



MEDIA CONTACTS:

Shelby Young
National Speech & Debate Association
shelby.young@speechanddebate.org
(515) 577-2884

Mother-Child Duo Take Home National Awards!

Winners announced at the National Speech & Debate Tournament

West Des Moines, IA (July 1, 2025) — The National Speech & Debate Association is proud to recognize two members of the Mount Vernon High School Speech and Debate Team for their outstanding leadership and commitment to speech and debate.

Taite Kirkpatrick was awarded the 2025 William Woods Tate, Jr., National Student of the Year award at the National Speech & Debate Tournament last week in Des Moines.

Taite's mom, Kelley Kirkpatrick, was honored as the 2025 James Madison Copeland Coach of the Year at the National Tournament.

“The Kirkpatricks have made a huge impact on speech and debate in their local school, community, and across the country,” said J. Scott Wunn, Executive Director of the National Speech & Debate Association. “It’s an honor to present them with these awards and highlight their hard work and dedication over the years.”

The National Coach of the Year Award annually honors high school coaches who reflect outstanding leadership and commitment to speech and debate activities. All 112 NSDA districts can nominate a District Coach of the Year. From those nominations, a national winner is selected. Taite best described their mom’s impact as a speech and debate coach during the National Awards Assembly on June 20.

“As the coach of a Title I school, my mom fights tirelessly to get her students the resources and recognition they deserve,” said Taite. “She believes that any student who walks through her door can be changed by forensics, whether they become a national champion or do just one round of speaking. What sets her apart is not being a good coach, but being a good person. Our team jokes that her superpower is turning strangers into her friends. She uses her voice to fight for what she believes in unapologetically. She uses her voice to tell us she believes in us. She uses her voice to make people laugh. She uses her voice to make people feel loved, included, and supported.”

Taite is following in Kelley’s footsteps. Taite was honored with one of the most prestigious and renowned student awards presented by the NSDA. The Student of the Year is awarded to a graduating senior member who has been honored as a District Student of the Year and who best represents the tenets of the Code of Honor: humility, equity, integrity, respect, leadership, and service.

As the child of a debate coach, Taite likes to say they began their debate career at the age of six. They have many speech and debate titles and accolades in their career, including being a member of the USA Debate Team. Taite is also a member of the NSDA Student Leadership Committee, National Honor Society, Key Club, and Skagit Teen Court.

The National Speech & Debate Association is proud to recognize these two outstanding members of the NSDA!

The 2026 National Tournament will be held in Richmond, Virginia, June 14-19, 2026. To learn more about Nationals, visit www.speechanddebate.org/nationals.

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About the National Speech & Debate Association

The National Speech & Debate Association is the authority on public speaking and debate in the United States. The Association builds the infrastructure for speech and debate competitions around the world by providing topics, educational resources, and training for students and coaches. For 100 years, the National Speech & Debate Association has built a platform for youth voices that culminates in the National Tournament, the largest academic competition in the world. For more information, visit www.speechanddebate.org.