

MENTAL HEALTH FOR MENTORS:

A Study of Burnout in Speech and Debate Coaches for the California High School Speech Association



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Acknowledgments and Gratitude

For most of my life, I've stubbornly insisted on doing things *my own way*. I often ignored good advice from well-meaning people. It was toxic and counterproductive. In many ways, I was the model of how *not* to succeed in Speech and Debate: a competitor who ignores constructive criticism. I am grateful for my time in lockdown. It gave me the breathing room I needed to reflect, acknowledge, and refocus. I fell back in love with an activity I thought I had to completely leave behind for my well-being. I decided to try and help prevent others from falling into my bad habits—both for their sake and for their students. I could not have done this without dozens of people. I am so grateful.

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Executive Summary

The context examined in this work is a nonprofit group of volunteers dedicated to offering extracurricular competitive opportunities in Speech and Debate to Californian middle and high school students. The California High School Speech Association (CHSSA) serves over 300 member schools every year across 11 geographically distinct leagues. While CHSSA is governed by an executive board, its member leagues are mostly autonomous. They must only follow CHSSA guidelines at their state qualification competitions in preparation for CHSSA's capstone Speech and Debate competition (the state championship). Throughout most of the year, students from public, private, and parochial schools compete at tournaments hosted by separate institutions. Many, preparing for upcoming competitive seasons, also train during summer and winter break. Consequently, the organization is facing a major problem: CHSSA coaches are reporting heightened levels of stress and turnover. As the Speech and Debate community attempts to address issues of systematic inequity in resources, accountability for bad actors, and growth, many volunteers who keep the organization afloat are burning out.

While there have been studies examining burnout in collegiate Speech and Debate directors of forensics and inequities in high school Speech and Debate competitions, there has not been a comprehensive analysis of burnout in Speech and Debate coaches. This challenge and the status of the organization led me to two broad categories of literature. First, I investigated the benefits of Speech and Debate competitions, their educational disparities, and ethnographic studies about experiential learning. Next, I reviewed literature related to empathy, equity, and standards of care. Noddings's (1992) argument that actors have an ethical obligation to morally educate others by modeling empathy, developing dialogue, practicing, and encouraging others strongly influenced my research. I simplified and adapted Altfeld, Mallet, and Kellman's (2015) framework for measuring burnout in sports coaches. My conceptual framework considers four primary drivers of burnout: equity issues, emotional exhaustion, physical exhaustion, and financial stress.

Putting together the context, problem, literature, and framework, I arrived at three research questions. First, how does Speech and Debate involvement impact feelings of burnout in coaches? Second, how do demographic factors influence feelings of burnout in Speech and Debate coaches? Finally, given the findings of questions one and two, what organizational rules and procedures could mitigate burnout in CHSSA's Speech and Debate coaches?

To investigate these questions, I used a sequential, exploratory mixed-methods approach. In Phase One, I conducted 28 individual qualitative interviews with a group of Speech and Debate coaches. These coaches were selected to optimize a diverse range of perspectives in terms of competitive backgrounds and demographic characteristics. In addition to being asked about their experiences in the activity, they gave feedback about

the usefulness of various burnout- and equity-related measurement tools to develop my questions for the next phase of data collection. In Phase Two, I created a survey to collect both quantitative and qualitative data; it included a variety of response types, including open-ended questions. That survey, which creation was influenced by my Phase One interviews, was distributed to coaches across the nation. Survey data analysis was followed by recommendation-focused convenience interviews of Speech and Debate coaches who responded to the Phase Two survey. All interviews took place via online meeting platforms due to physical distancing requirements related to COVID-19.

Finding 1: Speech and Debate coaches have mixed feelings about their involvement.

Nearly every interviewed coach described the activity as exhausting, frustrating, challenging, and rewarding. Many mentioned a feeling of obligation, a need to give back to their students, and a sense of shame around quitting, despite the personal toll the activity takes.

Finding 2: Speech and Debate coaches take on a multitude of obligations.

Coaches described a wide range of obligations, which includes skills coaching, socio-emotional mentorship, internal logistics (such as scheduling practices), and external logistics (including signups for weekend competitions, hotel reservations, scheduling buses, monitoring students, judging, and helping run the tournaments). Coaches linked these often-competing obligations to a state of stress and distraction.

Finding 3: Speech and Debate coaches rarely take time off.

A plurality of coaches spends over 20 hours per week coaching Speech. Many don't include the full days they spend at weekend competitions in that number. Nearly every surveyed coach reported preparing their students for every form of competition, including local, state, invitational, and national contests. Over 33% of coaches also put in over 10 hours per week into coaching during their summers.

Finding 4: Speech and Debate coaches feel burnt out.

A plurality of coaches describes their Speech and Debate experiences as consistent with the symptoms of burnout, including emotional exhaustion and physical strain.

Finding 5: Speech and Debate coaches, when experiencing microaggressions (from other coaches, students, or parents), are unlikely to leave the activity because of those inequities.

Other coaches were more likely to contribute to microaggressions than parents or students. Surveyed coaches were apt to dig in their heels and stay in the activity, despite this discrimination.

Finding 6: Speech and Debate coaches are frustrated by inconsistencies in rules and norms.

Inconsistencies in judge education, community accountability, tournament rules, and transparency in the tabulation room are linked to the absence of a strong, central authority in the mold of high school sports supervisory bodies.

Based on these six primary findings, I made five recommendations for the California High School Speech Association to address these feelings of burnout in their volunteer coaching population and benefit the students they aim to serve.

