

BERKELEY HIGH SPEECH AND DEBATE

FAMILY HANDBOOK 2025-26

Welcome!

Welcome to the 2025-26 Debate Season! We are excited that your student will be part of Berkeley High Speech and Debate this year.

This handbook provides information about debate practices, tournaments, family obligations, and instructions about required paperwork. Please note that students and their families need to fill out the [forms at the end of this packet](#) before participating in tournaments.

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What We Do

Students participate in Berkeley High Speech and Debate in two ways. First, they attend in-person practice, usually twice a week after school, where they develop key debating skills (logic, argumentation, public speaking). Second, they attend weekend tournaments, where they compete against students from other schools. Tournaments are explained in greater detail below.

New debaters are called “novices,” and have practices designed specifically for them. They compete in a separate division at most tournaments.

Some tournaments will be in person, and some will be online.

You should bookmark the team [website](#), as it has other important information, and will be updated over the course of the school year. The password for the private sections is “POI”.

What We Expect from our Parents and Guardians

The Berkeley High Speech and Debate program is a student club. Its continuity and success depend on the participation and support of debate parents. One purpose of this handbook is to emphasize the need for that parental involvement. **The program receives no financial support from Berkeley High School or the Berkeley Unified School District.** Everything we do, we accomplish with the support of parents and debaters.

We have three expectations for families: financial support, judging, and helping at our annual fundraiser (the Berkeley High International Parliamentary Debate Invitational, this year online, probably on January 30–February 1, 2026). We also invite parents to join the parent leadership team by contacting lead parent [Soroush Shehabi](#). **We currently need a treasurer to hold team funds, as well as other parent leaders.**

Additionally, the team welcomes two types of in-kind donations. If you have business clothes that you would like to donate for students to use, please contact our parent coordinator (to be determined once the school year starts). If you have an old laptop you no longer need, please contact head coach Joel Jacobs; these are useful to lend to students for tournaments, and to record debate rounds for later discussion. Laptops that have not already been wiped of data will be wiped upon receipt.

Financial Support

Debate is an expensive activity: We pay hundreds of dollars in league dues and have hired several college students to help coach the team. (Our head coach volunteers his time.) The team covers tournament entry fees, which can amount to hundreds of dollars per student per year. *We receive no financial support from Berkeley High School*, and instead rely on family fair share contributions to cover debate team expenses.

a) Fair Share Payment

Every Fall, we ask families to pay a fair share contribution to help with team costs. This contribution pays for coaching and tournament fees. *All interested students will be able to compete regardless of whether their families are able to support the program financially.* If you are able to contribute, please be generous and give the full amount you can. Consider paying extra to cover the share of another family that is not in a position to contribute.

Requested amount:

\$500-1,000 for returning debaters

\$100-300 for students in their first year of debate.

Payment Instructions: You can make your fair share payment in one of two ways:

1. Paypal to @BethanyGDebate
2. Write a check payable to Bethany Goldblum, and mail it to the following address:

Bethany Goldblum
2031 Mira Vista Dr
El Cerrito, CA 94530

If you mail a check, please send an email with the check amount to quantumqueen@hotmail.com, and cc: bhsdeb8@gmail.com, so we know the check is on its way.

b) Overnight Tournaments

Most tournaments are local, and there is no cost to the student or family for competing. The debate team will cover tournament entry fees for competitors. But every year, we attend a few tournaments where we pay for lodging and other costs. *These are not official BHS field trips; and any students who attend do so independently of BHS.* We ask families to cover the costs for transportation, hotels, and food if their debaters attend. Families that are in a position to do so will be expected to cover their share of the full cost of the trip, including the travel costs for coaches and chaperones. We will let you know in advance if there are costs associated with a tournament. *Some funding may be available to assist students for whom the hotel costs are a hardship. Please contact head coach [Joel Jacobs](#) if you have questions.*

c) Late Drop Penalties

When students drop out of tournaments at the last minute, the team still has to pay their entry fees. Managing your schedule and honoring your commitments are key life skills, and we expect parents to help their students grow towards becoming responsible adults. **If a student drops out of a tournament after the add/drop deadline and the tournament imposes a penalty, we expect the student and/or family to reimburse the team for the cost.** For away tournaments, this may include the student's share of lodging costs. So please be mindful of deadlines.

Judging

We are required to bring judges to every tournament, and ask that you (or another family member, relative or friend) volunteer to judge at *some* of the tournaments your student attends. Details below.

Help with the Berkeley High Tournament

In the Spring, Berkeley High Speech and Debate hosts our annual fundraiser, the Berkeley High Parliamentary Debate Tournament. This year, it will be January 31–February 1, 2026. Our tournament is typically an “All hands on deck” event for the team. We ask all parents and debaters to volunteer that weekend, probably on Saturday.

Parent Volunteers

We’re always eager to get new parents involved in the general oversight and support of the team. If you are interested in helping out the club, please contact one of our parent leaders. Adding parent volunteers is especially important this year, as our most involved parents have seniors on the team.

