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Why Debate Matters for My Students

Maria Williams – November 19, 2014



In the fight for educational equality, Success Academy is doing something transformative: Our schools are changing the face of competitive debate in New

York City.

For the past three years, Success Academy has been sending middle school students to compete in local and national debate tournaments that were once exclusively dominated by elite schools.

Thanks to a rich and varied curriculum that allows our middle school students to choose debate as an elective class, our scholars have developed the skills to compete and win against debate teams from a variety of schools, including private schools such as The Dalton School and The Hackley School and schools with gifted and talented programs.

Debate teaches students the art of argumentation through rigorous preparation and teamwork. Its academic benefits are well established and some of our country's top leaders were skilled speakers and debaters in school, including CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and former U.S. presidents.

My students love to debate one another and push each other's thinking especially on issues that are pertinent to their lives. This past April, one of our eighth graders whose family has struggled financially, took home the New York Debate League's top award – the Golden Gavel – after giving a speech asserting that the country's war on poverty has not failed. If it had, he said, "It would mean that no matter how hard I try, how well I do in school, or how much I practice debate, I can't overcome the world I was born into."

For our scholars, debate is not just a game or a sport or a bullet point on a college application; for some of them it is a way past everyday struggles.

Their enthusiasm and preparation was on full display again this past weekend at a highly competitive debate tournament in Westchester. Harlem West had a strong showing, including winning a debate round about the merits of police wearing body

cameras against a team from the Hackley school.

You can read about it in *The New York Times*, which published this [story about Success Academy and the New York Debate League](#) on November 17.

As we expand our debate program to all our middle schools by January, we will need more volunteers who can serve as judges at competitions. If you would like to volunteer, please contact me at Maria.Williams@SASchools.org.

We look forward to the day when the face of debate represents more of our nation's diversity and not just a handful of scholars from a particular zip code.

Subjects: [Debate](#), [Schooling](#)



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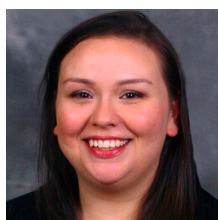
Audrey Richmond · Lewis University

This is terrific! It's exciting that you have been so instrumental Berg in bringing such a meaningful element into these young.

peoples lives. Keep up the good work. Aunt Audrey

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[Maria Williams](#)

Debate Teacher, Success Academy Harlem West

Ms. Williams is the founding speech and debate teacher at Success Academy. In her five years as a teacher, she has coached a national championship winning team and 25 first-place Golden Gavel winners. Eight students at Harlem West have won Golden Gavels.

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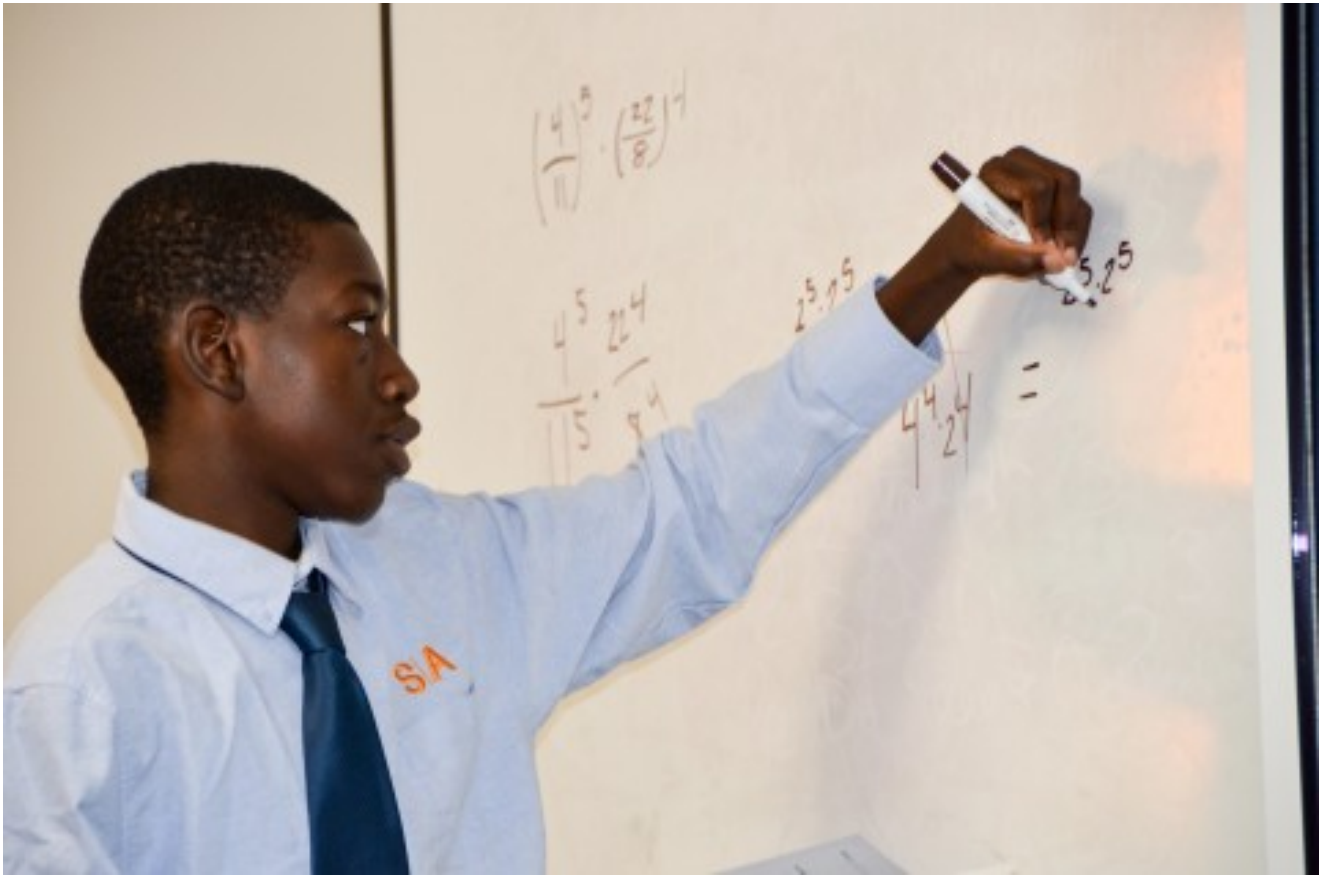
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