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This was a historic and exceptional inaugural year for the University Middle Speech and Debate Team. Our team is a member of two organizations: the Metro Memphis Urban Debate League, and the National Speech and Debate Association, which also functions as our honor society.

This year, our team competed against over seventy other schools representing 18 states and four countries. Our students have researched and prepared to debate four major debate topics this year: U.S. arms sales to foreign states, U.S. sanctions against Venezuela, U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf, and Universal Basic Income. Though we were one of the only squads in the nation consisting entirely of sixth graders this year, our students have accumulated a bevy of awards of which we are very proud.

At our annual Model United Nations youth conference in December, Elijah Schaffzin was recognized as Outstanding Delegate.

At our second tournament of the year, hosted by Collierville High School in January, our squad won a third place sweepstakes award for total team points. Individual students also represented our school with great ability and poise. The public forum debate team of Arya Debes and Aura Kumar won fifth place in the tournament. Both of our duet improvisational acting teams qualified for award recognition: Elijah Schaffzin and Kennedy Woods in 5th place, and Zoha Askari and Daphne Arendt in 4th place. Elijah Schaffzin also won 4th place in Impromptu Speaking and Zoha Askari won 2nd.

At Metro Memphis Urban Debate League's February tournament, the policy debate team of Rayelle Burnett and Elijah Schaffzin bested dozens of other SCS and area schools for an 8th place win.

While school building closures due to Covid-19 temporarily paused our debate team meetings, we rallied to compete in our first ever online tournament, hosted by Early Scholars Speech & Debate (New York) in April. At this tournament, the public forum debate team of Arya Debes and Aura Kumar won third place. Three students were also recognized with individual speaking awards: Arya Debes in 8th place, Zoha Askari in 5th place, and Aura Kumar in 3rd place.

At our next online tournament, hosted by DC Urban Debate (DC), two of our public forum debate teams closed out the final spots. The team of Sophia Henderson and Elijah Schaffzin won 2nd place in the tournament and the team of Zoha Askari and Brayden Spann were tournament champions.

We anticipate participating in an additional 3-5 tournaments before the school year ends, including the Urban Debate League Middle School National Championship. Our qualifying students for this tournament are Rayelle Burnett, Arya Debes, Aura Kumar, and Elijah Schaffzin.

In our national honor society, the National Speech and Debate Association, several of our students have accumulated points towards outstanding recognition. Students are inducted into this society after accumulating 25 NSDA points through participating in public speaking events and tournaments. The students who have achieved this great honor this year are Brayden Spann, Kennedy Woods, Rayelle Burnett, Zoha Askari, and Elijah Schaffzin. These students will be inducted into the society in a public ceremony when school buildings re-open, each with Degrees of Merit.



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Coaches accumulate points along with their students for each tournament and public speaking event. Mrs. Warden earned 2,220 points as of this year, qualifying her for a Degree of Premier Distinction and her Quintuple-Ruby Coaches' Pin. The new degree and pin will be conferred alongside the student degrees in our 2019-2020 NSDA Induction Ceremony when school buildings reopen.