Recommendation 1: Gain perspective and capital by connecting with alumni and retirees.

This recommendation stems from the lack of systematic outreach to CHSSA's thousands of alumni (former students) and retired coaches, many of whom can supply guidance and suggestions to the organization based on their experiences. Given Speech and Debate's correlation with later-life success, many former members could offer funding necessary for judge training, judge hiring, and monetary support for new and lower-income programs.

Recommendation 2: Create certification programs by partnering with the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA).

The NSDA, CHSSA's sister organization, has already developed resources for judge and coach education. Formalizing these resources and creating fleshed-out certifications for judges and coaches may help orient coaches with their full range of duties, the resources they already have to fulfill them, and consequences for problematic behavior.

Recommendation 3: Design guidance for "quality of life"-oriented roles at Speech and Debate competitions.

CHSSA can develop guidelines for ombudspople, equity officers, and venue specialists to optimize weekend tournaments for coaches and students. These include community standards for continued participation in CHSSA-sanctioned events with clearly outlined ethics- and good behavior-related clauses.

Recommendation 4: Create committees to reimagine tournaments' length, the span of the competition season, and the awards system.

First, the introduction of online tournaments offers new opportunities to experiment with at-home, pre-recorded, and hybrid Speech tournaments that are less demanding of coach time and energy. Second, roughly every state has its own independent body dedicated to high school forensics and/or performance-related activities. Some state organizations, such as the Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA), intentionally limit the number of tournaments students or teams can attend before losing eligibility at their state championship contest. This minimizes coaches' incentives to take their teams to year-round weekend competitions. CHSSA can consider implementing similar rules to prevent coaches from burning out. Finally, there are alternative frameworks for tournament results that may disincentivize awards-obsessed coaches from maintaining toxic mindsets.

Recommendation 5: Expand the scope of this report and receive feedback from the community at large before implementing the other recommendations.

Initially, this project included a third phase of follow-up interviews and focus groups. Considering practical constraints, this phase was abandoned. However, CHSSA should use the data discovered in phase two to interview their members about the feasibility of these recommendations.

Like all research, this project has limitations, including a relatively low number of respondents to the qualitative portion of the data. However, these recommendations are suggested with some degree of confidence. CHSSA has an opportunity to reimagine how Speech and Debate functions by confronting a long-standing problem in its community. In addressing this long-overlooked phenomenon and prioritizing mental health for mentors, CHSSA may see greater rates of engagement, satisfaction, and retention.

Introduction

Speech and Debate, sometimes called forensics, provides students with opportunities to communicate, think critically, collaborate, and engage in creative work. While high school and collegiate forensics have been offered to students for decades, elementary and middle school Speech and Debate opportunities have emerged more recently. Several national organizations offer competitive options to K-12 Speech students, including the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA), the Tournament of Champions (TOC), the National Catholic Forensics League (NCFL), and the National Christian Forensics and Communications Association (NCFCA). Other national groups provide tournaments to college students, including the American Forensics Association (AFA), the National Forensics Association (NFA), the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA), the American Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA), and the Phi Roh Pi National Forensics Organization (Phi Roh Pi). Many of these organizations allow students to compete in overlapping categories, though there are often small differences; for instance, the NCFL lets students compete in Dramatic Performance (which requires them to memorize and perform a 10-minute long comedic or dramatic interpretation of literature), while the NSDA has separate categories for Humorous and Dramatic Interpretation. None of the organizations has direct, institutional authority over its counterparts.

In addition to these national bodies, many state-level institutions offer Speech and Debate programming to students. In some instances, Speech and Debate is controlled by drama- or general extracurricular-focused organizations (for example, the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association also governs their Speech and Debate). In California's case, the California High School Speech Association (CHSSA) has governed its state championship tournament since the late 1950s.

CHSSA, like many of the national organizations, generally offers four broad categories of Speech and Debate: interpretation of literature events, in which students select texts, edit them to fit a time limit, memorize, block, and perform them; limited preparation events, in which students are evaluated on their organization, content, and delivery when spontaneously or extemporaneously addressing prompts; platform speaking events, wherein students must research, write, memorize, and perform traditional speeches; and debate events, which give students the chance to argue on the affirmation and negation of topics (some events are one-on-one and others are two-on-two; some are prepared and others are extemporaneous).

CHSSA members, in general, attend more competitions than CHSSA's state championship tournament. There are four major levels of tournaments: local or league tournaments, which are hosted by CHSSA-affiliated schools; the state qualifying and state championship tournaments, which CHSSA hosts; invitational tournaments, which

are presented by independent institutions (often colleges or high schools with their own Speech teams) to offer additional chances for students to compete; and national circuit tournaments, which draw students from across the country (and, recently, from foreign nations as well) who hope to earn the requisite results to qualify to highly prestigious national championships (such as the NSDA championship and the TOC championship).

Coaches report high levels of stress and strain at Speech and Debate competitions. The Speech and Debate season offers a tournament roughly every weekend; several camps also offer preparation and additional coaching for students during summer and winter break. Highly competitive and well-resourced teams often have the time and support to attend far more contests than their less fortunate peers.

