



Dear Colleagues,

Any effective school administrator should be driven by continuous improvement in two key areas: student achievement and school climate.

**Without question, the best mechanism for improving both is to offer a competitive speech and debate program.**

Schools across the nation are still determining how best to respond to the suite of student assessment results administered last spring. The national proficiency rate for English Language Arts was 52%, while the rate for Math was just 30%. In New Mexico, the ELA average was 33% and the Math average was 16%. Needless to say, the results are alarming.

Some education leaders are noticing that schools with robust speech and debate programs are far outperforming those national averages. That is certainly true here in New Mexico. If you look at the top scoring schools in any state, I can guarantee that those schools also offer speech and debate.

**We already know why.** Speech and debate students are more engaged and enthusiastic about being in school in the first place. They learn to think deeply and critically about the world around them. They learn close-reading and research skills on a whole other level than is provided in the regular classroom. They find a sense of inclusion and belonging that allows them to simply be themselves.

These are all important indicators of a school's climate that have a direct impact on student achievement. While more short-sighted educators may focus on test prep to raise test scores, education leaders with vision know that achievement is a product of a school's climate. There is no better way to improve school climate than empowering students through speech and debate.

As we continue to re-imagine what education can and should be in the wake of the pandemic, we need all schools to harness the transformative power of speech and debate. If your school is not giving speech and debate the credit it's due, I encourage you to examine the data at [www.speechanddebate.org/advocacy-articles](http://www.speechanddebate.org/advocacy-articles). The assessment results speak for themselves. If you still need more convincing, I can be contacted at [tsmith@eastmountainhigh.net](mailto:tsmith@eastmountainhigh.net). I am more than happy to connect with anyone who wants to collaborate on improving school outcomes and how a speech and debate team plays a key role in a school's culture.

Sincerely,

*Trey Smith*

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