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AOC Names New Director of Judicial Branch Education

San Francisco – Administrative Director of the Courts William C. Vickrey today announced the appointment of Diane E. Cowdrey, a nationally recognized state judicial educator, as the new director of the Administrative Office of the Courts Education Division/Center for Judicial Education and Research.

The statewide agency's education division leads and supports continuing professional development for approximately 2,000 California judicial officers and 21,000 court employees. Dr. Cowdrey will join the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) in February 2008. She succeeds Karen M. Thorson, who has served as Education Director since 2000 and will retire in 2008. Through her leadership, Ms. Thorson guided major improvements in judicial branch education, including curriculum-based judicial education and distance learning.

In her statewide leadership role, Dr. Cowdrey will partner with the Governing Committee of the Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER), an advisory committee to the Judicial Council, and local courts throughout California to advance the judicial branch's strategic goal of education for branchwide professional excellence.

She will be responsible for the year-round series of curricula-based educational programs and services for judicial branch personnel, including more than 100 in-person, 90 broadcast, and 300 online education courses, and approximately 50 judicial publications.

Dr. Cowdrey, who has more than two decades of experience in the field of adult education, currently serves as Director of Education for the Utah Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). Since 1992, she has directed comprehensive educational programming for all judges and court personnel in Utah. Prior to service at the Utah AOC, she was Director of the Judicial Education/Adult Education Project at the Georgia Center for Continuing Education, University of Georgia.

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In announcing Dr. Cowdrey's appointment, Mr. Vickrey said, "Diane strongly believes in the value of continuing professional development within the judicial branch for building public trust and confidence in the courts. She has the experience and drive to ensure that California's courts have the best possible resources and training to meet the diverse needs of the public. And, she has the leadership ability to complete the education initiatives in process and to ensure continued progress in the future."

Dr. Cowdrey enthused, "I am honored to join the California Judicial Branch as part of the dynamic Administrative Office of the Courts. California is a national leader in judicial branch education and my aim will be to support and build on that tradition of innovation and excellence. I look forward to meeting my new colleagues throughout the state of California."

Dr. Cowdrey has served as Western Region Director of the National Association of State Judicial Educators. For more than a decade, she has contributed to judicial education efforts nationally, serving on numerous boards and committees of the National Center for State Courts, National Judicial College, American Judicature Society, National Association of Women Judges, and others, on issues ranging from trial court leadership and curriculum development to e-learning and rural courts. She has consulted and taught extensively throughout the country and internationally and is a published author many times over on topics in judicial and adult education.

Chief Justice Ronald M. George said, "Dr. Cowdrey's broad national perspective on judicial education issues and her diverse professional background will ensure that California continues to lead the way for state court systems in providing innovative education and training opportunities for judges and judicial branch personnel. I was impressed by her perspective on continuing professional education and her approach to addressing complex program issues."

Current Education Division Director Karen Thorson welcomed the appointment, stating, "California has a long history of excellence in judicial branch education due to the contributions of many people over many years, and we will continue to excel in this area under the direction of Dr. Diane Cowdrey. Diane's unique background combines both academic education and considerable judicial branch education experience from both the national and state level. Her expertise will significantly contribute to building on what we have and to achieving new levels of excellence. We are extremely fortunate to have her assume leadership of the Education Division/CJER."

Court of Appeal Justice Ronald B. Robie, chair of the CJER Governing Committee and a member of the recruitment panel, said, "Diane is a talented professional who will make a strong contribution to ensuring high-quality education and professional development within the branch. She has the background, vision, and interpersonal skills to guide the great staff of the Administrative Office of the Courts and also to guide the continued development of the finest judicial education program in the country."

He was joined in his endorsement by Rosa Junqueiro, Executive Officer of the Superior Court of San Joaquin County, who commented, "I am extremely pleased that Diane has accepted this position. She has tremendous experience in education at both state and national levels. Her background will serve the judicial branch well as we begin to place greater emphasis on education for court employees."

In 2006, Dr. Cowdrey received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Center for State Courts. She holds a doctor of education degree in adult education from the University of Georgia, and a bachelor of science in social work from Ohio State University.

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The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and promotes leadership and excellence in court administration.