

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Speech & Debate Handbook 2025-2026

INFORMATIONAL MEETING TUESDAY NOVEMBER 11th

OFFICIAL SIGN UP AND COACHING WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 12th

Tuesday Speech Coaching Begins 18 November 6:30 to 7:30 PM @CHS E265

Wednesday Debate Coaching Starts 19 November 6:00 to 7:30 PM @CHS E265

[November "Start of the Season" Calendar](#)

If Covid is an issue > VIRTUAL COACHING

[Zoom Link](#)

Coaches:

Head Coach, Speech & Debate – Jeri Neidhard

jeri.neidhard@centerville.k12.oh.us

Assistant Speech Coach – Elaine Daly

short73@msn.com

Middle School Assistant Speech Coach – Kelly Kilbride

kellymkilbride@gmail.com

Middle School Assistant Speech Coach-- Cheli Curran

chelicurran@icloud.com

Captain MS Extemp Debate-- Vasakan Thambi-Pilla

Coach-- Rojan Reddy

Coach-- Dharmendra Varma

Coach--Shobhit Goel

Coach--Vidhi Goel

Captain MS Speech – Partth Lakdawala

Coach--Nissi Xavier

Coach--Yamini Nitalla

Coach--Rakshita Singh

YOU MUST DO THE FOLLOWING:

1. Sign up on our [Middle School Team Roster](#).
2. Add yourself to our ParentSquare app to send and receive text messages. Parents and students can both do this.
3. Joining the Middle School team is \$50 your first year, and \$40 after that,
4. ***All required Emergency Medical Authorization Forms must be completed through the HAC by December 1st. For parents trying to fill out EMA on [HAC](#), you need click the on registration bar at the top of the page, then update & enroll.***

Deadline for Roster is December 1st

Deadline for Payment is December 4th

Students & parents can access all team information on our [Team Web Page](#)

Welcome to the Wonderful World of Speech and Debate!

- Benefits of participating in Speech and Debate:
- Speech & Debate is *fun*!
- Speech & Debate is a great way to improve your speaking skills
- Speech & Debate is a great way to meet new people
- Speech & Debate is a flexible activity that allows you to still be involved in other activities at the same time
- The Speech & Debate Team does not involve actual “tryouts,” but encourages all who are interested to participate
- Speech & Debate is a great way to gain recognition on a team that is among the top ten programs in the state of Ohio

Everything you need to know to participate:

1. **Understand the basic philosophy of the Centerville Speech & Debate Team:**
 - Our activity is devoted to improving students’ communication and thinking skills while developing confidence and poise.
 - We believe that we can educate, have fun and also be highly competitive.
 - Participation in speech & debate does not prevent students from being able to participate in other activities, but it does require a dedicated commitment, strong work ethic and good time management skills.
 - We do not require any “try-outs” or make any “cuts,” but attending a coaching session is required in order to compete each week.
 - There is no minimum number of tournaments or practices to attend in order to remain on the team.
 - This is a commitment that requires a **strong work ethic**, a mature sense of **responsibility**, and spirit of **cooperation with coaches and teammates**. It is expected that you will practice on your own and come to coaching **prepared** to really focus on improving your performance.
 - You are joining an activity for mature students who learn from and use constructive criticism to improve performance. The team is lucky to have three very experienced coaches who want you to reach your potential. This activity is NOT *about the hardware; it’s about the hard work*.
2. **We will participate in the Ohio Speech & Debate competition season from mid December (for experienced students) through the end of January with a State Championship in late February. The plan is to attend one tournament in December for SPEECH ONLY, and then two tournaments in January for everyone--ending with the Championships in February (4 tournaments in total)**
3. **Tournament sign ups links will be on the webpage and distributed through [ParentSquare](#).**
 - **VERY IMPORTANT:** Signing your name on the pre-registration sheet constitutes a “firm commitment,” and failure to show up to participate at that tournament will cause you to be charged a fine equivalent to the individual registration fee that the team pays for each competitor who is pre-registered for the tournament. (We do not get “refunds” for “no-shows.”)

4. MIDDLE SCHOOL CATEGORIES

Like a track meet, students competing in many different events attend competitions on the same day at the same tournament. Think of Speech like "TRACK." You have sprinters, hurdles, relays, distance runners . . . very different activities that students specialize in. Debate is like "FIELD," Among this group, a variety of events showcase the skills of different athletes. You will see the long jumpers, high jumpers, pole vaulters, team members throwing hammers, discus and shot put . . .

