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Speak Out Dallas

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Project Title: Speak Out Dallas

Project co-authors:

Elizabeth Tsai, Freshman, President's Scholar, Finance and Economics w/ Financial Applications
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- TFA State Debate Finalist
- Glenbrooks National Tournament Semi-Finalist
- Vice President of Plano Senior Speech Team
- Chair and coordinator of the Asian American Citizens Council Youth Symposium
- People to People International Diplomacy Model U.N. group leader

Nicholas Elledge, Freshman, President's Scholar, Political Science and Public Policy w/ Spanish minor
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- American Legion Oratorical Contest National Champion 2006
- Author of The Art of Interpretation, a 180 page speech curriculum 2007
- NCFCA National Sweepstakes (overall) Speech Champion, 2005
- Toured for 18 weeks in fall 2007 with 11 other interns teaching thousands of 12-18 year olds at four-day speech and debate conferences
- SOAR Knoxville inner-city speech teacher 2006

Faculty and Community Partners

- Communicators Advantage Project, national (program/curriculum development, photography, guest instructors)
- Video editor - Nathan Brown (TN)
- Graphic Design - Jessie McLean (Masters College, CA)
- Patti LeSalle - SMU Executive Director of Public Affairs
- SMU CCPA Department and Professors including:

Mark McPhail (Dept. Chair)
Maria Dixon
Daniel Schill

Additional Prospective Partnerships:

- Rene Martinez, executive director of parent and student engagement for DISD
- Dallas Teach for America alumni (Wendy Kopp, founder/CEO, is a friend of SMU and a Dallas native)
- Dallas/SMU Toastmasters
- *Education is Freedom*, Dallas based non-profit, Marcus Martin - CEO
- Dallas Morning News and Dallas Business Journal (print media coverage)

- Invitations to local and national news anchors and political figures (if they decline, at least they will be aware of the program and hopefully provide PR support)
- Comerica Bank (recently moved HQ to Dallas, potential donor) and other enterprises seeking to cost effectively build their “local connection”
- Kiwanis, Key, Lions, and Rotary Clubs

Statement of the problem

➤ ***Lack of positive role models and mentors***

One recognized, recurring problem among Dallas high school students is a lack of positive role models and mentors from whom to learn and emulate. Rene Martinez, the executive director of parent and student engagement for DISD, said in late 2006, “We need a lot more mentors. We probably need 1,000, but we’re inching up every year.” Parent and teachers mold a teenager, but the desire inside a student to imitate and compete against positive peer role models ignites a passion in students to emulate that achievement and makes excellence an attainable reality.

➤ ***Lack of fundamental life skills***

Communication skills are essential in every facet of life -- from interpersonal communication, to college and job interviews, to commanding the public platform -- and allow students to maximize their existing talents and succeed in their pursuits. The opportunities available to students who learn communication skills early on increase exponentially as they grow older, whereas a lack of confidence, leadership ability, and communication skill is a significant barrier to entry into the university and workplace.

➤ ***Lack of beneficial activities***

According to DISD official statistics, about half of DISD students drop out of high school. Though multifaceted, the cause of dropouts can to some extent be attributed to a lack of challenging, engaging, and rewarding activities in high school. The draw of labor wage jobs or mere student disaffectedness entices many students to leave high school before graduation. Yet, the hope of a better, more prosperous future combined with rewarding and fun school activities may give some students the incentive needed to stay in school.

➤ ***Lack of empowered expression from youth and minorities***

Much of the apathy and angst apparent in teens today stems from a feeling of powerlessness. Youth aren't sure how they can express themselves on issues they care about, or if it's possible to make a difference in areas that are important to them. So, their frustration turns to apathy. What teenagers need are tools so they can express what is important to them. They need words.

How this project will address the problem (and methodology)

It is our belief that students can and must become effective communicators. We believe firmly in the power of communication and its necessity in the modern context. Furthermore, we believe that every student has the means to become a better communicator. Our mission is to equip student leaders, teachers, and parents with materials, teaching and programs to sharpen students’ leadership and communication skills.

DISD has roughly 40,000 high school students. Though our goal is to reach as many people as possible, it is more effective to interest student leaders in special opportunities such as a select conference and speech contest than it is to interest the student body in general. Those at the top, the student leaders, teachers, and parents, are our initial target audience as they are more likely to adopt our vision and actively participate. After significant research and program development, we will promote and invite student leaders from schools to participate in our "by invitation only" "especially for leaders" "limited space available" one to two day kick off conference.

The conference teaching will be interactive and focus on communication and leadership, including resume and interviewing skills. Students will receive special training and mentoring from our event staff so that when they return to their schools, they will possess the vision and tools to interest their peers in learning about communication and to, with support from us and school staff, start their own speech group or chapter. These student leaders will partner with adults at their schools to start a group that will train and equip other students in the area of communication. The continuum of development will culminate in a speech tournament in which students will compete for prizes and scholarships. With success and financial support, the program will perpetuate and the speech contest will happen annually. We will continue to provide and adapt materials and oversight so that teachers and student leaders can most effectively continue their school speech groups. We will also encourage students to speak in their communities and pursue other competitive venues.

