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BEATTY MIDDLE SCHOOL DEBATE TEAM WINS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

First post-pandemic, in-person championship debate brings over 400 debaters from across the country to compete for the top prize

Buena Park, CA — Mrs. Terhune’s debate classroom is teeming with activity as a student performs a rhetorical juggling act in front of the class.

The topic: Social media companies should be held liable for content. The task: Simultaneously present a concise, well-researched argument on the topic, refute “point of information” demands and “heckles” (three-word interjections) from the audience, and wrap up before the five-minute timer sounds.

As it turns out, few can juggle as well as the Gordon H. Beatty Middle School debate team, which took home the top prize at the first in-person national championship tournament since 2020. Over 400 debaters from as far as Virginia competed in the tournament, with three teams from Beatty advancing to the second day of competition and one of those teams—Eugene Kim and Olivia Woo—winning the entire tournament.

“I like the feeling of being part of a debate,” says Olivia. “Maybe I’m just an argumentative person, but it’s fun to engage in ‘clashing’ like that. It’s very rewarding. It’s a lot of work, but it’s very rewarding.” She thinks back to the online debate tournaments that she participated in during the pandemic, when students Zoomed into the events and were put into breakout rooms for the individual debates. “We had the same key components as a regular debate, but we couldn’t really have an actual ‘clash,’” she recalls. “With internet delays and muting and unmuting, we were never really in sync or able to challenge each other.”

Eugene has been Olivia’s partner all year, and she, too, loves the thrill of being part of a debate. “I like that sometimes I get to let my anger out by being argumentative,” she reflects. “At first I may not like a topic because of how it sounds, but as I start to argue it more and more, I really begin to enjoy it.” Her favorite topics this year have been whether or not Washington, D.C. should be the 51st state and whether or not the character of the artist should determine the merit of the art.



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Mrs. Terhune, the debate teacher at Beatty, is most impressed by the students' stamina with preparing multiple topics and speeches for each tournament every 6 – 8 weeks and then starting all over again with new topics for the next tournament. She herself is also an English teacher, and she describes the debate program as "a lot of work, and also a real joy to see." Terhune credits the sixth-grade debate coaches, Kirsten Kim and Michael McDonald, with laying the foundation for her seventh and eighth grade debaters. She also admits that it's "a little fun to see the disappointment and surprise of the private schools when Beatty competes at the highest level. Our students prove time and time again that they deserve to be there, that the program is just as good and the students just as capable. It's not about resources or money; it's about hard work and dedication. What you put in is what you get out."

Olivia has a few final words for her teacher: "I see Mrs. Terhune as more than a teacher. I really look up to her as a mentor, and I'm glad I was able to make her proud at this tournament."

Dr. Joaquin Valdez, the principal at Beatty Middle School, reflects on the devotion of Mrs. Terhune and the entire debate team when he says, "These students represent the highest ideals of Beatty. They jump into every tournament with poise, courage, and hard work, but they never lose sight of what it means to be a good sport and compete with grace."

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Mrs. Terhune poses with Olivia and Eugene to celebrate their first-place win at the national debate championships.



Mrs. Terhune, Dr. Joaquin Valdez, and Dr. Yvette Cantu (Interim Superintendent of BPSD) join Olivia and Eugene to commemorate this achievement.



The Beatty Middle School Debate Team with Mrs. Terhune (center row on the right)