



RICHMOND FORUM  
**SPEECH &  
DEBATE**  
INITIATIVE



# Student Programs Report

2023 - 2024

# Richmond Forum Speech & Debate Initiative

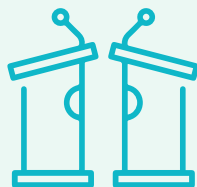
## 2023-2024 BY THE NUMBERS



31 Teams



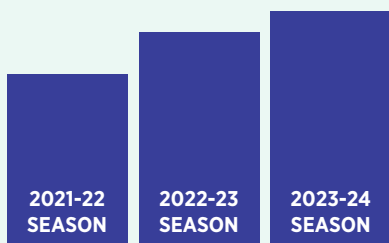
49 Coaches



1,451 Tournament Entries



926 Students



84 State Qualifiers



20 National Qualifiers



7 Tournaments



and 364 Pizzas!

## 2024 NATIONAL TOURNAMENT QUALIFIERS

### Clover Hill High School

COACHED BY HUNTER CLARK & NIC BARKER

Jax Bullbrook, *Lincoln-Douglas Debate*

Julia Herald, *Dramatic Interpretation*

Matthew Wang, *Original Oratory*

### Collegiate School

COACHED BY SHANNON CASTELO & LAUREL MAUGHAN

Maytal Zasler, *Original Oratory*

Hollyn Borich, *Programmed Oral Interpretation*

Alex Reavy-Cantwell, *Public Forum Debate*

Justinas Petkauskas, *Public Forum Debate*

### Cosby High School

COACHED BY JACKIE CLARK AND BILLY WADDELL

Reagan Goldsmith, *Dramatic Interpretation*

Kezra Adonis, *Duo Interpretation*

Majestic Henderson, *Duo Interpretation*

Ellora Houchins, *Programmed Oral Interpretation*

### James River High School

COACHED BY JESSICA SANCHEZ, FRANK CROWLEY,  
& NICK WHELEN

Mary Pepper, *Duo Interpretation*

Adelina Babbit, *Duo Interpretation*

Lilli Brown, *Humorous Interpretation*

Evelyn Gayle, *Informative Speaking*

Rowan Milton-Benoit, *International Extemporaneous Speaking*

Abigail Ruzs, *Senate*

### L.C. Bird High School

COACHED BY MELISSA LIGH

Kylie Springfield, *Original Oratory*

### Petersburg High School

COACHED BY TERRI SMITH

Taylor Thomas, *Dramatic Interpretation*

Miangel Brown, *Humorous Interpretation*

## THE FACES OF SPEECH & DEBATE



**Taylor Thomas**

**STUDENT, PETERSBURG HIGH SCHOOL**

Sophomore Taylor Thomas is only in her second year on the Petersburg Forensics Team, but has been making waves in Richmond speech and debate! She has consistently ranked in the top three during this season's RFSDI tournament circuit and qualified for the 2024 national tournament in Dramatic Interpretation.

"I love that in speech I can show different sides of me other than what people see on an average day. I get to show different emotions and personalities and truly express myself. Speech has made a big impact on me not only in school, but at work, and in my daily life. I used to be shy and quiet, but now I walk around with my head held high, talking and not afraid to speak up. I feel like I have truly found my voice and I am not afraid to use it."



**Jessica Sanchez**

**SPEECH COACH, JAMES RIVER HIGH SCHOOL**

Jessica Sanchez has been teaching for more than two decades and is now in her 12<sup>th</sup> year of coaching speech. Her involvement in and passion for speech goes back even further, having participated as a student in both high school and college. At James River, Jessica has led the speech team to winning three state championship titles, with 17 champions at the state level and 23 national qualifiers.

As the most recent chair of the National Speech & Debate Association Virginia District Committee and the president of the Virginia Association of Forensics, Theatre, and Debate Coaches, Jessica is shaping youth development and academic engagement at both the regional and national level. If that's not enough, Jessica also mentors new coaches. We are lucky to have such dedicated coaches in Richmond!

## COMING SOON

### 2026 National Speech & Debate Tournament

We are thrilled for Richmond to have been selected to host the 2026 National Speech & Debate Tournament. Seven thousand top student competitors and 3,000 coaches and judges from nearly all 50 states will spend a week in our region. The tournament will coincide with the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our country's founding and we plan to weave that historic milestone into the week's events.

Planning efforts are well underway and we need all hands on deck! If you are interested in getting involved, visit [richmondforum.org/2026](http://richmondforum.org/2026) or email [sandra@richmondforum.org](mailto:sandra@richmondforum.org).

**June 14 - 19, 2026**



### Revolutionary Rhetoric Debate Invitational

The American Revolution was inspired by discussions and debates that took place in Colonial Williamsburg 250 years ago. The memories of those formative times remain alive today to inspire new generations and encourage new debates about how best to strive for a more perfect union. This October, Colonial Williamsburg will host promising high school students to debate as our founders did, fulfilling our promise that the future will learn from the past. Learn more at [richmondforum.org/RR](http://richmondforum.org/RR).

**October 11 - 12, 2024**



# Richmond Forum Scholars

Each year, five of the Richmond region's most highly motivated high school juniors are selected to work behind the scenes at America's largest nonprofit speakers' series. The **Richmond Forum Scholars** program, which is now entering its 12<sup>th</sup> year, is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for some of the best students in our region.

Scholars interact directly with the Forum's visiting speakers, facilitate the Forum's Student Room at the Altria Theater, staff VIP speaker receptions, and complete a variety of assignments to support each program.

## APPLY TO THE PROGRAM

The application window opens when next year's season is announced at the end of our final program in April.

Interested rising high school juniors from across the region are encouraged to apply. This year's Scholars represented Glen Allen HS, Collegiate School, Open HS, Manchester HS, and Cosby HS.

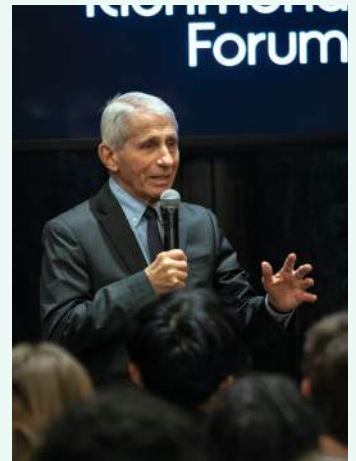
[richmondforum.org/scholars](http://richmondforum.org/scholars)



2023-2024 Richmond Forum Scholars with Liz Cheney

## Student Room

This season, over 500 area students participated in Richmond Forum programs in our **Student Room**. Students were able to view our sold-out programs and had the inspiring opportunity to interact directly with our speakers.



*Presenting powerful voices so Richmond can learn.  
Empowering local voices so Richmond can lead.*

LEARN MORE AT [RICHMONDFORUM.ORG](http://RICHMONDFORUM.ORG).

