

Long but important.

Teen Court, as an alternative to Juvenile Court, provides first-time, non-violent, juvenile offenders the opportunity to participate in a court process carried out by their peers: fellow teenagers. The goal for defendants is that the peer pressure of Teen Court will be a force for positive change for them. Also, juveniles who successfully complete their Teen Court sentence have their juvenile record expunged.

For Teen Court participants, the benefits are many. Public speaking improvement. Building self-confidence. Learning court procedure. Experience in a courtroom. Public service. Excellent activity to list on college applications. The list goes on and on.

Students who want to participate in Teen Court attend training sessions to learn and become comfortable with court procedures and the roles they will fill during Teen Court sessions. They are trained how to be the prosecutor, defense attorney, clerk, bailiff, and juror and they perform these roles in real court in a legally binding sentencing trial that they conduct. A district judge presides over every Teen Court. In McC Co, Judge Tony Kitchen is the Teen Court judge.

McC Co Teen Court runs from Oct to May. Training sessions will begin in October and we will start hearing cases in court in January. Every training session as well as every court case will occur on Thursday evenings at around 5pm, though not every Thursday. The most important date to know is October 27. That is the first training session and parents are required to attend with their teens so parents and teens alike will be well-informed about the requirements of Teen Court.

If you live in another county, you may want to find out if they have a Teen Court program. Though veteran McC Teen Court members will be allowed to return, I may not be able to allow new out of county members this year if our numbers are too high. I won't know about that until the first training session, though.

Any teenager 13-17 is eligible, however there are some things for parents to consider before deciding to have their teen participate. This is a serious, eight month commitment. I will assign cases and roles and teens receive a summons to court. These summons for Teen Court are just as serious as adult summons and cannot be dismissed or ignored for ball practice, chorus, etc. just like a jury summons for mom and dad can't be dismissed for work.

If you or your teen have a conflict for a particular court date and you let me know several weeks in advance that on a certain Thursday you are unavailable, then I won't assign you to a case on that day and there is no problem. If you are likely to have conflicts on Thursday evenings routinely, don't plan on participating in Teen Court.

All five training sessions are mandatory as is the Swearing-In Ceremony. If your teen will be between the ages of 13 and 17 on Dec 8, they may participate in Teen Court.

You are allowed and encouraged to attend all of the training sessions. In this way you can see what your child will be doing. We have mock trial practice during most of the training sessions. Things change when training is over. Parents need to be fully aware of the fact that juvenile proceedings are protected. This means that your child cannot discuss defendants, court proceedings, outcomes, or anything else about Teen Court with you. You will not be allowed to attend court. Only the teen court members, the judge, defendant, defendant's family, and myself are allowed in the courtroom. Parents of young teens

need to be especially aware of this. There may be things that they encounter that you specifically hoped they would avoid since you homeschool and when these things come up, they will not be able to discuss details with you. For example, our cases can involve things like shoplifting, criminal mischief, drug use, drug trafficking, domestic violence without injury, teen pregnancy, foster care, juvenile detention, etc. Obviously, these topics in general are things you can discuss with your teens, but no case related details or outcomes.

Also, those teens assigned as defense attorneys have to meet with their defendant prior to court to hear their story and prepare a defense. Parents may not participate in this interview or ask questions about it. I will always assign two teen court members per case to be defense attorney. They typically decide to meet at the public library but they work that out themselves with their defendant. They all will be given my cell phone number so that if at any time they have questions or concerns I can help them. They aren't working without a net. They will have training and I am always available to answer questions if they have them, but you as their parents cannot be involved in their case.

I know I am really pounding this point, but homeschool parents are not used to being out of the know about what their kids are doing, so I want you to fully understand. Make sure your teen's level of maturity is up for this kind of independence and responsibility.

The final important point I want to make sure you realize is that this is not a PATCH thing or a homeschool thing. Any teen, county wide is eligible to participate and we are promoting Teen Court in the high schools pretty hard this year. So, your teens will need to be prepared to work well with and for other teens whose lives, families, upbringing, background, beliefs, behaviors, vocabulary, etc are nothing like theirs. It can be and has been for many a real eye opener as well as a valuable experience.

I know I've made it sound really serious, and it is, but it's a great experience and really fun for the teens as well.

If you have any questions, let me know.

MANDATORY SIX-WEEK TRAINING:

October 27 - (First session-- PARENTS ARE REQUIRED to attend with teens)

November 3, 10, 17 - (No Teen Court 11-24: Thanksgiving)

December 1 - Last training session

December 8 - Swearing-in Ceremony

COURT DATES FOR 2012

January 12, 26

February 9, 23

March 8, 22

April 12, 26 (April 2-6, Spring Break)

May 10

Eve Silverstein

Teen Court Coordinator