In-Kind Donations

The team also accepts two types of in-kind donations:

1. Dress clothing, to lend to team members who do not have dress clothes for tournaments that require them; and
2. Laptops to lend to students for use at tournaments. They can be older models that you are replacing anyway. Please wipe all user data; if you don’t know how to do that, we can do it.

Please contact a parent leader or head coach Joel Jacobs to make arrangements for in-kind donations.

Practice Schedule and Expectations

We are fortunate to have three coaching sessions available for our students each week (many schools meet only once per week). Please attend practice regularly.

Attending two practices per week is strongly encouraged. In case of conflicts, students may attend fewer practices.

We usually begin practice with a “podcast warmup,” in which everyone gives a one-minute speech about a podcast they listened to. A list of recommended podcasts is [here](#). Students should also write down a word from the podcast that they want to use in their speech. We will have alternate topics for students who do not have a podcast news article to discuss.

We meet in Room **G215**

Practice Schedule

Monday 4:00-6:00 pm	Novice practice
Tuesday 4:30 - 6:30 pm	Varsity practice
Wednesday 4:00-6:00 pm	All-team practice
Wednesday 5:30-6:30	Speech event practice

Conduct at Practice

We expect all students to be engaged at practice, ready to engage with the material and their peers. Our team is composed of students with a variety of experience levels, backgrounds, and strengths, and can function only if we support and respect each other. Disrespectful, overly critical, or hurtful actions towards other debaters (on our team or from other schools) or coaches are not tolerated.

Tournament Participation Details

Debaters may attend as many tournaments as they like. Some debaters go to every tournament that fits their schedule. Others may not attend any tournaments. There is no minimum or maximum requirement.

Many of the tournaments we attend are daylong events, usually on a Saturday or Sunday. Others may be two days long. A few tournaments last three days for students who reach elimination rounds. Tournaments can run into the night. For in-person tournaments, it will sometimes happen that debaters and judges have to stay at a tournament after they have been eliminated, because they are waiting for other debaters (or judges) on the team to finish. Judges are typically expected to judge through the round after all teams from their school are eliminated, to ensure an impartial judging pool. (You may not be finished precisely when your student is.)

Signing Up for Tournaments

Students sign up for tournaments on Google Forms. You can find the tournament calendar/sign-up links [here](#). The links can also be found on the [BHSD website](#). Each tournament will have a deadline for signing up. Any student wishing to compete should first check with their parents, then sign up for that tournament prior to the deadline.

A tournament signup is a commitment to participate in every round of the tournament. Any conflicts/issues/special arrangements must be discussed in advance with the coach. Once the deadline has passed, students may not decide to skip the tournament or miss part of it, except in extreme cases such as medical need. Otherwise, your family will be responsible for any “drop fees” that the tournament charges.

Tournament Attire

Business attire is recommended for all competitors, but not required. You may choose to wear suits (with ties and dress shirts), dresses, or other conservative outfits. Some tournaments allow casual attire, but you should assume business attire unless you receive a contrary email from a coach. We hope to have extra dress clothes for students to borrow; please contact parent coordinator [Soroush Shehabi](#) if you would like to borrow some (or if you have some to donate).

Conduct at Tournaments

We expect all students and parents to treat teammates, competitors, judges, and coaches with respect. Creating a supportive atmosphere is more important than winning. Thank you for giving your best effort.

Special Rules for Overnight Tournaments

School policy does not allow overnight field trips, and so we do not take them. We do not compete in away tournaments on behalf of Berkeley High. Students do sometimes choose to compete in away tournaments independently of the school. The following rules apply

For overnight tournaments, the coach must know students’ whereabouts at all times. **When not at the tournament or with the whole group, students are expected to be in their own rooms or in the hotel lobby at all times;** any other plans must be cleared in advance with the coach, or if the coach cannot be reached, with an adult chaperone.

Any use of alcohol or drugs by students, any sexual activity, being somewhere unexpected without the coach knowing your whereabouts, any behavior that endangers the safety of self or others, or any other inappropriate behavior, will lead to significant consequences for all

involved. In case of any question about whether an action or activity is allowed, ask the coach, or if the coach cannot be reached, an adult chaperone.

Attending tournaments is a privilege that can be revoked if abused.

Technology Best Practices

We strongly encourage you to watch [this video](#) to learn how to avoid technical problems during online tournaments. For online tournaments, it is important to have a reliable internet connection. That means being as close as possible to the router or using a wired connection if possible.

Parent Judging at Tournaments

In order to satisfy our judging requirements, **for every two tournament days in which their student competes, each family is expected to cover judging for one day.** Parents, older siblings, grandparents, family friends--anyone who has graduated from high school and speaks English--is welcome to judge.

No experience is required! You will receive instructions on judging. Most judges are parents just like you and do not have prior judging experience. A “good” judge is one who is willing to listen carefully, put aside personal views, and decide which competitors made the strongest arguments. It is fun!

You will never judge your own student, or any student from BHS, at a tournament. (You might judge BHS students at an informal scrimmage.)

In order to judge, you will need an account on tabroom: <https://www.tabroom.com/> Please create an account (don't forget to store your password somewhere where you can find it!) so we can link you to the Berkeley High account.

