



Dear Fellow Administrators,

I am writing to express to you the wonderful benefits of speech and debate as an intellectually engaging activity in your schools. Speech and debate plays a critical role in the growth and development of students and teachers. I've seen students come out of their shells and develop such tremendous oratory skills and confidence that they otherwise wouldn't have developed in the classroom. I often call speech and debate "the best-kept secret for promoting academic excellence." It adds a level of intellectualism to your school that is unparalleled. It challenges students to engage material and orate that material with confidence and conviction. As an intellectual endeavor, it gives *voice* to the *voiceless*. I have literally witnessed our students who would be considered mere ordinary students by any measure become forces to be reckoned with because of the skills they have developed in speech and debate.

From an institutional standpoint, speech and debate has added a new dimension to our school. Speech and debate has not only transformed our students; it has reshaped the academic culture of our school, as we now offer Advanced Speech and Rhetoric classes in our curriculum. Additionally, speech and debate has helped us reunite with our past academic successes, as speech and debate was an integral part of our academic history. In our rebirth after Hurricane Katrina, our strategic plan dictated we work to become a "World-Class School." With that commitment came the addition of rigorous Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment courses, and the vision to rebuild our once prominent speech and debate program. As we added a level of rigor to our current curriculum, it seemed only natural to add speech and debate.

Our return to speech and debate meant connecting with the past and with one person who was a prominent part of that 80s dynasty—our coach, Byron Arthur. Byron restarted our program some five years ago with six students, who we aptly named "The Original Six." In that short period of time, he has built the program to one that is nationally recognized. It was so gratifying to think how far we have come as we watched our senior Daniel Williams win the National Championship in Dramatic Interpretation with his performance this past summer at the National Speech & Debate Tournament. What an awe-inspiring experience!

My advice to principals who are considering a speech and debate program is to *go for it*. It is such a transforming activity in the lives of students and in the culture of your school. It will add a level of academic rigor, excellence, and prestige to your school like no other activity. As your students achieve success in speech and debate, your academic reputation will abound. In other words, it is such a *game changer*. It was for us. Good luck in your endeavors!

Sincerely,



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www.speechanddebate.org