Several scholars have expressed concerns regarding these disparities. There has been consistent research into Speech and Debate inequities and their impacts on students; for instance, Furgerson and Rudnick (2014) analyzed the lack of gender equity in collegiate forensics. While several studies have detailed comparative impacts on students, no report has reviewed the impacts that a year-round activity like Speech and Debate has on both the coaches who constantly participate and their peers who are unable to match that level of commitment. As Berry and Fowler (2019) concluded, coaching in collegiate sports substantially impacts variables that contribute to teams' winning percentages. Drawing on the wealth of literature related to sports coaching, I discovered useful metrics for measuring burnout in sports coaches. Sports seasons for high school athletes typically last a fraction of the school year, but national institutions like USA Today have publicized the impacts of competition on their coaches (Venci, 2018). This capstone seeks to provide exposure and solutions for the burnout experienced by the coaches of a verbal sport with no off-season: Speech and Debate.

By interrogating how coaches feel, the factors behind their feelings, and recommendations to ameliorate these concerns, CHSSA has an opportunity to fix structural barriers to Speech and Debate's growth, better their coaches' quality of life, and provide a more positive and inclusive experience for students of all kinds. CHSSA's mission is to "encourage, support, and sponsor both curricular and co-curricular oral communication to empower students to be productive participants in American society and the global community" (About CHSSA, 2021). CHSSA has 10 listed goals in its mission statement. The word "coach" does not appear a single time in any of them. As poet Taylor Mali argued, "Teachers make a difference" (2013). To sustainably improve the activity for Speech and Debate students, I suggest CHSSA should systematically delve into the current coach experience.

Organization Context

CHSSA was founded in 1958. It currently divides its 300+ member schools into 11 leagues, and four areas, based on their geographic location. Each league has the autonomy to develop its own bylaws and create year-round Speech and Debate competitions; every league offers at least one monthly tournament leading up to state qualification contests in February and/or March. These “state qualifiers” must adhere to CHSSA guidelines and feature competition categories that are also offered at the state championship tournament in April; for instance, some leagues offer a low-pressure, low-preparation contest called Spontaneous Argumentation (SPAR) during their year-round tournaments, but no such event exists at the CHSSA state tournament.

CHSSA, which hosts over 300 member schools, founded a middle school state championship tournament in 2019 (which drew a comparatively small number of teams—20—to its inaugural contest).

CHSSA is governed by an Executive Council. As the CHSSA website explains,

“One component of CHSSA leadership is the Executive Council. The Executive Council members gain their positions through election or appointment. Elections are held during the annual May meeting. Those running for office must be council members. Elected officers include the President, Vice-President of Activities, and the Vice-president of Curriculum. The President appoints the secretary, bulletin editor, treasurer, and historian as well as the chairs of standing committees. Each member of the Executive Council has duties identified in the Constitution and By-Laws of CHSSA. The Executive Council does not have the power to make unilateral decisions unless issues are remanded to them by the CHSSA council.”

The CHSSA council is comprised of league presidents, area chairs, and at-large members. The body, which follows parliamentary procedure, votes on matters of concern at annual September, January, and May meetings. There are no student voices represented on the council.

No CHSSA council member is financially compensated through CHSSA, which is a nonprofit organization. They are volunteers. CHSSA raises money to host its annual tournament through a combination of annual school membership fees (which have ranged from \$100-200), business/corporate partnerships (for instance, the Ascend Speech summer camp paid to sponsor their Student Congress event at the 2021 CHSSA state championship), and donations.

CHSSA students often participate in non-CHSSA-sanctioned events, including the NSDA’s national championship. They are competitively successful: California schools closed out

the top five overall rankings at the 2020 NSDA Middle School Speech Challenge and had five out of the top 10 teams at the 2019 NSDA High School National Championship. Additionally, CHSSA is poised to grow in the years to come; California has the most middle schools registered with the NSDA of any state in the nation (nearly three times as many teams as the runner-up state).

This growth, however, will only be healthy and sustainable if it accounts for the wellbeing of both its students and coaches. For the sake of the volunteers who keep the organization afloat—the classroom teachers who dedicate their time to afterschool practices and weekend contests, the parents who spend full days judging, and the community members who try to help—CHSSA may consider applying the same level of scrutiny to coach wellness as they already have towards student equity.

In 2019, the NSDA asked CHSSA's Vice-President of Activities to prepare a comprehensive study of sexism experienced by female competitors for the NSDA's annual summer professional development meeting. The CHSSA Vice-President presented findings of endemic discrimination. For instance, only one out of the top 28 debaters in Public Forum Debate at the 2019 high school National Championship (a two-on-two prepared debate category) was female-presenting (despite a close to 50-50 split at the start of the competition). The Vice-President suggested this disparity was due to a series of structural factors: (1) a lack of reporting mechanisms for sexual harassment in the activity, which gave female debaters few options when faced with sexist or predatory coaches or contestants and consequently led to high turnover; (2) implicit bias, which led to female debaters being judged inequitably (for instance, being condemned for 'aggression' or 'volume' while similar traits were called 'confidence' in male performers); and (3) a lack of exemplars in the activity (for instance, until June 19, 2020, a female/female team had never won the high school Public Forum national championship). Her findings sparked a much larger discussion about equity and representation in the Speech and Debate community. In 2020, the Huffington Post exposed sexual harassment in the competitive national debate circuit; nearly a dozen former elite high school debaters described their experiences with misogyny, racism, and abuse (Gray, 2020). At the same time, the NSDA has sought positive exposure in the national media; March 5, 2021, was designated as "National Speech and Debate Education Day" in a Senate resolution. Consequently, prominent Speech leaders are aware of problems in the community and have an incentive to address them and generate more growth.

