

## Finding the Right Speech and Debate Coach



When schools commit to doing speech and debate, one of the biggest obstacles can be finding (and keeping!) the right person to lead the team. We're here to help!

### Defining the Search:

Finding someone with a speech and debate background at the high school or collegiate level as either a student or a coach is a plus, but not a requirement. Coaches come from many backgrounds, so cast a wide net! Consider the following audiences.

#### TEACHERS

Teachers are attracted to speech and debate for different reasons. They may connect to the activity due to a tie to their subject matter or personal strengths. Teachers who think coaching or teaching speech and debate will enhance their skills in the classroom and serve as a learning experience because of the subject they teach are a great place to start, but don't limit your search to those with clear ties! We have coaches who teach physics, math, and everything in between.

- **Social Studies** teachers tend to be very in tune with current events and political issues.
- **English** teachers are able to deconstruct ideas, assist with writing original speeches, and point out flaws in logic and style.

- **Gifted and Talented** teachers are able to differentiate instruction at a high level to help students reach new heights with their potential.
- **Resource** teachers know how to break down concepts to help students understand ideas, and can help them with organizing their thoughts.
- **Theater** teachers know how to help students tell stories, bring characters to life, and understand dramatic and comedic timing.
- **Media Specialists** know the ins and outs of research, finding the right supporting material to make an argument compelling.

#### COMMUNITY MEMBERS

If your school policies permit it, community members make excellent coaches! Consider these categories:

- **People with relevant skills:** Consider those whose professions are closely aligned to speech and debate who may be looking to give back. For example, a lawyer may be interested in coaching debate because of their love for research and argumentation. A local political figure may be taken with Congressional Debate. A motivational speaker could be enticed by public address events. Assess your network for connections!
- **Parents:** A parent committed to providing the opportunity for their student may step up to coach. Even if they know nothing about speech and debate, we'll show them the ropes.
- **Alumni:** Former speech and debaters make excellent coaches. If you have an established program, check with the outgoing coach or current student members for recommendations.

Your best advocates for finding a coach are students! Encourage any interested students to assess their networks and approach any teachers at school they think would be willing to give coaching a try.

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## Finding the Right Candidate

### CRAFTING A JOB DESCRIPTION

If you can't find someone within your school, the following qualities are beneficial for a coach who does not have a strong speech and debate background:

- Willingness to learn with the students
- Openness to new challenges
- Flexible—willing to adapt and change teaching and coaching approaches
- Determined to give students unique opportunities, help them find their niche, and stand out
- Committed to 21st century skills: critical thinking, collaboration, creativity
- Considerate of all types of diverse life experiences

### SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Speech and debate offers a number of competitive opportunities. Among our debate, public speaking, and interpretation events, there are more than a dozen different areas for students to participate in speech and debate in classrooms and tournaments around the country. That means a new coach has the opportunity to start out by introducing students to one of these areas that may be a strength of their own, then learn together with students about the others.

The next thing you may be wondering is, how can your school support your coach if they are not experienced. That's where the National Speech & Debate Association comes in! We provide training, mentorship, support, and resources for new coaches to be successful. From textbooks and curriculum to free tournaments and customer service, we're here to help answer any and all questions you may have.

### EVALUATING APPLICANTS

- Do you know anything currently about competitive speech and debate?
- Tell us about your experience with listening to all types of diverse life experiences.

- Tell us about a time or two when you learned something from a student that changed how you teach/coach?
- How do you manage your time, getting multiple work assignments done throughout the day, week, month, year?
- Why are communication and critical thinking skills so important?
- Tell us about a time or two when you asked for help from someone more knowledgeable than you.
- If applicants for your school's opening *do* have experience in the activity, ask about their past successes in the activity. Listen for distinctions like **Diamond Awards**, which demonstrate longevity in coaching, service citations, which demonstrate giving back to their community, **accreditation** or certificates, which demonstrate professionalism in speech and debate. Plus, consider competitive success, like tournament wins, sweepstakes, and state/national qualifiers.



## We can help you find the right coach!

- NSDA provides training, mentorship, support, and resources for new coaches to be successful.
- Submit a part time or full time position to our **Jobs Board** at [www.speechanddebate.org/jobs](http://www.speechanddebate.org/jobs)
- If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at [info@speechanddebate.org](mailto:info@speechanddebate.org) or by calling (920) 748-6206.