For rounds taking place online, you will need a good internet connection.

You should have a way to take notes -- either on the computer or on paper.

Here are some things to know about in-person tournaments:

- With one or two exceptions, the host school will provide judges lunch, and often a light breakfast. Judges are provided beverages, and often snacks throughout the day.

- Your out-of-pocket travel expenses will be covered by the team. Mileage to and from the tournament are tax-deductible.
- Judges are usually drivers as well, so we will ask you to drive Berkeley High debaters to and from the tournament and be available to them during the tournament if they need help or support.

Berkeley High is known for providing good judges. We show up on time, follow the rules, and give thoughtful comments to students. Our comments are written to highlight the best in the performance, and most importantly, offer constructive tips for improvement. We are proud of this reputation and want to keep it. If you have any questions, reach out to us and we will try to help.

Please sign up to judge early and often, so our coaches can focus on teaching debate rather than wrangling volunteers!

Families have several options for meeting this judging obligation:

1. Judge at least the minimum number of tournaments;
2. Assist with the cost of hiring judges (this is in addition to your fair share contribution for the year!); or
3. If neither of these options is feasible for your family, talk to the head coach or a parent leader, and we can work something out that is feasible.

No student will be limited in their tournament participation because their parents have not met the judging obligation.

Berkeley High Speech and Debate Team

Contacts

COACHES

Head Coach	Joel Jacobs	bhsdeb8@gmail.com
Assistant Coach	Alex Parikh-Briggs	alexparikh-briggs@berkeley.edu
Assistant Coach	Elisandra Moulitsas	Elimoulitsas@gmail.com

PARENT LEADERS

Soroush Shehabi (Lead Parent)	soroush.shehabi@gmail.com
Rebecca Esterson	rebeccaesterson@gmail.com

STUDENT CLUB OFFICERS

A list of student officers can be found [here](#).

FACULTY SPONSOR

Aaron Glimme

Our sponsor is *not* involved in the team's day-to-day operations. For questions involving tournaments, payments, or other details, please contact the parent team leaders.

Communications

Website

<https://bhsdebate.wixsite.com/home>

Student Communications (Slack)

Students communicate with each other and the coaches through Slack. You should have received an email with the link to join the Slack group; if not, please have your student contact a coach. Students must join Slack if they wish to participate in tournaments. They can do so [here](#).

Monthly Parent Emails

We typically communicate with parents through email, usually about once a month. Please be sure to whitelist bhsdeb8@gmail.com in your email app, and keep an eye out for emails with BHSD in the subject line.

If you have a question, please contact one of the parent leaders or the head coach.

Introduction to Debate and Speech

Parliamentary Debate

Berkeley High students debate in a style of debate known as Parliamentary Debate. This structured debate is a two-person team debate that emphasizes a combination of persuasive speaking, logical reasoning, and knowledge of current events. In this debate format, tournament officials assign a different topic for every round. The two teams have limited preparation time, usually twenty minutes, to plan arguments for the side they were assigned: either “Government” (sometimes called “Affirmation”), which argues in favor of the resolution, or “Opposition” (sometimes called “Negation”) which opposes the resolution.

Here is a [sample high school parliamentary debate](#).

Speech Events (also called Individual Events or “IE’s”)

The Berkeley High team also competes in individual events, such as Extemp and Impromptu. **Extemporaneous Speaking (“Extemp”)**. Extemp is an individual event in which the student draws three topics on current events and then has thirty minutes to prepare and deliver a seven-minute speech answering one of the topics. This is sometimes offered as two events, one featuring national topics and one featuring international ones. In **Impromptu**, a speaker draws three topics (often single words or quotations), and has two minutes to prepare a 3-5 minute speech. In **Original Oratory**, the student prepares an original, factual speech on a subject of their choosing, and then presents that speech in every round.

The primary focus of practices will be parliamentary debate. We will spend a few practices introducing speech events. It will be possible for individual students to work on speech events at practices throughout the year (ideally, with prior notice) and asynchronously (by recording a speech and sending the link to head coach Joel Jacobs). Throughout the year, students will have the opportunity to enter tournaments offering speech events. Recordings of the [2019 National Championship final rounds](#) in several events are available on our team website.

Forms Checklist

Students must upload all forms before competing in tournaments.

1. Please fill out [this online registration form](#).
2. Please complete the following forms, which are required for participation. **All filenames should begin with the student's last name, e.g. Smith_InsuranceCardSide1**
 - a. Student Conduct Agreement
 - b. Family Agreement
 - c. Permission and Release Form
 - d. Medical Form
 - e. Copy of Medical Insurance Card
3. Your Fair Share contribution of \$100-\$300 for new debaters and \$500-\$1000 for returning debaters. Click here to make your contribution (link coming soon). *This is not a requirement for participation, but is strongly encouraged*, so please be in touch with the coach or one of the parent leaders if you are unable to make your family's contribution.

All of the forms for item #2 (except the copy of the health insurance card) are available [here](#) as a single fillable pdf. You can upload the completed pdf and the photos of the insurance card [here](#).

<https://tinyurl.com/famhan25>