



POLICY PLATFORM

As the old adage states, “We listen to a book a day, speak a book a week, read the equivalent of a book a month, and write the equivalent of a book a year.” Our society, which has chiefly relied on oral communication for generations, has seen worrying trends in education. Although meta-analyses have demonstrated that students rely on speaking and listening 79% in their communications, modulist curriculum have increasingly relegated public speaking, both personal and performative, as a secondary, or tertiary skill.¹ From a career perspective, public speaking has consistently topped the list as a crucial skill, irrespective of the job description. When Harvard Medical School surveyed more than 2,000 patients, they found that poor communication skills would be the number one deterrent for returning to a physician.² Even outside of the STEM world, Fortune 500 executives concluded that diminished ability to delegate authority, listen, give direction, and problem solve were rooted in deficient oral communication skills.³

¹ M. H. Buckley, “Focus on research: we listen a book a day; speak a book a week: learning from walter loban,” *Language Arts*, vol. 69, pp. 622–626, 1992

² N. L. Keating, D. C. Green, A. C. Kao, J. A. Gazmararian, V. Y. Wu, and P. D. Cleary, “How are patients’ specific ambulatory care experiences related to trust, satisfaction, and considering changing physicians?” *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 29–39, 2002.

³ “Graduates are not prepared to work in business,” *Association Trends*, 4, June 1997, <http://www.ubuntu.com>.

With technology increasingly deemphasizing the importance of verbal communication, the education system has a responsibility to underscore this imperative skill for career, life, and the creative.

Despite a clear demand for communication opportunity within the classroom, no state currently mandates a public speaking class and state standards for verbal communication within the English curriculum are narrow and impractical. States have deemed public speaking education as a higher education skill, with the majority of public colleges offering classes, but they’re often not mandatory, not interactive, and not personal. In a study of higher education in Alabama, a state that mandates no public speaking education in its English curriculum or makes available resources for extracurricular speech and debate programs, only 33% of public colleges require Public Speaking and 3% require Fundamentals of Oral Communication.⁴ With clear statistical evidence that almost all jobs require strong oral communication, the idea that only 36% of college students are receiving the skills necessary to be prepared for career and beyond are disheartening and disappointing. Even outside of the classroom, speech and debate programs, the most effective programs at teaching public speaking skills, have

⁴ S. Morreale, L. Hugenberg, and D. Worley, “The basic communication course at U.S. colleges and universities in the 21st century: study VII,” *Communication Education*, vol. 55, no. 4, pp. 415–437, 2006.

seen consistent cuts at the local and state level as politicians have assured that these skills would be reinforced in the classroom. As students see little incentive to improve their communicative ability and educators do even less to foster these skills, education fails its duty to prepare for the future.

With such unfortunate data on the state of public speaking, there is a simple solution, reinforcement. Through the creation of a semester long, mandatory course for ninth graders, schools can close deficiency gaps and empower their students to be more active and adept communicators. As such a new and progressive field, public speaking education gives school systems the opportunity to personalize curriculum and increasingly utilize technology in the curriculum. Within the class, students will spend one quarter exploring the foundations of speaking. From interview etiquette to literary analysis, studies will highlight what comprises a great speaker, how these skills are translatable for students, and ultimately, how can these skills be applied in the classroom and workplace. For the second quarter, students will embark on a capstone that explores three areas of public speaking: debate, focusing on the use of evidence and argumentation, public address, highlighting the importance of personality and advocacy in speech, and interpretation, which in conjunction with English classes focuses on literary analysis and characterization. While partnering with organizations like the National Speech & Debate Association and state speech and debate leagues, parents, educators, and students can be assured that they will be receiving a highly interactive, rewarding, and cutting edge study in public speaking.

With questions of practical costs for school districts, it remains important to consider the unmatched benefits speech and debate provides to students. From a practical perspective, the unique presence of technology in this semester

long class can help limit the exhaustion of resources this class would take. For schools that cannot afford the employment of staff, the creation of a flipped classroom, staggered enrollment of classes, and the certification of public speaking as an arts graduation requirement could help schools circumvent many of the roll-out issues of a new course. On behalf of students, The Broward County Debate Initiative, an extracurricular public-private partnership for high school students, found that participation in speech and debate increases literacy scores by 25% and GPAs by 10%. While debate has long been envisioned as an exclusive, cost-prohibitive activity, its prioritization of research, logic, and audience engagement skills build better students and citizens. 98% of Broward County's debate students graduate high school, 95% attend a four-year college, and participating at-risk students see a 70% probability increase in graduating high school.⁵ For English as a second language, at-risk, and inner city students, public speaking education provides a crucial chance to close access gaps and re-prioritize equality in education.

Ultimately, the concerns established in oral communication education deficiency places practical priority back on students. With a focus on the future in schools, the reward that public speaking has on personal and career development remains unmatched. As educators, politicians, and parents consider what will make their student a better citizen, person, and worker, the answer lies in the obvious: communication. When students struggle to speak in front of a classroom of twenty of their peers, they cannot be effective communicators for corporations or their country. This trend of academic silence must be reversed, let's teachspeech!

⁵ <http://browardschools.com/SiteMedia/Docs/web/Debate/debate-brochure-2017.pdf>