

Recent national debate topics have included public health assistance to sub-Saharan Africa, U.S. immigration policy, juvenile justice, gun control, global warming, and protection of ocean ecosystems.

BUILDING STRONGER AND SAFER COMMUNITIES

First Lady Laura Bush describes how competitive debate can become an alternative to violence: “Unfortunately, some teens turn to anger or violence as a means of expression. Debate is a healthier option, safer for children and for their communities. Students in the CAD [Computer Assisted Debate, part of the Atlanta Urban Debate League] program learn what it’s like to be on a team, a lesson much better learned in the classroom than in a gang. They learn to see both sides of an issue, which helps them diffuse potentially dangerous situations. Debaters learn how to identify a good argument and reject a bad one, so they’re better equipped to deal with the hazards of negative peer pressure” (NAUDL).

Michael Scott, president of the Chicago Board of Education, writes that “debate is a wonderful way to learn. It encourages critical thinking, analyzing issues at their core, and then articulating your view in a sound, reasonable, rational fashion. If more people could argue their points, there would be less shooting on our city streets” (NAUDL).

FRIENDSHIPS

Beginning debaters develop close friendships with the debaters on their own team. Experienced debaters also develop close friendships with their competitors. After a few years of competitive debate experience, a debater will have established a network of friends who are destined for success in their chosen career paths.

From my own high school experiences, I have a network of friends including numerous attorneys, two members of Congress, a judge recently appointed by the International Criminal Court to investigate genocide charges in Darfur, three college professors, two high school teachers, and several business executives. I also have numerous friends who met their life partners through debate competition.

TRAVEL

Participation in debate tournaments usually involves travel to neighboring cities and often to other states. This travel is an education in itself as it offers shared experiences