



Dear Colleagues,

In this year of virtual learning, disrupted schedules, and lost opportunities, our students need an activity that brings them joy, companionship, and learning. They need an activity that allows them to bond with supportive adults as well as with fellow students who share their passion for performance and argumentation. In these unprecedented times, many of our students need speech and debate more than ever.

Speech and debate allows students to find their voice. What could be more important today in our changing world? Our society is currently facing social unrest that has not been seen at these levels and intensity in decades. We are experiencing a complicated time where the ability to find common ground has become increasingly difficult. The news is full of confusing and conflicting headlines, and social media is polarizing our nation. Finding where the truth lies can be difficult for young adults (and older ones, too). Yet, through speech and debate, students are taught to identify reliable sources, to write persuasively, to research and connect with scripts that speak to them on a personal level, to collaborate with peers, to formulate a point of view, and to demonstrate empathy through developing characters.

Additionally, students learn to truly listen. What could be more important in these uncertain times? Speech and debate fosters the skills that we need now—skills that can be used to be part of true national and global understanding. Speech and debate helps students connect to their passions. They are learning what it means to be an advocate, and they are developing lifelong skills that will serve them in their personal life and in whatever career path lies ahead. Speech and debate teaches students how to rely on one another, to support one another, and to be part of a team. Participating in speech and debate provides opportunities for students to learn genuine caring for others, humility with success, and graciousness in defeat.

This is going to be a challenging year. One of the things we love most is traveling to tournaments. Many tournaments will be happening virtually. The mourning we are going through is magnified for the students tenfold. Their losses must be acknowledged. I urge you to find the 'teaching moments' the pandemic is providing. Your students are learning by watching you every day. They need to see you modeling joyful grit and tenacity with grace. They need your heart this year, and they need your courage. This noble, historic, and sometimes wacky activity of speech and debate is where their personal joy sits. Find strength in helping them, every day—for as you know, they are discovering who they are in their work with you.

My hope for each one of you is that you stay the course and focus on supporting and stretching your kids. My bet is that you, your students, and your team will come out of these trying times even better than before. Good luck, break legs (virtually), and most of all, find joy and have fun!

Photo: Josh Huskin



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Find this and other letters of support on our website:
www.speechanddebate.org/advocacy