We are very similar! High school offers 13 different categories, but we limit our middle schoolers to two events that still represent the overall categories of interpretation, oratory and debate.

We are limiting our categories this season! In previous years, too many students had to be combined with other categories. We feel it's best to provide the best opportunity for our team's participation.

SPEECH

MS Interpretation

Read (NOT NECESSARILY MEMORIZED) Time frame: 8-10 Minutes (plus a 30 second grace period) The competitor reads/performs a program from a manuscript, which can include any of the three genres (prose, poetry, drama) or a combination thereof around a central theme. The competitor should use his or her voice, gestures, face, etc. to convey the proper emotion of the pieces and engage the audience. Oral Interpretation is the expression and sharing of literature with an audience. The function of the interpreter is to establish oneself as a liaison between the author who created the literature and the audience that responds to it. Students performing in Oral Interpretation simultaneously increase their reading, listening, and speaking skills while improving their critical thinking abilities.

DEBATE

MS Extemporaneous Debate An individual debater focuses on topics of current national importance or controversy. Each round, the student has 30 minutes to prepare arguments in favor of and against a given resolution. Students may use their computers to prepare, and may also use notes as they present their arguments. There is a specific format that is followed, thus giving predetermined amounts of time for presenting an argument, questioning your opponent, and rebutting claims made by the opposition. Rounds last approximately 20 minutes.

5. Know what to expect when you attend a tournament: *Covid will determine if we are live or virtual!*

Departure: From the CHS Athletic Entrance on the West side of the building.

Arrival: Students usually go directly to the auditorium or cafeteria.

Coach Registration/ Student Warm-ups:

Students will wait while coaches register and get necessary materials (code numbers, schedules, critique sheets and maps). Once students have these materials, the officers will find an empty room in which to lead a speech team "warm up" with vocal exercises, stretching and a run-through of individual speeches. Extempers will get their critiques and codes before heading off to the Extemp Debate Prep Room (usually a library).

Code numbers & schematic:

Each speech student will receive a code letter and number which identifies them throughout the tournament. Schedules are usually created once all debate teams have arrived at the school, and students will access that on their phones.

THE HEAD COACH WILL CREATE ACCOUNTS FOR EACH STUDENT ON SPEECHWIRE.COM, AND THEN YOU WILL ACTIVATE THE ACCOUNT. **THIS IS FREE.** THIS IS HOW YOU WILL GET YOUR CODES AND ROOM ASSIGNMENTS FOR COMPETITION. BUT, **STUDENTS WILL NEED LAPTOPS/CHROMEBOOKS, A CELLPHONE, AND A PERSONAL EMAIL ACCOUNT.**

Opening Assembly:

The tournament host will welcome students and give any directions regarding changes in the schedule, room assignments, lunch, etc. Students will go directly from the opening assembly to their first round of speaking/debate.

Rounds & Ranks:

Each speech student speaks once in each round of the tournament and will be ranked 1-7 by the judge in each round. (One is the best.) Debaters receive either a “win” or a “loss” in each round.



Lunch & Tabulation:

Lunch is frequently scheduled after the third (and in some tournaments, final) round, so that students will eat while coaches working in the “Tab Room” determine placements in each category by adding the speakers’ ranks (low score wins!) OR debaters’ win-loss record. Bring money or pack a lunch for this part of your day.

More rounds?

Some tournaments will schedule additional rounds of speaking/debating frequently called “out rounds,” meaning that not all students will speak (They are “out.”) These rounds are used to narrow the field of speakers down to the top six or seven speakers in each category who will then all speak in a “final (power) round.” Debaters are also eliminated as others go on to debate in octa-finals, quarter-finals, semi-finals and finals.

Awards Assembly:

After the “Tab Room” calculates the places, they are announced by category in the Awards Assembly. Usually trophies or ribbons are given to the top 3-6 speakers in each category and the top debate teams. Teams all sit together, and applaud the winners. This should be viewed as a dignified, respectful recognition of the top students at the tournament. We usually stand for all speakers from our own team and for all first place speakers regardless of their team. **Respectful, mature behavior is a must!**

Return of Critiques/Ballots:

Written critiques from the judges will be released to all speakers at the end of the tournament through the SpeechWire account. Release occurs between one and three hours after the tournament ends.

