



## BRENTWOOD High School

2221 High School Drive Brentwood, Missouri 63144 p 314-962-3837 f 314-963-3166 www.brentwood.k12.mo.us

Dr. Edward M. Johnson Jr., Principal

Mr. Stephen Ayotte, Assistant Principal/Athletic Director

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To Whom It May Concern:

Summing up Cara Borgsmiller's outstanding qualities on paper is a difficult task, but it is one that those who know her would take on without question. I have had the privilege of coaching in a community with Cara for the last ten years. I can assure you that Cara knows what she wants and has the energy, creativity, and desire for excellence to get there. I have rarely worked with a colleague so thoughtful and responsible, and she is greatly respected among the Eastern Missouri coaches and students for it. Because of her outstanding compassion, leadership, service, and ongoing support of our coaching community, I highly recommend Cara Borgsmiller as the NSDA Educator of the Year.

Cara is a coach that lives the NSDA Coaches Code of Ethics. And the great thing about Cara? She doesn't live it because she has to or because it is directly beneficial to her. She is an ethical coach focused on learning and service to her community because it is just who she is. Her students strive to understand arguments, not to win them. When they write their pieces or pick their scripts, they seek humor or knowledge or understanding rather than trophies. That's what Cara brings to her team. Her Parkway West team and family were recently devastated by suicide. In the aftermath of that terrible tragedy, administrators, teachers, parents, and students looked to Cara. She was their source of solace in a great time of need. That is what it means to be more to your team than just a coach. Cara is a staunch advocate for her team, and they are better for it. She is what makes Parkway West a family.

Cara's leadership is exhibited outside the Parkway West walls on a regular basis, as well. She has served for years on the NSDA Board for our district and sits on the Greater St. Louis Speech League Board, as well. When it comes to running tournaments in our area, we all look to Cara. In addition to being our judge guru, she is calm in a crisis, organized and diligent in planning, and always accommodating. What stands out the most, however, is the fact that we can all compete against Cara's teams while also rooting for them. As a rival coach in the district, I have no qualms about competing against Cara's students, but I also fiercely hope for their success because I know how hard they work and how well-supported they are. In a competitive community, that is a difficult balance to achieve, and Cara does it with grace.

You are looking for educators to hold up in high esteem, and I can think of no better example than Cara Borgsmiller. She is a passionate, intelligent advocate for students and for the activity of debate. If you want a coach we should all emulate, you should look no further. Cara is deserving of every opportunity that comes her way, thus I wholeheartedly recommend her!

Sincerely,

Robyn C. Haug

Director of Speech and Debate

Brentwood High School

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to nominate Cara for the NSDA's Educator of the Year Award. Cara was - very deservedly - named one of five national finalists for this award. I am going to let the recommendation for that award serve as the nomination for this award:

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It is my privilege to write this letter of nomination for Cara Borgsmiller to receive the 2019 Eastern Missouri NSDA Coach of the Year Award. I have known Cara for the past eight years and consider myself extremely fortunate to work with such an incredible coach, educator, mentor, leader, and friend. Cara is the backbone of the Saint Louis speech and debate community and she is incredibly deserving of this award.

I came to the speech and debate coaching community with very little experience. Cara was one of the first coaches to reach out to me. She sent me copies of resources for workshops, practices, and tournaments. I have copies of every lesson plan and assignment she has ever taught. Her tournament was the first I attended as a coach and while she was in the middle of hosting a tournament, she took time to guide me through what I needed to do as a coach at a tournament. When I hosted my first tournament later that semester, Cara read my invitation, helped me order trophies, assisted my team with the scheduling process, and helped me run my tab room. She has been by my side every step of my career providing support, guidance, and resources. If my story was unique, then Cara would be considered an amazing mentor. However, my story is not unique because Cara goes out of her way to welcome, mentor, support, and embrace every new coach in our community. She helps new coaches manage every step of a career that can be exhausting, confusing, and overwhelming. She makes this career accessible and manageable for new coaches. There is not a school in our district that does not use speech and debate curriculum Cara has developed or revamped. Coaches and educators in the greater Saint Louis and mid-Missouri area are successful in this career because Cara invests time, energy, support, resources, and love into each and every coach and program.

