



FIND MORE RESOURCES ONLINE!

Dear Colleagues,

I cannot think of a better time to embrace the importance of a strong speech and debate program in your school's curricular and extra-curricular opportunities. We are all surrounded by a never-ending flow of information, logical fallacies, emotional arguments, personal opinions parading as facts, and the real struggle to listen and evaluate. The only way to combat this whirlwind, equip kids, and even model for adults is to educate through the lessons of speech and debate.

I have been so fortunate over the last few years to see the impact that investing in speech and debate can make. As a former arts administrator with Columbia Public Schools, I worked to ensure funding for supportive coaches, teachers, transportation, curriculum, and materials for all students who wanted to participate. I know the difference it makes—the energy and understanding created when peers, parents, and school administrators see students not only evaluate their own opinions but also research opposing viewpoints and come to new and more meaningful conclusions.

While as a school district we always had some moderate success with the extra-curricular activity of speech and debate, we saw real success and growth for students when we implemented a course of study that developed research skills, gave time for real student collaboration, and provided access to a full-time teacher. This investment, coupled with the extension of extra-curricular opportunities to compete against peers in other school districts and expand their exposure to different ideas, fueled a fire of student success and learning.

Competing and winning (along with the art of losing) is part of the fun, but it's not the actual goal or outcome that inspires me the most. These brilliant future leaders and fellow community members are now better equipped to face a challenging world that will demand all their calm and well-crafted reasoning skills. They will inspire others to ask questions, dig deeper, and not fall into the cesspool of doom scrolling, bullying, and name-calling. I want to encourage you to keep investing in speech and debate and other programs that promote critical thinking, raise the public discourse, and empower and prepare our students to lead.

Most Sincerely,

James Melton

James Melton, NBCT & SHRM-CP

Associate Executive Director, Missouri State High School Activities Association
NSDA High School Administrator of the Year (2023)

Former Director of Fine Arts, Columbia Public Schools (2013 to 2023)

▶ www.speechanddebate.org/advocacy