TEAM COMMUNICATIONS

[This link lets you join our account which serves all students and parents on the middle school team](#)

Be sure to join the MS group

Achieve Success with the following “Tournament Tips!”

Practice

- Practice on your own several times a week & run-through the night before tournament
- [PLEASE READ THIS IMPORTANT LINK ABOUT COMPETING ONLINE!!!!](#)
- Read and study all critiques of your performance
- Create a weekly “priority list” for specific improvement
- Debaters, get in the habit of reading/watching the news DAILY! Resources suggestions will be given to you.



At Home:

- Get sufficient sleep the night before tournament
- Get up in plenty of time in the morning; don't rush!
- Eat breakfast of some kind; avoid milk!
- Dress for Success! See “The Look” further in this document.

Although Coaching is Once a Week, Students Should Practice/Prepare at Home

At the Tournament:

- First check in with the coach and get your schedule and code number.
- Check out the rooms in which you will be speaking.
 - Speech: Interpers should determine focal points and everyone needs to check out the amount of “walking space.”
 - Debaters: Find your prep room to set up your materials.
- Warm up” (Team officers will lead a speech team “warm up” in a room somewhere away from the crowd.)
- Do vocal exercises to warm-up voice.
- Physically “stretch out” and “limber up.”
- “Run-through” once & get mentally focused (WALL TALK) Get a “Good Luck Hug” from your coach (Debaters may or may not be “huggers” but Daly and Neidhard like to hug them anyway)!
- Go to the bathroom before speaking.
- Do Not Be Late for Rounds!!!

In Rounds:

- Do NOT enter a competition room until the judge has entered the room.
- Choose a seat that helps to “spread out” the audience; do not sit right in front of or right next to the judge.
- Be friendly with other speakers, but do not “over-socialize.”
- Take time to focus on your performance; look at script and/or checklist.
- Write tournament journal info discreetly; get other contestants’ codes, titles, authors, and comments about the strengths of their performances.
- **Be extremely polite & attentive to other speakers!!!**
- Do not solicit comments from judges.

Between Rounds:

- Conserve Energy! Do not “over-socialize!”
- Watch what you say and do; “the walls have ears, and the ears have ballots!”
- Drink something to prevent dry throat. Carrying a water bottle with you is a great idea.
- Consider a quick walk outside for fresh air and a clear head--*but be careful about locked building doors!*
- If you just had a “good” performance, think about what it was that you did so well; stay focused.
- If you just had a “bad” performance, think about what it is that you need to do differently, re-focus and “run-through” again.
- Seek out your coach if you need to talk. We are usually in the Tab Room.

What to Bring to a Tournament

- A copy of your speech or cutting, vocal exercises, “tournament journal” and pen or pencil (Speech only) OR Debate evidence OR Laptop
- A water bottle as well as throat lozenges or throat spray if you have experienced any soreness or “scratchiness”
- Money for any meals at the tournament (usually lunch)
- Possibly an “iPod,” cards (Euchre is the card game of speech!) or something else to do during “down time.” Coloring books and Mad Libs are fun. Of course, homework is always a good thing to bring!
- “Good Luck Charm” if you believe in such; just keep it small because you will have to take it with you from round to round.

Dress for Success (See the PowerPoint on Our Webpage)

Speakers should “dress for success” which generally means **dressing up** and dressing somewhat **conservatively**. Others, and this certainly includes judges, form impressions of you before you ever open your mouth. Make a strong, positive “first impression.” “**The Look**” can be generally defined as conservative, classy, and dignified.

Specific Considerations:

- **Girls** - In general, wear a dress, suit or really nice pants and “dressy” blouse or top.
- **Guys** – In general, wear suits and ties; sport coats (with tie or nice no-collar shirt) and nice pants; “Dockers” and sweater or sweater/tie; nice pants, shirt and vest. For those who are “allergic” to ties, consider their advantages listed below.
- **Guys & Girls** - Be cautious of extremely bright colors; they can distract attention from your performance. Unless you are hysterical and in HI, leave your bright purple suit with the neon tie at home. Instead, consider darker colors that allow the focus to be on you and your face, not your clothes.
- **Guys & Girls** – you want to bring the focus up around your face as much as possible.
- **Girls** – consider scarves at your neck, necklaces, earrings, hair decorations (that may also keep hair away from your face).
- **Guys** – Avoid “loud” ties; the traditional “power tie” is red to bring the focus up around your face without distracting attention from your face. Also consider a handkerchief in coat pocket, suspenders, vests, lapel pin.
- **Girls** – Avoid short, short skirts; they are distracting and make movement difficult, if not embarrassing. The attention should not be on your thighs; some judges really dislike this and will tell you so on your critiques. Also avoid tops that leave your stomach exposed. Avoid low necklines; be sure you can stretch your hands to the ceiling AND bend over without giving the judge and audience an additional “show.”
- **Girls** – Avoid really high platforms or heels which may be difficult to stand balanced on for the length of your performance or to move in.
- **Guys** – No sandals or athletic shoes! Wear dark shoes and dark socks.

