

1/13/20

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Irene Gardea for the West Texas District National Speech and Debate Association Coach of the Year. For the past 4 years Ms. Gardea has been my debate coach, speech teacher and high school mentor and I can think of no one who deserves this honor more than her.

For the past 11 years, Ms. Gardea has led the Americas High School Speech and Debate team to multiple regional, state and national competitions where her students have surpassed expectations. In addition to regional championships in congressional debate and extemporaneous speaking, numerous Texas Forensic Association State Finalists and NSDA National Tournament quarter and semi-finalists- Ms. Gardea also coached the 2015 National Runner-Up in Dramatic Interpretation and the 2017 William Tate National Student of the Year. Considering our circuit in El Paso, Texas is a small, under-represented community, our team's accolades have helped Americas High School bring pride to our community and the West Texas District. For us, Speech and Debate is more than a club, it's a means of sharing our voices, stories and opinions so that we can one day give back to the world. Our speech and debate alumni go on to do amazing things because of the foundation that Ms. Gardea has set. Former National Student of the Year, Ricardo Flores, co-founded the El Paso Leadership Network, an organization aimed at assisting high school students receive admission to their dream colleges. 2012 graduate Paola Gallegos serves as El Paso's Mayoral Head Speech Writer and though he did not compete on her speech and debate team, singer/songwriter Khalid was a student in Ms. Gardea's Professional Communications class. Though she is a phenomenal coach, Ms. Gardea has proven to be a great educator who helps students build the confidence and drive to take on leadership roles in the real world.

Not only does Ms. Gardea support student academics, she also supports athletics and extracurricular activities. Ms. Gardea attends volleyball and football games throughout the season equipped with motivational signs, leads the Americas H.S. Teacher Cheer Section and announces names at commencement. During significant dates, for example, she takes the time to recognize administrators, teachers, counselors, assistant principals, and staff. At the beginning of each school year, Ms. Gardea takes from her own free time help at pre-registration. Last but not least, Ms. Gardea commemorates the end of the school year's debate season by organizing a banquet specially designed to highlight each student's successes and strengths in debate—and in life. The whole while, she is teaching and encouraging student success in her classroom by delivering real-life, meaningful lessons.

As if this were not enough, Ms. Gardea also leads by example by demonstrating leadership abilities to her students. Currently, Ms. Gardea actively participates in the West Texas NSDA District Committee as district chair. On campus, Ms. Gardea also serves as the Department Head

for our award-winning Career and Technical Education Department, co-sponsors our senior class and coordinates our UIL Academic organizations.

I truly believe that Ms. Gardea is an incredible ally and resource to our students, faculty and community. On a personal note, throughout high school, I have struggled with internal and external battles. At my lowest points, I have contemplated graduating high school early to avoid bullying and heartbreaks created from feelings of loneliness. While weighing my options, I remember what an impact speech and debate has made on me because of Ms. Gardea and realize how much I would miss being on her team. This realization is what keeps me at Americas High School. I owe it to Ms. Gardea because she is a reminder of persisting and learning to appreciate the journey. Ms. Gardea once told me, "Everything you will ever need, you already have" It is because of her that I know I will forever be equipped for whatever life throws at me, and I am forever thankful for the guidance and support she offers.

While I completely understand that Ms. Gardea was the winner of last year's West Texas NSDA Coach of the Year and was recognized as a semi-finalist for the National Coach of the Year- I truly feel that Ms. Gardea deserves to be a finalist for this honor. I proudly nominate her in hopes that you will join me in seeing her value to the El Paso speech and debate community and promoting the notion that she should be re-considered for the national award. While there are so many great coaches in our NSDA district, I have been moved and inspired by my coach so much that I whole-heartedly believe she deserves this award a second time.

In summary, Ms. Gardea is the ideal candidate for the West Texas District National Speech and Debate Association Coach of the Year. Should you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (915)276-1845.

Best regards,
Caitlyn Acevedo