



Dear School Administrators,

It is with great pride that I submit a letter in support of speech and debate programs and share the amazing impact the activity is having in the Santa Ana Unified School District (SAUSD).

The idea began during the 2015-2016 school year when the District partnered with the Kiwanis Club of Santa Ana to host a pilot program at all intermediate schools in the District as a way for students to develop and perfect their communication skills, which are highly valuable in the workplace. In March 2016, 100 students demonstrated the art of speech and debate in their first tournament. To date there are approximately 600 students participating in the program. AUSD's speech and debate program has a full-time Curriculum Specialist, Mr. Sal Tinajero, who is an experienced educator and speech/debate coach who works closely with staff, teachers, and students to promote and sustain the program.

Santa Ana is the seventh largest school district in California and Orange County, with a student population of 94% Latino and 60% English Learners. With a student population of 50,000, 91% qualify for free-and-reduced lunch.

What makes this program so powerful is the very rare opportunity to offer a speech and debate program at all intermediate schools in a school district, particularly one the size of Santa Ana Unified with a high student population of Latinos and English Language Learners. A program of this magnitude is typically reserved for high school.

Our students are taking full advantage of the opportunities associated with speech and debate. They frequently comment how the program has strengthened their critical thinking and public speaking skills while keeping them engaged. One student shared with me how fearful she was of speaking in public before participating in speech and debate. Now, she can proudly speak with confidence in public with increased self-esteem. This will support her academics and social skills.

The benefits are endless and will provide your students an experience that will last a lifetime.



Sincerely,

Stefanie Phillips, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Santa Ana Unified School District, California

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