Beyond her commitment to supporting coaches and providing curriculum resources, Cara is a leader in our community. She has served as the treasurer of the Greater Saint Louis Speech Association for the better part of ten years. She has been on the NSDA Eastern Missouri District Committee for ten years as well. She serves as the Judges Coordinator for both the state-qualifying district tournament and the national-qualifying district tournament for Saint Louis. For the past two years, Cara has also worked in the tab room at the state tournament. Cara is consistently elected by her colleagues and peers to serve in these leadership roles because she is known as a fair and ethical coach who cares about this activity with a passion rivaled by few others. Not only does she serve in leadership roles, she excels in them – she always goes above and beyond in all that she does. Most importantly, she has worked incredibly hard to build a community of informed and engaged judges. In the past five years, Cara has more than tripled our judge pool and has worked actively to recruit and retain new judges. She created a series of videos to educate new judges and she put together sample ballots to help judges learn what type of feedback is most helpful to students. We now have judges asking to come back every year and there is not a single judge who does not know Cara by name. She also takes on extra work in organizing judges for the district tournaments to make the process easy for participating schools and coaches. When I covered for Cara one year while she was on maternity leave, I was overwhelmed by how much time and energy Cara puts into creating a process that most people take for granted. The community we have built is largely do to the work Cara has put in to build it and the leadership she provides.

The most important thing Cara does is invest in the students who participate in this activity. She is by far one of the best judges in our district. She will work with students from other schools to help them become the best competitor they can possibly be. When I first started coaching, I watched her to learn how to give quality feedback to students. I cannot count the number of times Cara has helped students on my team prepare for the state and national tournaments. She is the most respected coach in our district for insight into each event in speech and debate. While her team is incredibly successful, Cara – and her team – is better known for approaching speech and debate as a communication activity and focusing on advocacy and empowerment. Her students tackle difficult topics and do so in a persuasive and compelling

way. Cara's former students have competed in speech and debate at the collegiate level, are currently candidates for public office, serve as community organizers, lead political campaigns, have coached speech and debate, and many are pursuing advanced degrees in law, public policy, economics, and medicine. Once her students leave her program, they continue to use the skills they learned to continue to fight for a better community. Cara is empowering the future leaders of society and her students are ready to tackle the largest issues facing the world when they leave her classroom.

I have always been impressed by Cara as a coach and educator; however, a recent tragedy has made me understand just how incredibly strong and unique she really is. In June of 2018, one day before she was to travel to the national tournament with students, a 2018 graduate of her team committed suicide. I watched as her team, the school, the local community, and our speech and debate family all looked to Cara in the aftermath. The parents of her former student were calling her regularly. Current students and alumni were reaching out to her because they needed help and support. Her school administration looked to Cara for advice on what to do. Cara navigated an extremely difficult situation with courage, bravery, and grace. She was exactly what every person needed her to be. Most importantly, Cara has used this tragedy to work with her school district to develop comprehensive social-emotional curriculum and increased mental health training for educators. She has used this tragedy to educate members of the speech and debate community about mental health, self-care, and mindfulness. Cara has always been a giant in our coaching community. After watching her these past few months, I am completely in awe of her.

Cara is the type of coach and educator all of us should strive to be. She is so passionate about speech and debate and what it allows students to do. She is a fierce advocate and works so hard to empower students. She is making our profession better and she invests so much in the coaching community. Everyone who works with Cara is better because they have learned from her. I am a better teacher, coach, leader, friend, and person due to Cara's influence. It is truly an honor and privilege to write this letter of nomination for Cara Borgsmiller to be named the recipient of the 2019 Eastern Missouri NSDA Coach of the Year Award.