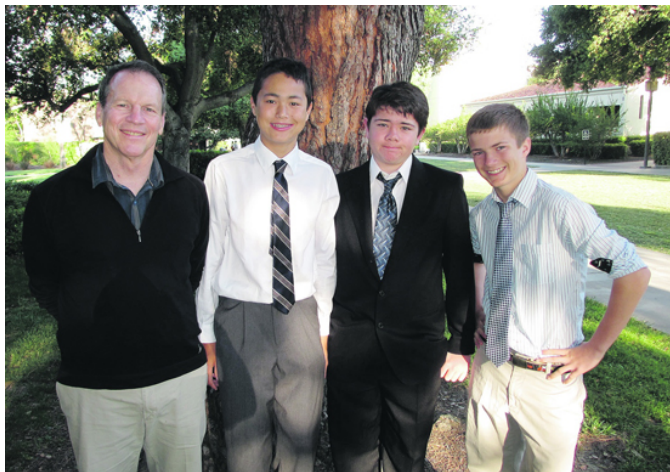


Published April 25th, 2012

JM and OIS Debate Teams Compete in Claremont Championship Tournament

Submitted by Mark Moore



The Joaquin Moraga Intermediate Debate Team from left: Coordinator/Teacher Don Read, students Peter Moore, Conor Harvey, and Shea Danforth Photos Mark Moore

The Joaquin Moraga Intermediate and Orinda Intermediate School debate teams represented their schools Saturday, April 21 at the 10th Annual Championship Tournament of the Middle School Public Debate Program sponsored by Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, Calif. The program began 10 years ago and has gotten more popular each year, having expanded as far as Louisiana, New York, New Jersey and Washington D.C. with 90 teams and 270 students participating in this year's tournament.

As Professor John Meany, CMC Director of Forensics, said, "Debate is having an opinion which is informed and defensible. All I have to do is bring educators to see one debate, saying nothing, and they want to join. Everyone is a winner in debate because it is about acquiring a skill, no matter how a team scores. This skill is useful in terms of public speaking and classroom participation. It is the hardest of the forensic sciences because no matter how elegant and thorough your argument, your opponent will always tell you you are wrong!" The co-creator of these debates, Professor Kate Shuster, said parents everywhere curse her under their breath for teaching teenagers to argue better, but she believes strongly in "creating a better democracy one 11- to 14-year-old at a time."

The Lamorinda teams punched their ticket to the Championship Tournament by performing well at the local level in the league championship held March 24 in Fremont. The East Bay Debate League was started five years ago by a group of local teachers including Don Read and Patti Forster from JM and Terry Eubanks from OIS. "The first couple years were a steep learning curve for participants in the new league," said Mr. Read, "but it is now a more mature league" and continues to expand. After splitting two times into Sacramento and South Bay leagues, the East Bay league now features eight teams, including an Oregon team that participates in the league's season of five debates. At some schools debate is an after-school club, but at JM and OIS it is offered as an elective class for seventh- and eighth-grade students.

At the Championship on April 21, each team of three students competed in five debates during the day. Topics included "Tax Increases are good for America;" "The U.S. should establish a national DNA database of all residents;" "States should require drug tests to receive welfare benefits;" and "Students should be allowed to carry registered guns on a college campus." Most of the debates were very close and the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate team was fortunate to go 3-2 on the day; the Orinda Intermediate team had an identical record. Individual speaker honors went to Aaron Baum and Daniel Ginsburg (30th and 24th places) from OIS. The OIS team also finished as the 22nd best team of the tournament. The day concluded with a final, public debate between the top two teams, a raucous affair with the spirited participation of the audience.

The debate season ends Saturday, May 12 on the JM campus with the NorCal Championship, which has a similar format. Make plans to attend and prepare to see what middle school students are capable of!



The Orinda Intermediate Debate Team from left: Coordinator/Teacher Terry Eubanks, students Daniel Ginsburg, Jonathan Zhou and Aaron Baum

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