We plan to provide these student leaders with (1) ongoing mentoring support after the event, (2) promotional material (like t-shirts, website, video clips, curriculum, etc.), (3) inspiration/vision, and (4) support from their school's leadership and administration, so they can return to their schools and develop lasting programs that will reach more students.

Projected Activity Timeline

Stages two and three (preparation and implementation) are subject to change based on the findings of our research.

Stage One: Research (continuous, begins late February)

1. Demographics

We will first gather demographic and statistical information including, but not limited to, graduation and retention rates, college attendance, TAKS (standardized testing), ethnic and age groups, number and locations of schools, and existing school programs and support structures. We will explore the possibility of a Middle School/Jr. High branch of the program.

2. Pilot Program Models

Models that we will be studying:

- Urban Debate League - founded by Melissa Wade at Emory University.

- Bronx High School of Science - an urban speech team successful in national debate circuits.
- Davidson County School District in Alabama - helped minorities have their voices heard.
- David Aime at the University of Alabama and Karen Robinson at Clark-Atlanta University - “what not to do” models.

3. Logistics and school compatibility

We will contact school administrators to further explore school needs and the means available for the program including facilities, transportation, student leadership programs, curricular requirements and how our program fits into the school year, and the best time for the program to take place.

Stage Two: Preparation (coordinated with research process, begins early March)

We will first create an infrastructure including a website, promotional video, and other media. From this, we will solicit support and advertising from community partners and continue to work with the school system.

Simultaneously, we will work with other communications and leadership specialists to develop educational material and teaching processes for student and teacher. Additionally, we will be nailing down the structure for the conference and speech tournament as well as the dates and facilities to be used.

Stage Three: Implementation (timeline to be determined by schools, most likely in late summer-fall)

This stage will involve visiting schools, maximizing student and public excitement about the program, bringing in guest instructors, holding clinics/conferences, and running the speech tournament.

Stage Four: Evaluation (both formative and summative)

During and after the implementation stage, we will be measuring the pulse of the program through evaluation and feedback provided by participation levels, student polls/questionnaires, the feedback of administrators and teachers, and our observation of student behaviors and progress. We want the program to self-perpetuate after we are gone as well as be the best it can while we oversee it, and, to that end, evaluations and feedback are vital.

Anticipated Benefit: *Big iDeas impact lots of people in significant ways*

This is *definitely* the most exciting section as we anticipate extraordinary benefit for hundreds if not thousands of school kids in Dallas. Elizabeth and I have both benefited immensely from the leadership and communication training of others and have seen its affects on many other students. Communication affects almost every aspect of ones life for the rest of ones life. We know that communication builds confidence, leadership, motivation, critical thinking, and hope for the future. We know that it creates

positive peer role models and that it is a worthwhile and fun school activity. We know that words empower.

Quantitatively, we anticipate improvement in students' career options and rate of college attendance. Testimonials and questionnaires will demonstrate the improvement and change in various students, as well as the reviews of tournament judges and school administrators. We can measure how many students participate in the program, how many speeches they give (at tournaments or in their community), what their typical trajectory in life would have been, and what their eventual job and education level end up being.

Yet, quantifiable or not, knowing that we have changed lives is our greatest satisfaction and our greatest motivation. We know not whether we might inspire the next Martin Luther King Jr. We only can know, or perhaps merely hope that our work will be as great a blessing to the urban students of Dallas as it was to Elizabeth and I –perhaps even more so in every aspect of life, for the rest of their lives.

Estimated Budget

- Ad/shirt/website design – \$0
- Advertising and shirt production– \$350
- Supplies (e.g. syllabi, printing, packets, binders) – \$ 550
- Facility –Seeking a host, if not, approx. \$500
- Volunteer Guest Instructors Travel/lodging expenses – \$600
- Tournament (judges, food, materials, transportation) – \$ 1200
- Scholarships – Dependent on raised support, currently stated at: \$1,000, \$500, \$300*

*We plan to use the \$5,000 as seed money. As the project moves forward, we hope to raise additional support for a broader budget, especially increased scholarships and prize donations. We will also explore the viability of SMU providing a scholarship to SMU for the winner.

Our passion and commitment...

Elizabeth and I bring not only significant leadership experience in the administration and finance of communications events, we are passionate about this project. We realize it is a large endeavor, but our hearts and minds are in for the long haul and we are excited about the opportunities that lay before us. We will do our absolute best to make this project a success and are confident that it will be a beneficial venture for Dallas students and for SMU.

Thank you for your consideration and for supporting our Big iDea.