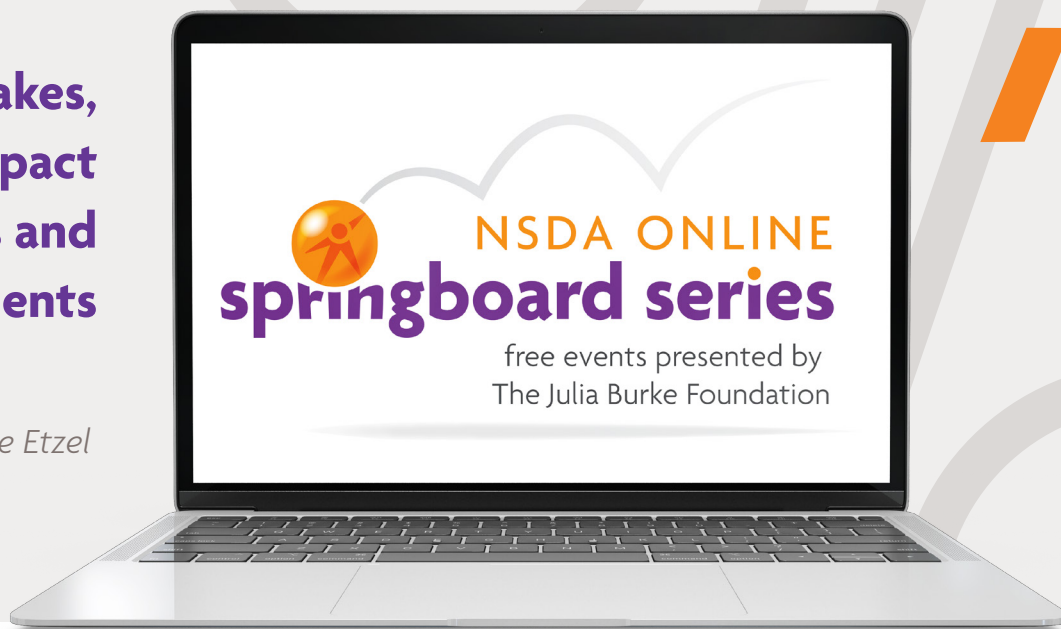


Low-Stakes, High-Impact Scrimmages and Tournaments

by Kellie Etzel



Thanks to the generosity of The Julia Burke Foundation, the NSDA launched the Springboard Series in 2020. Springboard is a series of virtual after-school speech and debate scrimmages with two weekend tournaments. The scrimmages and tournaments are organized and managed by the NSDA using Tabroom.com.

The best part? They're completely free! Students don't have to be NSDA members in order to participate in the scrimmages, either. They can compete in their favorite speech and debate events from the comfort of their own homes or with their teammates at school!

Through the Springboard Series, the NSDA aimed to fill a void

created by the pandemic to provide experienced and novice students alike with free virtual access to speech and debate. Springboard provides high school and middle school students with an avenue to critically think through problems, collaborate on creative solutions, and communicate effectively against injustices.

Not only have Springboard scrimmages occurred Tuesday and Thursday evenings four times a month, but the NSDA also hosted a weekend capstone tournament in early December. Another weekend tournament is planned for May 5-7. That upcoming tournament is very special—students will have the opportunity to qualify for the National Tournament!

So far, 2,065 students from 28 states and international locations have had a chance to gain new speech and debate skills, participate in new events, and receive valuable feedback from a new set of judges.

A total of 466 students from 73 schools and 221 judges gave up their Saturday on December 4 to compete in a mix of live and asynchronous speech and debate events. Congressional Debate, Big Questions, Humorous Interpretation, Policy Debate, and Duo Interpretation were represented among the events. About 150 of the top-placing students earned medals for their performance.

In addition to providing students with free practice opportunities,

the Springboard Series is a wonderful way for coaches, advisors, administrators, and supporters to build and foster a healthy speech and debate team. Springboard offers a low-stakes, high-impact way for coaches to recruit, train, and expose new students and judges to competitions. In fact, some coaches have started to use the Springboard Series in unique and creative ways.

Coach David Yastremski from New Jersey found a great use for Springboard scrimmages—tryouts for his school's speech and debate team. For years, David's team held traditional tryouts for available spots. With Springboard, he was able to eliminate traditional in-person tryouts, determine which students were really interested in participating in speech and debate,

Testimonials . . .


and help his students develop a competition-ready performance—all while giving his students a chance to compete in more than one form of speech and debate.

For David's team, Springboard created a structure where students had options to show their commitment to the team. Attending after-school Springboard scrimmages became a social, unifying experience, and mentoring relationships naturally formed between new and returning team members.

The Springboard Series offers students essential feedback and ranks from judges across the country and is an excellent way to build skills and confidence with zero entry fees. Coach Mark Stowitts from California sees Springboard as a rare opportunity for his students. "Why would they give up their evenings to compete on a school night?" he asked. He ultimately concluded that

Springboard gives students the opportunity to receive more detailed, constructive feedback from a variety of judges than they might normally get during a full, in-person tournament.

Imaginative coaches like these have found inventive uses for the Springboard Series. Here are a few more ideas:

- Avoid judge burnout through exposure to talented performers from across the country (and around the world!).
- Utilize Springboard for judge development: an introduction to judging for new judges or new events.
- Garner fresh administrative and parental support for speech and debate teams with free competitions.
- Let students try out a new speech and debate event in a lower pressure situation.
- Offer the Springboard opportunity in lieu of a practice, giving students an opportunity to get feedback from other sources. 

Springboard offers a low-stakes, high-impact way for coaches to recruit, train, and expose new students and judges to competitions. Here's what participating coaches are saying!

"These tournaments have provided a safe and accessible avenue for our students—particularly our novices—to try speech and debate. Thank you to The Julia Burke Foundation for your continued support of our activity!" — David Yastremski (New Jersey)

"I am from a very small, rural school, and my kids are into every other activity they can possibly be in. By offering the Springboard scrimmage, my team was able to compete on Tuesdays and Thursdays without having to interfere with their other activities." — Pamela Evitts (Missouri)

"We greatly appreciate the opportunity to make this tournament available to our students in India, where we are starting new programs and introducing U.S.-format speech and debate competitions to eager students. Participating in practice rounds helped build confidence in our first-time debaters in a supportive, educational environment." — Rajiv Kacholia (India)

"Our budget is tight, and being as isolated as we are here in the islands, my students are much better able to practice and compete than we would be without the Springboard Series. It is a great service provided to students who, especially in our pandemic world, need as much support as we can manage." — Bill Teter (Hawaii)

To learn more about the Springboard Series, visit www.speechanddebate.org/springboard-series.

Kellie Etzel serves as Online Speech and Debate Coordinator at the NSDA.



 **NSDA ONLINE**
springboard series

free events presented by
The Julia Burke Foundation

See the
schedule and
learn more:



The Springboard Series for speech and debate is back!

Thanks to the generosity of The Julia Burke Foundation, the NSDA has expanded the free online opportunities available via the Springboard Series for the 2021-2022 school year.

speech and debate events

Both speech and debate events will be offered for current high school and middle school students.

after-school scrimmages

Several free online after-school scrimmages offered in February and March. Scrimmages are a mix of live and asynchronous events.

qualify to nationals

A free tournament open to any high school that attended their district tournament will be held May 5-7. Top-placing students will qualify to Nationals!