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Francis Lewis High School Makes Semi-Final Run in Moot Court Competition

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For over 30 years, Proskauer lawyers have worked with students from Francis Lewis High School in Queens to help prepare them for moot court competitions. This year's program was unlike any other with practices held over Zoom from living rooms and bedrooms across the City; and, instead of walking up to the lectern at the Thurgood Marshall Courthouse, a grand classical revival landmark in lower Manhattan, each student argued at home in front of a laptop. Despite the challenging situation, the competitors made it to the semi-finals of this year's Metropolitan Mentor Moot Court competition for the first time in ten years.

In preparation for the competition, this past fall for a little over a month, three to five Proskauer lawyers met with nearly 20 students twice a week explaining how to read cases, organize persuasive arguments, and speak with confidence in a public forum. We then held practice arguments over and over again. By the end of our preparation, all the students made tremendous progress, but one competitor stood out. She had no experience with moot court and initially came off as shy and soft-spoken. That, however, did not last long, and in the semi-finals she demonstrated tremendous confidence and poise. Indeed, despite telling her family that she would be presenting, a family member made an unexpected appearance in the background unaware he was on camera. She was unflustered, pressing on with her strongest performance ever. Seeing the students' progress was one of the most gratifying aspects of this experience for me and my colleagues, Jacob Tucker and Scott Tan, who helped spearhead the effort.

In addition to developing public speaking skills, the moot court program provides a meaningful civics lesson by enabling students to learn about the courts and various constitutional rights. The program also provides an opportunity for students to work together – and help each other – even while stuck at home. And that may be the most important lesson of all. At a time of physical separation when it is especially easy to feel isolated, we can still come together and make each other stronger. Of course, making it to the semi-finals didn't hurt either.

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