



EXPERIENCE THE SPEECH AND DEBATE EFFECT

Dear Fellow Administrator,

There is no question that we have very important roles in the education of today's student. Though that role has evolved and continues to branch into new and exciting areas, I believe principals should always anchor their decisions to the overall *support* of students. Supporting the vast interests and needs of a school's student body is a moving target, and principals need to strive to hear student voices when deciding what to offer students for their continued growth. It has been my experience that having a speech and debate program provides students with an opportunity to have a voice, and more importantly, to learn how to grow their voice.

About five years ago, our very accomplished debate teacher, Mrs. Liz Wood Weas, approached me about the idea of beginning a middle school speech and debate program at Mountain Brook Junior High. Her hope was to begin the process of cultivating student voices among seventh and eighth graders in order to prepare them for a larger impact once they transitioned to high school. I really did not know the magnitude of saying "yes, let's do it" in this moment, but instead simply thought I was staying grounded to my belief that schools always should offer programs if there is student interest.

Within a year of our agreement to begin a program, Mountain Brook Junior High students were competing in national events and performing exceptionally well. A few years later, our speech and debate program in grades 7-12 is thriving and allowing our students to discover new possibilities each year. It is reaffirming to support students in such a way that allows them opportunities as vast as speech and debate.

I hope you are able to either continue offering speech and debate or are considering adding it to your school. If the experience is anywhere near as rewarding as it is for Mountain Brook Junior High, I am positive speech and debate will provide your students with opportunities to impact others.

Sincerely,



W. Donald Clayton, Jr.

Principal, Mountain Brook Junior High, Alabama
2017 NSDA Middle School Principal of the Year



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