

BOZEMAN DAILY
CHRONICLE

Hawkers excited for state speech and debate meet

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The Hawkets are ready to roll this weekend when Bozeman High School hosts the state championship speech and debate tournament.

“We’ve been working for it all season,” said junior Esmie Hurd.

“We’re excited for this weekend,” said Daniel Waterman, a senior and fellow policy debater.

Some 376 students will compete from all 15 of the largest, AA high schools in Montana on Friday and Saturday, including 36 from Bozeman High. More than 410 volunteers will have the tough task of judging more than 650 hours of competition.

Hawk debaters and speech team members stayed for hours after school Wednesday night, practicing and getting tips from coaches. On competition weeks, team members can put in 40 hours, between preparation, practice and competition, Hurd said.

Speech team members rehearsed in a hallway, while two teams of policy debaters practiced against each other in the classroom where Adam Thane, Hawkets head coach, teaches English.

The sense of tradition is strong there. The Hawkets’ heraldic logo adorns the classroom door and the walls are plastered with long lists naming Hawk champions at state and national tournaments going back decades.

Thane, who debated for Bozeman High back when he was a student, took notes in red and black ink as the debaters argued over U.S. policy on selling arms to the world. The students spoke rapidly as they cited evidence from the White House to the Washington Post, Cato Institute to the Congo, Putin to Trump. They challenged the other team on facts and politely poked holes in logic and conclusions.

Timers beep-beeped and one debater sat down and exclaimed, “Blech,” sounding dissatisfied. “That was really good,” Thane said. “The way you dealt with advantage one was quite good.”

The young debaters can quote an astonishing amount of information about economics, human rights, world history and current events from Russia to Egypt. They've either memorized the information or got it at their fingertips on computer tablets. No Googling is allowed, but they can use electronic tablets to hold the documents they've collected over many months, instead of lugging around the giant, heavy tubs full of magazine articles and paper printouts that they used to rely on.

It has saved a lot of trees, Thane said. He offered the teams some last tips about the magic of numbers, and sounded encouraging.

“Good job, kids. I'd say we're ready,” he said. “You're gonna knock it dead.”

“I'm a little nervous,” junior Amelia Hartshorn said of her first state tournament. “But overall I'm really excited. I think it's going to be a good competition to test us.”

Nic Kuntz, a senior, said he likes policy debate because it's “a real, real, real deep dive into a topic” and it's cool to come up with a solution to a world problem.

Debate seems “super nerdy,” Waterman said, but he's stuck with it four years because he's made such good friends. “I love the people on this team.”

In another classroom Lila Michael, the English teacher who coaches speech events, listened and laughed while junior Willow Craighead rehearsed her humorous interpretation piece. Craighead jumped quickly from one silly character to another, acting out each one and shooting off rapid-fire jokes.

“It's a lot of fun,” Craighead said. “I just like making people laugh.”

Rehearsing nearby were teammates Emily Daniels, interpretation team captain, and Hugh Burroughs and Tristan Pritham.

“We practice, practice, practice,” Pritham said. “I've definitely honed some acting skills.”

“I'm so grateful we have so many people on our team who are so wonderful,” Burroughs said.

This is a big year for the Hawkers, the last time they'll be part of the largest high school in Montana. This fall Gallatin High School will open and the student body will split in two.

Thane said he plans to stay at Bozeman High — he lives two blocks away — but he's been working all year to prepare students and coaching staffs so both high schools will have strong teams. Though splitting the team could cut its strength, having two high schools will offer twice as many students the chance to compete at the varsity level.

The Hawkers won all their meets this year except the last one in Butte, which rival Glacier High won by a close three points. Thane said the Hawkers haven't had a tournament this year where all teams hit their best at the same time.

If that happens at state, he said, "we'll be tough to beat."