

For Immediate Release
August 22, 2024

Fullerton School District's Speech and Debate Team Named National Champs for Fifth Year in a Row



Fullerton School District's National Speech and Debate team, made up of 20 students in grades sixth through eighth representing various schools from across the district, took top 2024 NSDA honors.

(Fullerton, CA) - For the fifth consecutive year, Fullerton School District's Parks Junior High has earned top honors at the National Speech and Debate Association's (NSDA) championship tournament as an Overall School of Excellence in Speech and Debate. 170 schools spanning 36 states and five countries had students competing in NSDA's 2024 national competition, and Parks Junior High is one of only three schools to be awarded this prestigious recognition.

FSD's 20 Speech and Debate competitors joined nearly 800 students at this year's NSDA national showdown, showcasing their public speaking skills in a variety of competitive speaking categories and vying for nationals' hardware. In addition to Parks Junior High's overall sweepstakes win, three FSD students, Natalie Hong, Annette Lee, and Apollo Meneses, were named individual national champions in the categories of Program Oral Interpretation, Original Oratory, and Humorous Interpretation, respectively.



From left to right: Apollo Meneses, Annette Lee, and Natalie Hong holding their NSDA championship trophies.

Emily McDougall, an Educational Services Director for FSD who oversees the district's Speech and Debate program, shared that FSD started its speech and debate program with a trial cohort in 2017. The program is now available to all students in fourth through eighth grades at each of FSD's 20 school campuses.

McDougall also noted that the expansion and success of the program have been made possible through a successful partnership with Advantage Communications, which organization helps provide coaching staff, competition preparation, and more.

Adriana Toghia, District Director and Vice President for Advantage Communications, shared that FSD's showing in the 2024 NSDA national championship saw 38 FSD-entered events advance through preliminary rounds, up from 12 events last year. In addition, while FSD's team primarily focuses on speech events at this tournament, Parks Junior High's points totaled so highly that it earned the team a spot points-wise in the Speech and Debate section.



Parks Junior High has earned the title of Overall School of Excellence for five years in a row.

“Public speaking is an invaluable skill that will serve our students in their personal and professional endeavors for the rest of their lives,” said Hilda Sugarman, President of the Fullerton Education Foundation (FEF) and Vice President of FSD’s Board of Trustees, who supported fundraising efforts through FEF to help FSD’s 20-student speech and debate team travel to Des Moines, Iowa to compete in June.



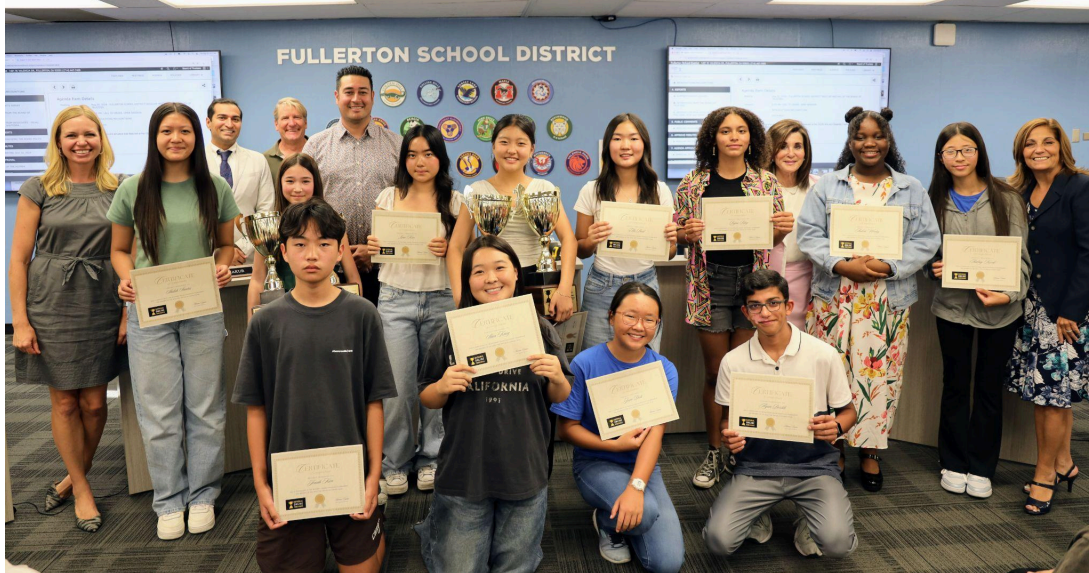
FSD’s Board of Trustees invited all 20 of its national speech and debate competitors for board recognition at its Aug. 20 board meeting.

NSDA has been hosting the national middle school competition since 2010, and an NSDA representative shared that the number of entries in every competitive category grew from 2023 to 2024, making this one of the most competitive competitions yet. For example, at the 2023 tournament, there was an average of 31 entries in each speech event, and in 2024, there were around 88 entries in each event.

According to NSDA, many who have roots as NSDA members represent industry leaders and nationally recognized household names, including Supreme Court justices Ketanji Brown Jackson and Sonia Sotomayor, acclaimed broadcast news reporters Tom Llamas and Stephen Colbert, Academy Award winners Jordan Peele and Brad Pitt, and countless others.

“The tournament is a moving reminder of how the skills students learn in speech and debate empower them to be changemakers, advocates, and future leaders of our world,” shared NSDA in a press release announcing the location of this year’s tournament.

FSD also had numerous students earn top honors in NSDA’s 2024 virtual tournament, who were also honored during their recent board meeting, illuminating the interest and success of FSD’s Speech and Debate programming.



FSD's Speech and Debate team competitors also saw success in the virtually-hosted 2024 tournament.

Fullerton School District families with students in fourth through eighth grades who are interested in participating in Speech and Debate for the 2024-25 school year are encouraged to attend the virtual Parent Information Session on Aug. 26, 2024 from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., and [more information can be found here](#).

NSDA celebrates its centennial next year, and the national tournament is scheduled to take place again in Des Moines, Iowa, the organization's headquarters. For more information about NSDA and upcoming tournaments, visit www.speechanddebate.org.

The Fullerton School District (FSD) is located in northern Orange County, California, and serves over 11,400 students in transitional kindergarten (TK) through eighth grade. FSD is home to 15 elementary schools, two TK through eighth-grade schools, three junior high schools, and a distance learning and home school program. FSD features unique programs for students, including a Dual Language Academy for Spanish and Korean languages; a Performance Academy Sports Program that offers a traditional in-person learning experience with time for advanced athletic training integrated into the school day; and robust before, after, and summer school programs. The mission of the Fullerton School District is to work collaboratively with the community to provide an innovative, high-quality educational experience for all students in a safe learning environment. FSD's motto, "Great Schools - Successful Kids," signifies that all FSD students will be given the tools and instruction to achieve academic excellence, hone interpersonal skills, and develop technological expertise to contribute as productive citizens in a democratic society. To learn more about the Fullerton School District's award-winning schools and programs, call (714) 447-7400 or visit www.fullertonsd.org.

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