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***Wisconsin teachers gain deeper understanding of our judicial system at annual Judicial Teaching Institute***

Oct. 12, 2009 – New insights into the operation of Wisconsin’s court system and classroom-ready instructional tools are among the resources middle school and high school teachers from around Wisconsin took home after participating in the tenth annual Judicial Teaching Institute. The two and one-half day event, sponsored by the State Supreme Court, the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the State Bar of Wisconsin, ran from October 8 to 10 at the State Bar Center in Madison.

Featured presenters Chief Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson, Professor Diana Hess of the University of Wisconsin Department of Curriculum & Instruction and Atty. Ellen Henak of the State Public Defenders Office Appellate Division were joined by attorneys, circuit court and municipal court judges, court officers and others to offer an inside view of the court system and dynamic ways teachers can bring the judicial branch alive for their history, government and social studies students.

First-year teacher Russell Smies of the Central Wisconsin Christian School in Waupun valued the “up-close view of the judicial system” the program afforded. But was also thankful for the “affirmation of the role of teachers” implicit in the active participation of Chief Justice Abrahamson and her colleagues from the Supreme Court and other judicial offices across the state.

That view was reinforced by Joseph Koss, a student-teacher enrolled at the UW-Madison, who stressed the exceptional access to key players in the judiciary the program allows. He also welcomed the course materials which, he explained, are both formatted for easy use in the classroom and modeled for participants through interactive exercises and simulated courtroom proceedings.

Keeping up with her junior and senior high school students, who often share first- and second-hand stories among themselves about their experiences with the justice system, was another benefit cited by American Government & Politics teacher Erika Sween of Oshkosh West High School. Noting that State Bar and Supreme Court staff “have really done their homework to bring great resources” to the event, she explained that in addition to gaining a deeper understanding of the justice system, she intends to emulate the institute’s teaching model by bringing attorneys, judges and other community resources into her classroom. “I’ve used the instructional materials [available through the program] before, which was good, but now I have a much better understanding of how to use them.”

(more)

Chetek High School American History and Civics instructor Gary Fitzgerald returned to the institute for a second time to deepen his understanding of the judicial system which, he noted, is given inadequate attention in most middle and high school textbooks. He also found new ideas about how to engage students in the sometimes challenging task of comprehending the complex and largely unseen third branch of government, including pairing students after reading instructional materials to quiz each other and compare what they have learned.

In addition to highlighting the roles and structure of Wisconsin's court system, the Judicial Teaching Institute addresses such topics as:

- How cases are presented and decided before the Wisconsin Supreme Court and how those decisions affect our everyday life;
- What it's like to be a Supreme Court justice;
- The difference between municipal circuit courts;
- The toughest part of the trial judge's job: sentencing; and
- How the Supreme Court sifts through the 1,000 petitions filed each year to choose the approximately 100 cases it will hear.

### ***2009 Judicial Teaching Institute Participants***

Carmen Ames, Sennett Middle School, Madison  
Cynthia Lynn Ball, Jefferson Middle School, Madison  
Josh Fisher, Chetek High School, Chetek  
Gary Fitzgerald, Chetek High School, Chetek  
Lori Ann Hoyt, UW-Whitewater Student, Whitewater  
Kaitlyn Kerr, UW-Madison Student, Madison  
Joseph Koss, UW-Madison Student, Madison  
Sandra Linde, Fond du Lac High School, Fond du Lac  
Scott Lone, West Bend East High School, West Bend  
Hilary Minor, Toki Middle School, Madison  
Glen Nesper, MHLT School, Minocqua  
Harold Olson, De Forest Area High School, De Forest  
Kristin Pachal, De Forest Area High School, De Forest  
Scott Reaves, Lincoln High School, Wisconsin Rapids  
Russell Smies, Central Wisconsin Christian School, Waupun  
Erika Sween, Oshkosh West, Oshkosh

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