CHSSA, partially due to California's size and competitive success, has developed a national reputation for pioneering important conversations on matters of equity; for instance, many CHSSA-affiliated presenters spoke at NSDA conferences and currently hold NSDA chairperson positions. Its position on coach wellness could potentially impact the 4,200+ coaches from 2,700+ high schools and 380+ middle schools in the NSDA and inform decisions about state and league bylaws and tournament procedures. After a year of unprecedented change in Speech and Debate tournament norms due to COVID-

19, including allowing pre-recorded speeches and debates from home, CHSSA has a novel opportunity to reimagine what it means to be a Speech coach.

Problem of Practice

The issues this report seeks to better understand are the causes and impacts of stress and burnout on Speech and Debate coaches. Many Speech and Debate coaches leave the activity after a small number of years and many of those who stay attribute significant levels of physical and mental stress to their continued involvement. This substandard coaching experience spills over to Speech students, who have reported often-unaddressed issues of psychological or physical harm, feelings of discomfort, inequities, and their own experiences of stress and burnout due to a demanding year-round activity. Before this report's creation, many CHSSA students and coaches informally described their own negative experiences in Speech to me. My goal was to see if these anecdotal accounts represented a larger trend in the activity since the formal evidence did not exist.

In the late 2010s, the organization's newest Vice President of Activities created a series of new practices at the CHSSA championship, including language about implicit bias on ballots (which the NSDA eventually adopted), wellness rooms for stressed students, therapy dogs and other comfort animals, and a voucher system for food-insecure students. Some of these initiatives benefitted coaches (we had equal access to the therapy dogs), but they were predominately aimed at improving student wellness. CHSSA has also posted some free curricular resources on its website to help lower the barrier to entry for newer coaches, though their offerings pale in comparison to the thousands of videos blocked by the NSDA's membership paywall.

Better understanding this problem is key to achieving CHSSA's goal of growing their organization beyond its current 300+ member schools. There are currently over 1,300 high schools in California, which means that CHSSA is only affiliated with roughly 25% of their potential partners. Additionally, it could mean creating a healthier experience for Speech students. Since research indicates coaching styles substantially impact mental health and emotions in student athletes (Knackstedt, 2018), the same may apply to Speech competitors and their mentors.

If the problem goes unaddressed, the prevalence of student complaints concerning equity issues, mistreatment by other coaches and students, and burnout will continue to fester. It will also hamper CHSSA's attempts to achieve its bigger-picture goals, including greater collegiate recognition of Speech and Debate, more University of California-approved Speech courses, and the readoption of a California Secondary Subject (Speech and Debate) teaching credential.

Coaches have informally attributed feelings of stress and burnout to a variety of causes, including (1) microaggressions (discriminatory statements or actions based on demographic characteristics), (2) the year-round competitive schedule, (3) the divide

between highly competitive, victory-oriented coaches and educators who are less familiar with tournament norms, (4) the substantial length of weekend tournaments, (5) the lack of easily accessible guides for new coaches, and (6) the feelings of obligation to highly-motivated students (some of whom want to constantly compete to stay at the top of ranking boards).

Literature Review

I focused my review of relevant literature on two major categories. First, I investigated the existing research surrounding Speech and Debate competitions. Next, I reviewed literature related to empathy, burnout, equity, and standards of care.

Speech and Debate Literature

There are three broad categories of Speech and Debate-related literature: first, defenses of its worth as an activity; second, summaries of its inequities; and finally, ethnographic studies about experiential learning.

These categories each helped me better understand my problem of practice. First, if the research didn't support Speech and Debate's value but pointed to alternative, more educationally beneficial activities, I could supply CHSSA with recommendations to alter their approach to the competitions. Second, the discussion of Speech's inequities could help me contextualize (a) the degree of those biases, (b) if there was a link between those inequities and participation, and (c) the efficacy of previous efforts to address potential problems. Finally, I looked at ethnographies because I expected to gather qualitative accounts from Speech participants and wanted to ground that data collection in research.

Speech's Value

Luong (2000) explains that Speech and Debate involvement is correlated with increased probabilities of higher education admissions: dedicated Speech and Debate participants enjoyed a 22% to 30% higher acceptance rate at top-tier colleges. This is not causal. Crucially, the statistic is commonly cited in Speech programs to draw in achievement-oriented families; it features prominently in the NSDA's vault of advocacy-oriented content. Therefore, delving further into whether these benefits are concentrated on segments of the Speech community (for example, on the wealthy, white, and/or male) is warranted.

Minch (2006) decouples the value of Speech from its college admissions merits, arguing that, regardless of one's background, students and faculty who participate in weekend Speech competitions have cited improved oral communication, critical thinking, organization, research, and writing skills. CHSSA boasts about the value of Speech under these terms. Consequently, I analyzed whether all Speech participants benefit equally in these respects.

Speech's Disparities

Croucher, Long, Meredith, Oommen, and Steele (2009) argue that involvement and identification with one's Speech and Debate community are correlated with demographic factors. For example, they indicate that males are more likely than females to feel empowered and supported by their collegiate teams (Croucher et al., 2009). They draw on Glaser, Zamanou, and Hacker (1987), who suggest that organizational culture can be measured via an analysis of a) teamwork, b) morale, c) information flow, d) involvement, e) supervision and f) communication during meetings. Given that different subgroups experience Speech and Debate differently, I analyzed those disparities.

