



NEWS RELEASE

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Richmond Region Selected to Host 2026 National Speech & Debate Tournament

RICHMOND, Nov. 20, 2023 – The National Speech & Debate Association has selected the Richmond region as the host of its 2026 National Speech & Debate Tournament, an event that is expected to attract 10,000 student contestants and visitors to the area. To be held on June 14-19 in 2026, the national speech contest is one of the largest academic events in the country.

“There is no better fit than partnering with The Richmond Forum's Speech & Debate Initiative to help usher in the next generation of leaders at the 2026 National Tournament,” said Scott Wunn, Executive Director of the National Speech & Debate Association. “By partnering with The Richmond Forum, we can shape a brighter future for our students, our communities, and our nation while also creating a tremendous educational opportunity for our programs.”

Richmond Region Tourism and The Richmond Forum, whose Speech & Debate Initiative (RFSDI) has helped grow interest and participation in speech and debate competitions, have been working to enhance interest in Richmond as a tournament host for more than three years.

Over the past five years, RFSDI has engaged more than 1,000 students in speech and debate in the Richmond region, growing from nine teams to 28 with 43 coaches. Last year's regional tournament circuit attracted 750 student contestants.

“The Richmond Forum's Speech & Debate Initiative has been cultivating new generations of students and teacher-coaches who are demonstrating tremendous interest in the critical thinking and communications skills speech and debate fosters. Attracting this prestigious tournament to Richmond is a crowning achievement for all of us,” said Heather Mullins Crislip, executive director of The Richmond Forum. “We look forward to hosting teams from throughout America, especially at a time when we are celebrating a milestone birthday for our nation.”

The event will include 7,000 competitors and will take place in 750 rooms across six schools in the region. Several thousand local volunteers are needed to ensure the National Tournament



runs smoothly. Interested community members can sign up to volunteer and stay abreast of developments by visiting www.speechanddebate.org/nationals2026.

Coinciding with regional celebrations for America's 250th birthday, the tournament will feature a United States Semiquincentennial theme.

"There's no debating that landing this tournament is a major accomplishment for the Richmond region," said Jack Berry, president and CEO of Richmond Region Tourism. "It will attract thousands of visitors at a time when we will be showcasing the richness of our history and diversity of our culture, and we look forward to welcoming competitors from all across the country."

"Our great city is excited to welcome the 2026 National Speech & Debate Tournament competitors, judges, volunteers, and staff to the capital of Virginia. I have no doubt that these visitors from across the country will fall in love with all that Richmond has to offer," said Mayor Levar Stoney.



About the National Speech & Debate Association

The National Speech & Debate Association is the largest interscholastic speech and debate organization servicing middle and high school students in the United States. The NSDA provides competitive speech and debate activities, high-quality resources, comprehensive training,



scholarship opportunities and advanced recognition to more than 140,000 students and coaches each year.

About the Richmond Forum Speech & Debate Initiative (RFSDI)

Founded in 1986, The Richmond Forum is America’s largest and most respected nonprofit public forum. Recognizing the absence of speech and debate programs at many of the region’s public schools and the inadequate funding for the teams that did exist, The Richmond Forum launched the Richmond Forum Speech & Debate Initiative in 2018 to start, grow, and support these vital academic programs.

In five short years in existence, RFSDI has:

- Engaged over 1,000 students in speech & debate in the region.
- Grown from 9 teams to 28, with 43 coaches.
- Created a tournament circuit with over 750 student registrations last year.
- Built a robust volunteer list of over 100 community members.

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