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BUENA PARK SCHOOL DISTRICT WRAPS UP TWO-WEEK SPEECH CAMP WITH MOCK TOURNAMENT

*Participants get a taste of speech competition and learn to find their voice
in the process*

Buena Park, CA — Yunju and her friends are clustered around the entrance to Beatty Middle School, waiting for the last day of Buena Park School District's two-week speech camp to begin. The program has brought together 50 students in grades 4 – 8 from the seven schools in the district to give them a taste of the speech program. Yunju participated in speech during the school year and couldn't wait to return for more this summer. "I like the fact that you can speak loudly and introduce yourself, and then you get to teach people something about your topic," she says.

Vanessa Young, District Director of Advantage Communications, heads up the team of coaches who run both the summer camp and the speech program during the school year. She describes the camp as a fun way to connect with other students, play games, and work on communication skills. "It's pretty incredible, actually," she continues. "Students start from scratch at the beginning of the camp, and they have a brand new speech by the end."

One pod of students comprises the "Writers' Workshop," where students choose a topic that they're passionate about and write their own persuasive speeches on the subject: Borynne talks about dementia villages; Kenji addresses the treatment of medical residents; German has chosen the topic of war crimes in the United States. Students in the storytelling or declamation pods receive pre-written scripts or speeches of 5 – 10 minutes each. These students love to act, and their focus is on the style of the delivery itself, which includes voices, character development, and pre-set hand motions and choreography. But whatever pod or style of speech, all students are learning what it means to speak out and be heard. And they're discovering that it's a lot of fun.

The last day of camp features a mock speech tournament. Instead of reporting to their customary rooms and coaches, the students experience what a real tournament feels like. They look for their names on a posted list, head to their



randomly-assigned rooms, and give their speeches in front of parents and other students who were not in their pod. As the mock tournament gets underway, the students are smiling and clapping for one another. They understand what it takes to stand up and give a speech, and they know the difference a little encouragement and support can make, even to students they have never met.

“Many of these students plan to join the speech program at their home school this fall,” explains Seri Hwang, Director of Educational Programs. “But for those who don’t, these two weeks have given them a solid foundation for learning to communicate, practice perseverance, and speak in front of a group with grace and confidence.”

Vanessa sums up the experience when she says, “I believe all students have a voice, but it takes practice to feel empowered and to lead.”

Watching these students, it’s clear that practice makes perfect.

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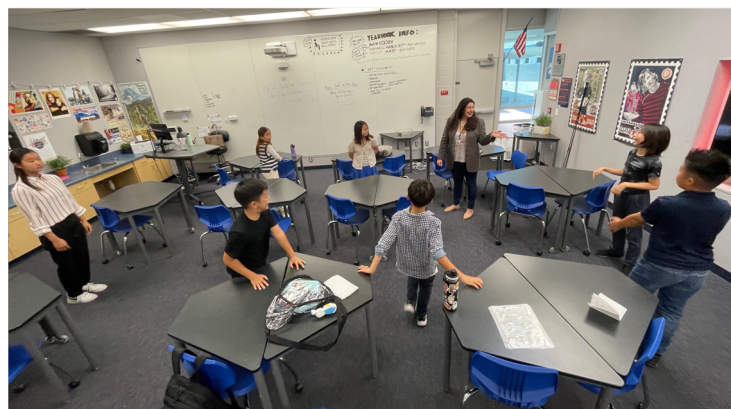
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Yunju practices her speech before the mock tournament.



Coach Rita with her students.



An exercise to get warmed up.