



Dear Administrator,

About nine years ago, I was walking around the East Mountain High School campus with the coach of our small speech and debate team, Trey Smith, who told me he thought his team was growing and going to be very good. We are a small rural school east of Albuquerque that also was considered a “small” school in New Mexico Speech and Debate.

At that time, I asked Trey questions: was he serious, did he want to take the next step, and did he have parental support? Not surprisingly, his answers were largely that he thought he did, so we decided that day that we needed to host a tournament and place ourselves on the map. Trey determined quickly the time of year for a statewide event, and we promoted it to ensure that our judges lived the experience to become future supporters of the program. I knew I needed to judge and check in with as many EMHS students as possible.

It was our belief that the more and impressive support we could provide the program, the more quickly our students would understand taking this program seriously. We held our first event, and it raised sufficient funds to help our poorer students afford entry fees in their own events, thus meeting another important goal: access to all.

Our students became competitive with larger schools, some six times the size of ours. That fact encouraged our students to push harder, so when it came time for Trey to set his goals for the coming year, he sought to be number two in the state. I told him that his goal had to be number one and assured him that if he were number three, he would still have a job!! The point was that we owed our students an expectation of the best, and he needed to commit to that ideal.

Trey was soon able to strategize with the team in terms of probability, not hope. For example, he met with his debate group to discuss *how* individual students would improve their performance, not *if*. They began to win tournaments and prepare for state with the belief it was possible. Students worked after school and weekends, efforts they might not have made had it not been for the determination that we would be number one. When the bus left at 4:00 a.m., I told the students one thing: I want to see you one last time before you return as state champions.

Yes, our team won the state championship three consecutive times, but more importantly, it established a school-wide intellectual and academic pride. Simultaneously, we were working on some curricular reform and college readiness goal setting. As a result of the “speech and debate attitude,” earned dual credits increased 800%, ACT scores increased an average of three points, and scholarship dollars offered doubled in three years.

A school board member claimed recently that speech and debate is our football, a source of **earned** pride. It shows that in a state in which educational successes are few, we can commit to our best, which can sometimes be the best. In 2013, www.niche.com declared East Mountain High School the best high school in New Mexico.

Our lesson: if you want a high impact, academic culture-enhancing program, **commit** to speech and debate.



Sincerely,

Douglas S. Wine, Ed.D.

Former Principal, East Mountain High School

National Speech & Debate Association Principal of the Year, 2013

Find this and other advocacy materials on our website:
www.speechanddebate.org/advocate