WCUSD Students Earn National Championship and Multiple Top 10 Finishes at National Speech and Debate Tournament

Edgewood Middle School earns prestigious School of Excellence Award for third consecutive year



WEST COVINA, CA, UNITED STATES, June 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- West Covina Unified School District is proud to celebrate the outstanding achievements of 28 students who represented the district at the prestigious National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) National Tournament held in Des Moines, Iowa.

Twenty middle school students and eight high school students competed against thousands of the nation's most accomplished student speakers and performers, demonstrating exceptional talent, resilience, and poise under pressure while earning some of the tournament's highest honors, including a national championship and multiple Top 10 finishes.

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>
> *Dr. Emy Flores*

Leading the way was Edgewood Middle School, which earned the prestigious NSDA School of Excellence Award for the third consecutive year. Edgewood was once again recognized as one of only five middle schools in the nation to receive this distinction, solidifying its reputation as a premier speech and debate program.

This remarkable three-peat reflects years of sustained excellence, dedication, and competitive success and serves as a testament to the culture of hard work, perseverance, and achievement fostered by students, coaches, and staff.

Four Edgewood Middle School students earned top-three finishes in the nation:

Cetlalli Valenzuela-Gonzalez (7th grade) – National Champion, Poetry Interpretation
Darcy Lam (8th grade) – 2nd Place, Poetry Interpretation
Lorenzo Williamson (7th grade) – 2nd Place, Original Oratory
Jacky Huynh III (8th grade) – 3rd Place, Humorous Interpretation

Additional national recognitions included:
Jillian Liang (6th grade), Hollencrest Middle School – 5th Place, Declamation
Arielle Hsiao (10th grade), Edgewood High School – 8th Place, Prose Interpretation

Beyond the awards and accolades, district leaders emphasize that the true value of speech and debate lies in the lifelong skills students develop throughout their journey.

“This program is about so much more than trophies and national recognition,” said Dr. Emy Flores, Superintendent of West Covina Unified School District. “Through competition, our students are becoming confident young women and young men who can walk into any room with presence, engage thoughtfully with any audience, and articulate their ideas with confidence and eloquence. These are skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives. We could not be more proud of the way they represented our district and community on the national stage.” Flores also expressed gratitude to the Board of Trustees for its unwavering support of the program.

“Thank you to our Board of Trustees for your continued trust and investment in this program. Your support allows our students to pursue excellence at the highest levels, and I am confident our speech and debate program will continue to evolve, grow, and produce remarkable outcomes for years to come,” Flores said.

Board President Joe Magallanes praised the students for their extraordinary accomplishments and the life skills they have developed through their participation.“These achievements reflect the incredible dedication of our students, coaches, and families, as well as the district’s commitment to providing opportunities that prepare students for success beyond the classroom,” said Magallanes. “Our students are not only excelling in competition, but they are also developing the confidence, communication skills, and leadership abilities that will empower them throughout their lives. We are immensely proud of their accomplishments and excited to see what they will achieve in the future.”

West Covina Unified School District continues to build a nationally recognized culture of excellence through its speech and debate programs, empowering students to become effective communicators, critical thinkers, and future leaders prepared to make meaningful contributions in college, careers, and their communities.

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