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March 9, 2026

Salesianum Repeats as Delaware High School Mock Trial Champions for 2026

After five rounds of competition, over March 6 and 7, 2026, students from Salesianum School took the title of Delaware High School Mock Trial champion, marking a repeat for the school that won in 2025. It also marks only the second time in the competition's 35 years that Salesianum has won the top spot, and the second time the school advanced to the final round. Salesianum will now go on to represent Delaware at the National High School Mock Trial Championship, which will be held in Des Moines, Iowa, May 7-9, 2026.

The final round on Saturday evening, at the Leonard L. Williams Justice Center in Wilmington, saw Salesianum facing off against Padua Academy. It was Padua's first time in the finals in over 25 years as well. The teams appeared in front of U.S. District Judge Maryellen Noreika, who acted as the presiding judge, and U.S. Rep. Sarah McBride (D-Del.) who sat on the judging panel. Serving on the judging panel was a bit of a full-circle moment for McBride, who competed in mock trial when she was a student at Cab Calloway High School. Also, on the judging panel were Veronica Finkelstein, who wrote this year's problem, Anthony ("Roddy") Flynn, Chief of Staff to Rep. McBride, and James Barton, General Counsel to Sen. Chris Coons.

"We were thrilled by both the number and diversity of the teams representing Delaware this year. We had four brand new teams, one of which was from Sussex County. It's been really important to us that we expand who competes in mock trial in Delaware" said Betsy Renzo, Executive Director of the Delaware Law Related Education Center (DELREC), which organizes the competition. With more than 26 teams, from 20 public, private, and parochial schools across Delaware, along with one after-school program, more than 330 students participated--about 100 more than 2025. That turnout makes this year's mock trial the largest state-level competition since its 1991 founding. "We are in awe of these students, who commit to this rigorous academic sport in their free time of their own free will. The time and effort needed to participate is laudable and the payoff is not only a better understanding of the law, but also transferable skills including public speaking, critical thinking, constructing a logical argument, and teamwork. It's not just about winning; it's about the growth that happens the entire time," said Renzo.

The competition is round-robin style, where student teams must present or defend a case – whose facts were provided to them by the organizers – following the law and courtroom procedures under the guidance of a teacher coach and attorney coach. One team is assigned to the prosecution or plaintiff side while the other acts as defense. In the following round, the team must argue the opposite side of the case against a different team. Every year the problem presented switches between a civil matter and a criminal matter. This year's problem was a

criminal matter related to a fictitious fire at a movie theater (called the 'Reel Deal') in the Brandywine Town Center. Fire investigators concluded it was accidental, caused by a popcorn machine, but the insurance investigator concluded the fire was deliberately set by the theater owner, who – at the trial – faces arson charges.

At the competition, the judges (who often are state or federal judges) do not determine who “won” the case but instead evaluate the students on their knowledge of the law and the case, their courtroom conduct and how well they argue their side. Awards are also given for best attorney and best witness.

The competition represents a massive commitment by the Delaware legal community, the Delaware Courts and DELREC. Several floors of the Leonard L. Williams Justice Center – with 13 courtrooms – were turned over to the high school competitors and supported by more than 240 members of the legal community, teachers and court staff who served as coaches, judges, courtroom monitors, bailiffs or administrative support. “It is a heavy lift every year and we particularly want to thank the Delaware Judiciary for making the courtrooms available. It is truly a group effort and we are grateful to our volunteers, the Delaware Bar, our two law schools, court officials, court staff, security, and bailiffs for their help,” said Renzo. She also thanked Colonial Parking for opening the courthouse parking garage on Saturday and providing a discount rate. “Putting this competition together is as much of a team effort behind the scenes as it is for the student competitors in the courtroom,” she said.

Rounding out the top 10 teams this year – following Salesianum and Padua – were Wilmington Friends (A-team), Archmere Academy (B-team), Archmere Academy (A-team), Concord High School, Newark Charter High School (B-team), Tower Hill, Wilmington Friends (B-team), and Ursuline.

The winner of the courtroom sketch artist competition was Tallulah Daisey from Archmere, who took first place, with Elizabeth Maynard from the Charter School of Wilmington in second place. Kaya Ergan won the top courtroom journalist award from Newark Charter School, and Maci Reno came in second. St. Mark’s High School was awarded the Delaware Way Award, which is voted on by the students for the team that best exemplifies civility and fair play.

If you are a teacher or a student or school administrator and would like more information about mock trial, you can visit the [DELREC website](#) or contact DELREC Executive Director Betsy Renzo at Brenzo@delrec.org.