



Dear Administrator,

It would be unfair for me to start off my letter of support for speech and debate without including that I was a speech and debate competitor in both high school and college and coached high school speech and debate for eight years before I moved in to administration. I am still connected to the activity as a two-diamond coach, supporting the team I started when I became principal of John F. Kennedy High School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I also spend part of my summer providing instruction at the Institute for Speech and Debate. Needless to say, I am committed to the activity.

Why did I get so deeply involved in speech and debate? Well, for starters, it is just plain fun. As a competitor, my best high school memories revolved around competitions, my team, and the experience. No different than any athlete who loves his sport, I loved giving speeches. But what I have come to realize as a coach and now as an educational leader is that this activity is not just for fun, it is an absolute game-changer for any student who engages in it.

When you think of the future-ready skills we want to develop in middle and high school students, four come to mind: critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. In fact, employers today say that those four things are among the important skills they need in employees tomorrow. I would argue that beyond a vocational need, our republic desperately depends on citizens possessing those four skills. A vibrant democracy cannot thrive when citizens do not possess the ability to analyze problems, discuss and debate them civilly, and work together to create solutions. On an even deeper dive, I believe you could make a strong argument that you need those skills for successful human/familial relationships as well.

And that is why I believe every child should be exposed to and/or participate in speech and debate. There is no activity—athletic, artistic, or academic—that develops students in those areas more completely than speech and debate. Watching students compete on weekends as they discuss important issues with an understanding as nuanced as a policy expert, or recreate a dramatic scene from a play, capturing the emotions of multiple characters all by themselves, or draft and debate legislation addressing our country's most pressing issues, is awe-inspiring. You see kids who want to learn because they have found a place where learning is truly challenging, authentic, and well, fun.

My personal mission is to continue building up speech and debate programs wherever I find myself. My professional mission is to find ways to infuse it into as many students' lives as possible. I hope you will join me in making speech and debate an offering for your students and support its expansion into schools nearby. You will see the impact immediately.



Sincerely,

Jason Kline

Jason Kline

Principal

John F. Kennedy High School, Iowa

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