Kitchener (2019) highlights the experiential gap by focusing on sexual harassment in Speech. Collegiate forensics leaves students in vulnerable positions, forcing them to express trauma during performances and exposing them to predatory coaches without sufficient reporting hotlines. Recently, there have been several program directors reported for harassment or bad behavior (Kitchener, 2019), resulting in a movement called #IEToo (I.E. stands for Individual Event, another term for the Speech side of Speech and Debate), where competitors produce works targeted at inequities in the Speech community. For example, the 2019 national high school champion in an acting category—Programmed Oral Interpretation—created a performance called Debate Like a Girl, which called out the gender gaps referenced by the CHSSA Vice President. Similarly, the 2020 national high school champion in a public speaking category—Original Oratory—returned in 2021 with a speech about the pain she and other women experience when their voices are silenced in the Speech community and the disheartening effect of seeing females underrepresented in debate categories.

McCauley (2018) highlights the need for the paradigm shift by explaining the vast gaps in equity in debate categories. For example, female Public Forum Debaters make up 42% of the initial entries, but only 24% of the top 30 in the country, and only 6% of national finalists (Lynn & Kawlocs, 2018). Tartakovsky (2017) confirms this gap via a robust analysis of tournament tabulation software but offers hope to resolve it; as he notes, a one standard deviation increase in win rate reduces the female dropout rate by 50% (Tartakovsky, 2017). Dillard-Knox (2014) furthers that there is a substantial gap in black-white participation in the popular Policy Debate category; the percentage of minority collegiate debaters hovers around 15%, which trails the number of racial minorities in college. More research into demographic data and dropout rates for coaches and competitors with other marginalized identities, in other categories of Speech and Debate competition, and at other age brackets (such as middle and high school) is warranted.

Shelton and Matthews (2001) expand the discussion of the experience gap by introducing invisible disabilities, such as mental illnesses, into the fray. They contend that coaches must proactively develop methods to account for the anxiety, stress, and lack of historically accessible accommodations to expand the activity's inclusivity.

Speech-Related Ethnographies

Soibelman, Seick, and Trader (2020) contend that one way to capture the impact of the activity's inequities is to encourage its competitors to journal their experiences, creating ethnographies, in the form of narratives. The authors believe that these narratives can draw attention to the experiential gaps, provide representation and exemplars of excellence to marginalized students, and increase retention in the activity. They draw on Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), who provide an overview of qualitative autoethnographies, challenging participants to treat their reflection as politically-just, socially-just, and socially conscious acts.

Quicke (2008) acknowledges that the process of confronting inequities, writing down experiences, and sharing stories is particularly messy and difficult for individuals with mental illnesses. Since mental illness is often invisible, and societal stigmas around its discussion may inhibit an honest and open discussion about its impact on the lives of the afflicted, I became concerned with using non-threatening language during my data-gathering phase. I found the AMS-65 (Kattari, 2018), which defined ableism, disability, and microaggressions for this capstone and provided guidance on inclusive questioning.

Finally, Piety (2010) examined burnout in collegiate Directors of Forensics. The author interviewed 15 head coaches and identified shared themes of feeling pressure to qualify for national tournaments, struggling to balance their roles as coach and teacher, and the benefits of mentorship programs. While the rationales listed for qualifying to prestigious competitions (including feelings of satisfaction, publicity, and funding) logically apply to both college and high school teams, high school head coaches lack many structural advantages of college Directors of Forensics. They typically do not have the same funding systems, deal with larger, less selective teams, and cannot delegate as freely to younger students. The author draws on older studies into why debate coaches quit (Burnett, 2002; Burnett & Olson, 1997; Dickmeyer, 2002; Gill, 1990; Heffling, 2008; Leland, 2004; McDonald, 2001; Olson, 2004; Richardson, 2005; Rives & Klopff, 1965; Workman, 2004); however, each of these studies interrogates wellness from a collegiate Speech and Debate perspective. The cultural and competitive norms of the high school and college worlds, while somewhat overlapping, substantially differ.

Empathy, Burnout, and Equity

After situating my research in the Speech and Debate context, I inspected three key factors. First, I searched for a standard of care that could define and measure both coach and student needs. Second, I sought a framework to consider disparities equitably.

Since there are so many entities involved in the Speech and Debate community (coaches, students, judges, administrators, parents, etc.), I was initially concerned with orienting my research on burnout, stress, and equity with an overarching philosophical framework that would allow for an inclusive, empathetic, multifaceted consideration of all parties involved. Then, since CHSSA's understanding of equity is intersectional (it considers the

layers of identity, including race, gender, age, class, and ability status), I wanted to gather as many useful pieces of literature as possible when considering (a) the disparities encountered by the impacted groups and (b) the possible links between those disparities and burnout.

Empathy and Burnout

First, Couser (1997) explains how stigmas are surmounted when people with illnesses are allowed to tell their stories in their own words. This influenced my research by allowing my subjects to respond to open-ended questions with narrative answers and reinforced the autoethnographic research practices explained above. Richards (2008) agrees that there is a clear difference between the researched as an object-of-research and a person with agency. By allowing subjects to express their humanity and have their concerns actively attended to, researchers may avoid problematic objectification of marginalized groups and allow them to express their individual senses of humanity. Morse (1928) expands on this claim, insisting that a mental hygiene-oriented approach can be beneficial to non-marginalized identities in overcoming fear and stress associated with a public speaking competition. This approach highlights a conception of caring, which involves a contextual encounter that emphasizes mutuality and flexibility. This means that different individuals require different strategies to be appropriately cared about (Noddings, 1992). Noddings's (1992) philosophy led me to approach causes, effects, and solutions on multiple planes. It rejects one-size-fits-all conceptions of stress and trauma and allows for multiple perspectives to be considered.

