

Program Building:

Finding the Right Speech and Debate Coach



When schools commit to doing speech and debate, one of the biggest obstacles can be finding the right person to lead the team. Often, schools feel they must find someone with a speech and debate background at the high school or collegiate level. While this certainly is a plus, it is not a requirement! There are countless examples of successful programs led by English, Social Studies, World Language, or other subject area teachers. Not only that, but there are other successful programs with a coach who works outside the school building, as well.

So, what qualities should you seek in someone interested in starting a speech and debate program at your school? Think about the people you already have in your building:

- Social Studies teachers tend to be very in tune with current events and political issues.
- English teachers are able to deconstruct ideas and point out flaws in logic and style.
- Gifted and talented teachers are able to differentiate instruction at a high level to help students reach new heights with their potential.
- Resource teachers know how to break down concepts to help students understand ideas, and can help them with organizing their thoughts.
- A media specialist knows the ins and outs of research, finding the right supporting material to make an argument compelling.

If you can't find someone within your school, the following qualities are beneficial for a coach who does not have a strong speech and debate background:

- Willingness to learn with the kids
- Openness to new challenges
- Determined to give kids unique opportunities, help them find their niche, and stand out
- Committed to 21st century skills: critical thinking, collaboration, creativity

The National Speech & Debate Association offers a number of competitive opportunities. Among our debate, public speaking, and interpretation events, there are more than a dozen different areas for students to participate in speech and debate. Most importantly, that means a coach can learn about what we offer and pick one or two of the events to get started.

The next thing you may be wondering is, how can your school support your coach if s/he is not experienced? That's where the National Speech & Debate Association comes in! We provide training, mentorship, support, and resources for new coaches to be successful. As an administrator, you can also turn to us to answer any and all questions you may have.

Finally, you may be wondering why you haven't started a speech and debate program sooner! Don't worry—you're thinking about it now! That is what's important. Together, we can give youth a voice and help make a difference in your students' lives.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact **Steven Schappaugh**, Director of Programs and Education at the National Speech & Debate Association. He can be reached at steve.schappaugh@speechanddebate.org or by calling (920) 748-6206.