



Dear Administrator,

When I arrived at Laurel School in 2004, an energetic science teacher approached me about starting a speech and debate team. I agreed instantly. Activities that cultivate voice for girls in a society that too often diminishes women's voices are essential. Speech and debate has had a transformative impact on our school culture; our girls, who have been hugely successful, have gained skills and confidence to carry them for a lifetime. Speech and debate team members embody growth mindset; they understand that persistence and effort can improve outcomes. From late fall through the spring, team members practice every afternoon, compete every weekend, often juggling the most demanding academic schedules with their fervent commitment to speech and debate.

Why do they do it? Why do they rise early each Saturday, take a bus to a school that is sometimes far away, compete in round after round? There's the esprit de corps that comes from being part of a team, of course, but I think there's also the great satisfaction that our girls derive from knowing that their voices matter. They spend time with other students who share a seriousness of purpose. Their relationships—with their teammates, coaches, even with competitors—matter. Speech and debate attracts very smart girls. On a weekday afternoon, it is not uncommon to find every Upper School classroom filled with girls in different events, practicing for their peers, giving and receiving feedback, honing their arguments, thinking about articulation, vocal variety, physical presence. They talk and listen, offer constructive criticism, work to improve. They take themselves seriously.

Last month, we took 12 girls to Fort Lauderdale for a tournament. That same tournament was attended by students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High. Today, some of those same students are speaking on the national stage in the wake of the tragedy that struck their school. Their courage and resilience speak to the power of voice and emphasize the type of community that speech and debate builds across the nation.

My own daughter grew from being a more tentative, soft-spoken girl to a winner through her time delivering speeches for Laurel's team. Her pride in being recognized helped her develop courage and confidence as she claimed her voice and learned to speak with both authority and authenticity. It heartens me to see young alumnae returning to school to coach our current competitors—the investment of our alumnae in mentoring younger girls speaks to the power of the program.

If you have the opportunity to launch a speech and debate program in your school, no matter its size or scope, don't hesitate. Invest in coaches who believe in the power of student voices. Get started. Perhaps your school, like Laurel School, will come to understand more quickly than you might believe possible, the power of words well-chosen and words well-spoken.



Sincerely,

Ann V. Klotz
Head of Laurel School, Ohio

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