Second, I researched definitions, symptoms, and causes of burnout. Burnout is defined by Short, Short, and Haugen (2015) as a work-related syndrome that develops gradually. The condition is characterized by feelings of fatigue, emotional disconnection, and reduced performance. Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998) suggest that burnout is not experienced equally by all groups and may be influenced by demographic factors (such as job, class, and gender). Importantly, burnout is not the same thing as resigning. A coach can be burnt out but stay in an activity despite their misgivings and stress, potentially harming both themselves and their students.

Altfeld, Mallet, and Kellman's (2015) adapted version of the Recovery-Stress Questionnaire for Coaches, or RESTQ, addresses factors that are indicative of burnout in German sports coaches. These include emotional symptoms (such as depersonalization) and physical symptoms (such as a lack of sleep). A further review of Mudallal, Othman, and Al Hassan (2017) revealed that emotional exhaustion is both a cause and effect of burnout. Peterson, Demerouti, Bergstrom, Samuelsson, Asberg, and Nygren (2008) further that burnout can be further caused by physical exhaustion. Additionally, Demerouti, Bakker, and Leiter (2014) clarify that a lack of financial compensation can further lead to burnout.

Smith, Segal, and Robinson (2019) link burnout to prolonged stress. This stress is particularly pronounced in education. Betoret and Artiga (2010) explain that stressors, or barriers that interfere with educators' work and prevent them from reaching learning objectives, plague the teaching profession. Too few teachers are systematically provided with ways to cope with structural stressors. Raedeke, Granzkyk, and Warren (2000) suggest that coaches are even more prone to mental health-draining stressors than teachers, and are at risk of being entrapped, which occurs when coaches feel like they need to keep coaching because others expect it of them. These stressors are magnified for coaches who are disabled or prone to mental illness and may even incite more mental illness, which can be a key factor in burnout.

Brown and Leigh (2018) describe how a performance-driven working environment (such as competitive public speaking) results in both low morale and an increasing number of burnout and stress-related illness diagnoses within academia. Teachers are also buffeted by stressors like disrespect and inattentiveness from students, which accounted for 22% of teacher burnout variance (Friedman, 1995). A highly competitive environment like Speech and Debate, where coaches often model disrespectful behavior towards rival coaches or teams in front of their students, may be more prone to displays of disrespect.

This highly stressful environment led Buchanan (2010) to study why teachers leave their profession. Many teachers explained that the high standards set for them by administrators, students, and parents (when they were offered comparatively meager benefits in return) led them to quit. Many coaches who feel entrapped (Raedeke et al., 2000) but continue to coach may assert their control over a stressful situation by demanding perfection of their students, which can foster student burnout and a decrease in motivation (Barcza-Renner, Eklund, Morin, & Habeeb, 2015).

Equity

Oexle and Corrigan (2018) explain that mental illness, burnout, stress cannot be viewed in the abstract; rather, individuals may simultaneously experience multiple marginalized identities (such as being disabled and/or a racial/gender minority). Boaler (2002) clarifies that proactively reframing traditionally marginalized identities requires a robust re-evaluation of how their images are represented in educational settings. For example, if there are no national exemplars of mentally ill female coaches of color, then mentally ill females of color are less likely to feel welcome in the Speech and Debate coaching space and reap the benefits of involvement in the activity. This identity-based representation is desirable when addressing burnout because inequities lead to a lack of communal engagement, a decrease in exchange-oriented relationships, and more symptoms of burnout.

Langenhove and Harre (1994) assert that researchers have the power to shift cultural images, defang stereotypes, and improve representation. Loes, Pascarella, and Umbach (2012) describe the beneficial spillover effects of such a diversity-oriented systematic

improvement. As they indicate, “an institutional policy based on programmatic efforts to weave exposure to diverse individuals, ideas, and perspectives into students’ lives may serve to enhance the intellectual mission of a [program]” (p. 21).

Finally, Moulton and Gehlbach (2019) created a survey specifically designed to measure equity concerns in an academic environment (the Panorama Equity Survey). While this survey was developed for a K-12 classroom environment, parts of its measurement tools were relevant to a K-12 extracurricular activity like Speech and Debate.

