

The Pueblo Chieftain

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'Sponge Bob' tries to square things at school event

By John Norton



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/JOHN JAQUES

Sponge Bob (center), also known as Ben Lee, sits with his defense attorney Sarah Bonds (right), as she prepares to plead his case during a mock trial Friday at the Pueblo Convention Center. The mock trial was put on by Ben Franklin Elementary School fifth-graders as a way to show teachers how to make civics lessons relevant to young children.

Maybe Sponge Bob shouldn't have accepted that pair of round pants delivered from "Ambercrombie & Fish" but that was up to the jury Friday morning as Ben Franklin Elementary School fifth-graders performed "The Trial of Sponge Bob" for a group of teachers.

Geri Trujillo already had incorporated some of the ideas being taught Friday and today at the Pueblo Convention Center as 80 elementary teachers from Pueblo City Schools and School District 70 learned how to integrate Colorado's new civics standards into their programs.

In the morning session Friday, the cartoon character sued the store for not selling him square pants and refusing to refund his money after he altered them.

Witnesses were called and a number of juries, made up of teachers, were asked to deliberate.

Later in the day, Trujillo's fifth-graders put on a mock Congressional hearing.

Now in the second of three years, the Strengthening Civic Education in Colorado Schools program is funded through \$200,000 annual allocations. The Colorado Department of Education, working with the Denver-based nonprofit Center for Education in Law and Democracy, sponsors the event.

The center has been running teacher training programs around the state and this week brought it to Pueblo for the two local school districts.

Byron Pendley of the Colorado Department of Education said that it's up to school districts how they do the training.

The Pueblo districts chose to have fourth- and fifth-grade teachers take part and bring what they learned back to the classroom. Teachers who follow through with civics programs will receive \$500 for materials through the program.

At the Pueblo conference, special emphasis was put on linking literacy and democracy.

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