- **Guys & Girls** - Avoid a “sloppy” look: sleeves too long, covering hands; shirt tails out; extremely baggy sweaters and pants, etc. Also avoid tight clothing that looks stretched around you.
- **Girls** – Avoid an overly “frilly” look; you want to be taken seriously.
- **Guys & Girls** – Be cautious of dangling earrings, and rings that may distract or that you may “play with” when you are speaking.
- **Guys & Girls** - Control your hair so we can see your face when you speak. Invest in gel, hair spray, “scrunchies,” hair pins, etc. OR a new haircut!
- **Girls** – Keep makeup and nail polish fairly conservative. For girls who don’t usually wear much makeup, at least consider some lipstick for a little color and extra focus on your face.
- **Guys & Girls** - Be sure that you are comfortable and can move easily in your “speech clothes.” Practice your speech in your “speech clothes” prior to the tournament to be absolutely sure.
- **Guys & Girls** – If you need individual help to achieve “The Look,” please do not hesitate to ask Mrs. Daly for “fashion consulting.” (It’s a free service!) You can ask Mrs. Neidhard, but she is a *fashion failure*.

Why Do We Join the OSDA and NSDA?

To participate on the Centerville Middle School Speech and Debate Team, we charge \$50 to help defray the expenses for tournament registration and materials. We also use that money towards the annual fee for our team to join the OSDA--the Ohio Speech and Debate Association. *We must join that organization in order to compete in Ohio tournaments.*

But we also join the NSDA--National Speech and Debate Association. All high school students pay an additional \$20 to cover the cost of a lifetime membership with the National Speech and Debate Association. For Middle Schoolers, the cost is less and covers all of your years in middle school. We make this a required fee the first year of participation so that all of your competition results can be recorded with the NSDA.

By having Centerville Middle School competitors join the NSDA--they have individual memberships and can compete at the National Championships in June. It also means that I can enter the “points” earned for tournament participation throughout the season. More points are earned for tournament success, but you ALWAYS earn points regardless of how successful you are!

SO, what does membership mean?

Speech and debate is an academic activity typically available to students in middle school, high school. Similar to athletic sports, speech and debate activities are **challenging, competitive** in nature, and require regular practice, coaching, dedication, and **hard work**.

As the largest interscholastic speech and debate organization in the world, the National Speech & Debate Association provides an extensive array of member benefits, including [resources](#), [tournament opportunities](#), [professional development](#), [scholarship opportunities](#), [exclusive partnerships](#), and more.

As a member of the National Speech & Debate Association, you are instantly connected to a robust community of professionals passionate about speech and debate. With more than 3,000 member high schools, 600 middle schools, and 5,200 coaches across the country, it’s easy to network with fellow speech and debate advocates in your region. Whether you are a student, starting a new program at your school, coaching for the first time, volunteering your time to a local program, reconnecting with alumni, or advancing your skill set—we’re here to support you every step of the way!

Student Benefits

- Membership in the largest interscholastic speech and debate organization in the world
- A membership certificate, with the ability to earn foil embossed seals for participation and service
- Ability to compete in districts and qualify for the National Tournament, where thousands of dollars in scholarships are awarded each year
- Opportunity to vote on nationally-determined debate topics for the school year
- Eligibility for [national awards](#) including Exemplary Service, Student of the Year, Academic All American, All American, and more
- [Monthly newsletter](#) sharing speech and debate opportunities and resources
- Access to online [resources](#) through the school's membership

If this is your child's first year on the Speech and Debate team, please submit a check for \$50 made out to Centerville High School, and then I will pay for those individual memberships. I can *only* record points for those students who are individual members. Students will receive official membership certificates and cards once they have earned 25 points. **All points are carried over into high school where they can then earn membership in to the prestigious National Forensic League Honor Society!** The more points you earn, the more degrees you attain. With enough points, you are eligible for nomination as an Academic All American.