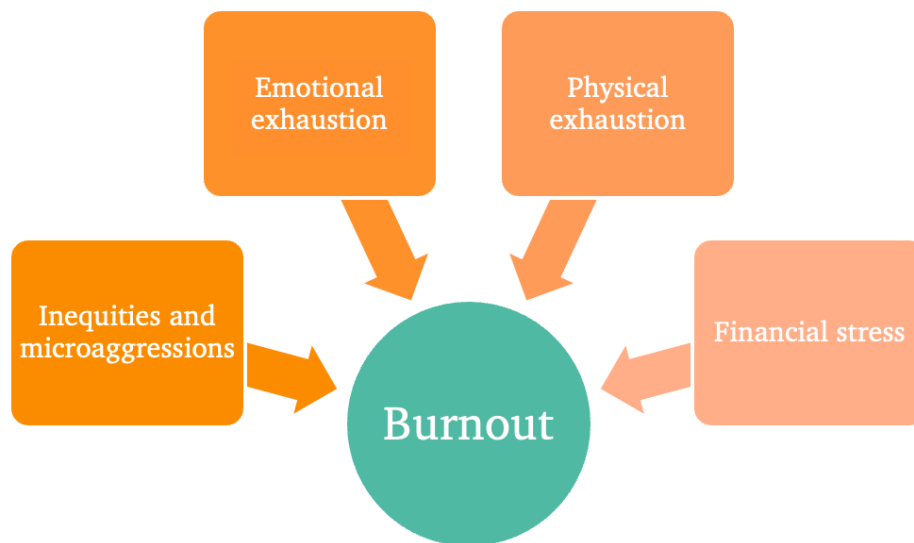
Conceptual Framework

After reviewing the literature, I framed my approach through the dual lenses of burnout theory and Noddings's (1992) standard of care. The research revealed a clear link between equity issues and burnout. I had discovered three primary measurement tools to guide my research: the Panorama Equity Survey (Moulton & Ofori, 2019), the AMS-65 (Kattari, 2018), and the RESTQ-C (Atlfeld, Mallet, & Kellman, 2015). Based on my anecdotal knowledge of how busy Speech coaches are, I was concerned such a long series of Likert scale-based surveys would not be completed by a sufficient sample size of coaches and sought to abridge it.

I developed the following conceptual framework (represented by Figure One below):

Figure One

Conceptual Framework



I used Kattari's (2019) working definition of microaggressions. Accordingly, "Microaggressions are everyday interactions that perpetuate inequalities and stereotypes against people who belong to marginalized communities" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000; Sue, 2010). I consolidated Altfeld, Mallet, and Kellman's (2015) various indicators of burnout and stress into the three major listed categories (emotional exhaustion, physical exhaustion, and financial stress). Finally, I employed Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998)'s definition of burnout:

Burnout describes a state of mental and physical exhaustion, which is maintained by accompanied maladaptive motivational processes and the generation of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors toward the job.

As I indicated above, *burnout* does not mean *turnover* or *retirement* (though it may lead to turnover). A coach may feel burnt out—exhausted, unmotivated, and dysfunctional—but continue coaching. In the long term, the burnt-out coach's behavior may create generational burnout, engendering a worse environment for their colleagues and students.

Project Questions

I settled on three key questions to guide the investigation into burnout within CHSSA’s coaches. These questions, the underlying concepts guiding them, and the method of data collection I used to answer each of them, are summarized in Table One. Each question influenced the subsequent question. For example, if it turned out that there was no widespread burnout in Speech coaches (Question One), I would not have advised burnout-focused recommendations (Question Three).

Table One

Research Question Alignment to Concepts and Data Collection Methods

Research Question	Underlying Concepts	Method of Data Collection
One: How does Speech and Debate involvement impact feelings of burnout in coaches?	Emotional exhaustion Physical exhaustion Financial stress	Coach interviews (Phase One + Phase Two) Coach surveys (Phase One + Phase Two)
Two: How do (coaches’) demographic factors influence feelings of burnout in Speech and Debate coaches?	Inequities and microaggressions	Coach interviews (Phase One + Phase Two) Coach surveys (Phase One + Phase Two) Document review
Three: Given the findings of Questions One and Two, what organizational rules and procedures could mitigate burnout in Speech and Debate coaches?	Literature on reducing stress and burnout; reducing inequities	Coach interviews (Phase One + Phase Two) Coach surveys (Phase One + Phase Two) Document review

My document review included ‘gray area’ literature (or research related to, but not the same as, high school Speech and Debate coaching), including research on Speech competitors, college Speech coaches, high school and college sports athletes and coaches, and high school classroom teachers.

Project Design (Data Collection and Analysis)

I used an exploratory sequential mixed methods design to answer my three research questions. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) describe this design's utility when the first phase of data collection is necessary to refine the instrumentation used to define the critical variables in the subsequent phases. I split my data collection into three key phases:

1. **Phase One:** Individual interviews of a demographically diverse sample of at least 20 coaches (I interviewed 28).
 - a. These interviews aimed to gather qualitative information and ethnographic narratives about Speech coaches *and* discuss optimal ways to narrow the scope of my questions regarding burnout and equity to maximize survey responses.
2. **Phase Two:** A 20-question survey was sent to multiple mailing lists (I distributed it to a total of 612 coaches; 98 responded in total).
 - a. These mostly closed-ended questions focused on gathering background information, understanding the respondents' involvement in Speech and Debate, questioning their experiences with burnout, and exploring the connection between any burnout they might have experienced and inequity.
 - b. Many of these questions were adapted from the RESTQ, the AMS-65, and the Panorama Equity Survey (or PES). I did not use most questions from those surveys for two reasons:
 - i. Many questions were about day-to-day classroom environments (in the AMS-65 and the PES) or physical sports (in the RESTQ) and didn't apply to Speech.
 - ii. I judged many questions to be redundant (for example, the RESTQ measures 'social stress' and 'conflicts/pressure', 'emotional exhaustion' and 'emotional stress', and 'fatigue' and 'lack of energy'). To check this bias, I decided to only narrow down this Phase Two survey after asking every Phase One subject about their opinions about which questions from all three surveys would be helpful for the survey's purposes. After reviewing the surveys, every interviewee agreed that keeping the number of questions below 25 and curbing redundancies would yield a higher response rate.
 - c. Respondents were, by default, anonymous. They had the option of including their contact information at the end if they wished to have follow-up questions sent during Phase Three.
3. **Phase Three (beyond the scope of this report):** A follow-up questionnaire was supposed to be sent to the volunteer coaches from Phase Two.
 - a. These open-ended questions were intended to present the respondents with my preliminary findings from Phases One and Two and ask for their

- feedback, which included (a) their agreement or disagreement with my appraisal and/or (b) their personal narratives about burnout and equity.
- b. This phase, while no longer a part of this report, inspired my final recommendation to CHSSA. The final questionnaire may still be developed and sent, per CHSSA’s discretion.