Sadly, you will need to pay \$20 for a lifetime membership once your child is in high school. Grrrrr.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Normally, we need parent volunteers to sell food at each tournament we host (As many as once in October and twice in February).

Parent help is integral to our program!

Our competitions are not open to fans or audience members. **However, your help is absolutely indispensable!** We must have your commitment in one or more of the following ways:

1. Receive training and judge at tournaments. *The team will provide you a \$50 gas card!*
2. Donate food if we host tournaments. We will have over 200 judges and competitors to feed!
3. Volunteer to sell food/maintain judges' hospitality room at the tournaments we host.

IN ORDER TO COMPETE, WE MUST PROVIDE ONE PARENT JUDGE FOR EVERY FIVE SPEECH ENTRIES, AND ONE PARENT JUDGE FOR EVERY TWO DEBATE ENTRIES!

A Word About Content and Subject Matter

One of the purposes of speech and debate is to provide an opportunity for students to share their "voice." We believe in free speech and the important platform that this activity provides. Mrs. Daly and Mrs. Neidhard measure literary appropriateness by what can be heard on regular television, but other teams have a more expansive view on content. Students must remember to consider audience and age appropriateness when selecting material. You will hear debate about issues that are put forth by the NSDA, not us, and those are the topics that must be addressed in competition--some of which may be considered controversial.

Furthermore, students may select topics that go beyond typical classroom subject matter and discussions. You will be a respectful audience member--honoring the right for others to bring forth issues of concern to them.

2025-2026 Tournament Calendar and Deadlines

Currently, no schools in southern Ohio are offering MS speech and debate. As a result, there are very few tournaments we can attend this year unless they become virtual.

We feel that competition is the best way to improve, so we are offering the opportunity for interested students and parents to attend some of our overnight tournaments.

This activity is NOT officially recognized by the middle schools, so I cannot distribute excused absence forms the way I do for high school students. Therefore, interested students will need to travel to and from the overnight tournaments and share a hotel room with a parent on the team. We will cover the tournament registration cost, but you will need to cover the hotel expense. I can allow you to take one of our “block of reserved rooms” at a discounted rate.

***Details for future tournaments will be shared
via emails and [ParentSquare!](#)***

★ ***All required Emergency Medical Authorization Forms must be completed through the [HAC](#) by December 1st. For parents trying to fill out EMA on HAC, you need click the on registration bar at the top of the page, then update & enroll.***

The final weekend in February, there will be a Middle School State Championship Tournament at a location TBA.

Judge Training

Offered via Zoom
Thursday December 11th
7:00-8:30 PM

[How to Judge Speech & Debate](#)



CLEAR YOUR CALENDAR NOW FOR THE FOLLOWING TOURNAMENTS:

TOURNAMENT DATE & LOCATION	DEPART CHS FROM ATHLETIC ENTRANCE	Sign Up Deadline
<u>NOVEMBER</u>		
<i>First Meetings</i> <i>Tuesday 11 6:00-7:30</i> <i>Wednesday 12 6:00-7:30</i>	<u>Tuesday CHS East Commons</u> Parents & Students Info Night Students talk to high school coaches and parents talk to adult coaches	<u>Wednesday CHS East Commons</u> Bring ChromeBooks or Laptops Register for Team Begin Coaching
<u>DECEMBER</u>		
8 <u>CINCINNATI PRINCETON</u> 11080 Chester Rd Cincinnati, OH	High School Only Depart 6:15 AM on 8 November	Registration Deadline 11/5
15 WEEK OFF	STARTING MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM THIS WEEK	
21 & 22 <u>BEAVERCREEK</u> 2660 Dayton Xenia Road	Parent Transportation Handout will give details	Registration Deadline 11/19
<u>DECEMBER</u>		
Date: Wednesday, December 3, 2025 <u>SIGN UP FOR JUDGE TRAINING HERE</u> Time: 7:00–8:00 PM Location: Google Meet (link sent after registration)		
17 <u>WOOSTER HIGH SCHOOL</u> 515 Oldman Rd, Wooster, OH 44691	Middle and High School Depart CHS 10 AM 1/17	Registration Deadline 1/12 Hotel Payment Deadline 1/14
<u>FEBRUARY</u>		
28 <u>MIDDLE SCHOOL STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS</u> T B A	Depart 4:30 PM 2/27	Registration Deadline 2/24 Hotel Payment Deadline 2/25