Phase One: Qualitative Interviews

Initial data collection centered on qualitative information received from a systematic sample of 28 Speech and Debate coaches. These coaches were contacted individually over email and social media. Some were acquaintances while others were prominent figures in the community. Not all coaches were current members of CHSSA, but all were familiar with CHSSA’s practices. Their demographic data are summarized in Table Two.

Table Two

Summary of Demographic Data from Phase One of Data Collection

Questions	Answers (out of 28)
Age	35.71% between 25-34 years old, 25% 18-24, 21.43% 35-44, 7.14% 45-54, 7.14% 65+, 3.57% 55-65
Gender	50% Male, 46.43% Female, 3.57% Nonbinary/genderfluid
Race	53.58% Caucasian, 14.29% multiracial, 10.71% East/South Asian, 10.71% Black, 7.14% Latinx/Latino/Latina, 3.57% American Indian
Ability Status	28.57% Disabled
Years Coaching	39.29% 6-10 years, 21.43% 3-5, 17.86% 16-25, 10.74% 26+, 7.14% 1-2, 3.57% 11-15
Categories Coached	92.68% coached debate, 71.43% platform, 71.43% interp, 67.86% limited prep
Levels Coached	100% coached high school, 82.41% middle, 39.29% college, 35.71 elementary
Coaching Status	85.71% active

These interviews were conducted and recorded online to maximize engagement and safety during the Summer and Fall of 2020 (and the outbreak of COVID-19). During each interview, I transcribed coaches’ responses to a series of questions. They were designed to understand (1) the coaches’ demographic information, (2) their experiences coaching Speech and Debate, (3) their perspective on burnout in the activity, (4) their perspective on inequities in the activity, and (5) their view of the utility of potential tools to measure a wider sample size during the Phase Two survey. The questions are listed in

Appendix A (note that the three research questions listed in the Phase One survey changed after it was distributed; this is because I focused the scope of this project).

There is no publicly available information on CHSSA’s demographics, but the NSDA released demographic information about their coaches. This is summarized in their *Membership at a Glance* page (represented by Figures Two and Three).

Figure Two

Coach Gender Demographics	
Gender	Percentage Reported
Male	44.33%
Female	54.95%
Nonconforming	0.41%
Other	0.30%
Total	100.00%

Figure Three

Coach Race/Ethnicity Demographics	
Race/Ethnicity	Percentage Reported
Arab or Middle Eastern	0.25%
Asian or Asian-American	5.36%
African-American or Black	5.80%
Hispanic or Latina/Latino /Latinx	6.53%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.32%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.78%
Other	2.57%
Prefer not to answer	5.44%
White, Caucasian or European-American	72.95%
Total	100.00%

The NSDA is less racially diverse than California teachers in general; so, too, was my Phase One interview population. Schofield (2001) informed my choices of race- and gender-diverse interviewees. By understanding the narratives of members of traditionally marginalized groups, I attempted to account for any potential blind spots I might have as a white male in the activity (a historically overrepresented group in Speech and Debate coaching).

Neither NSDA nor CHSSA has released public data regarding coaches with disabilities, but my response rate of 28.57% roughly matches the national average (26%, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2018).

After conducting my initial interview, transcribing my interviewees' responses, and double-checking to ensure my notes matched the recordings, I began coding to select and refine my Phase Two survey questions.

First, I engaged in open coding, where I broke my textual data into multiple parts. Then, I began axial coding and drew connections between separate codes. These codes are summarized in Table Three.

Table Three

Phase One Interview Coding Themes

Theme	Code	Description	# and % of Participants Referencing
Coaching benefits	Empowering students	Fostering student growth	14 (50%)
	Fun	Enjoying the competition	22 (78.6%)
	Impact	Changing the world with words	8 (28.6%)
	Giving back	Creating a cycle of mentorship	7 (25%)
Coaching duties	Skills coaching	Teaching performance techniques	25 (89.3%)
	Logistics	Tournament registration, travel arrangements, fundraising, running tournaments, judging	22 (78.6%)
	Leadership development	Nurturing a sense of duty, socio-emotional support	10 (35.7%)
Coaching impacts	Stress	Anxiety brought about by competitions	28 (100%)
	Pressure	From parents, students, coaches, admin	14 (50%)
	Exhaustion	Physically feeling overwhelmed	10 (35.7%)
Logistical concerns	Double-Entry	Concerns about students not getting breaks	10 (35.7%)
	Judging	Lack of training and support	20 (71.4%)
	Length of tournaments	Too many; they go for too long	10 (35.7%)
	Length of season	The season never ends for those on the circuit	10 (35.7%)
Equity and Inclusion	Discrimination	Racism, sexism, classism, ableism, microaggressions	18 (64.3%)
	Circuit norms	Divides between 'teachers' and 'professionals'	6 (21.4%)

Finally, I connected these themes to my conceptual framework through selective coding:

- **Coaching benefits** and **coaching duties** fell under ‘emotional exhaustion,’ since the coaches referenced their emotional engagement with the activity.
- **Coaching duties** and **logistical concerns** are also connected to ‘financial stress,’ since coaches contrasted the amount of work they did with their level of compensation.
- **Coaching impacts** are connected to ‘emotional exhaustion’ and ‘physical exhaustion,’ since the participants directly referenced those terms when describing their experiences.
- **Equity and inclusion** are connected to ‘inequities and microaggressions.’

As one experienced coach put it, *“The Speech classroom is a one-room schoolhouse.”*

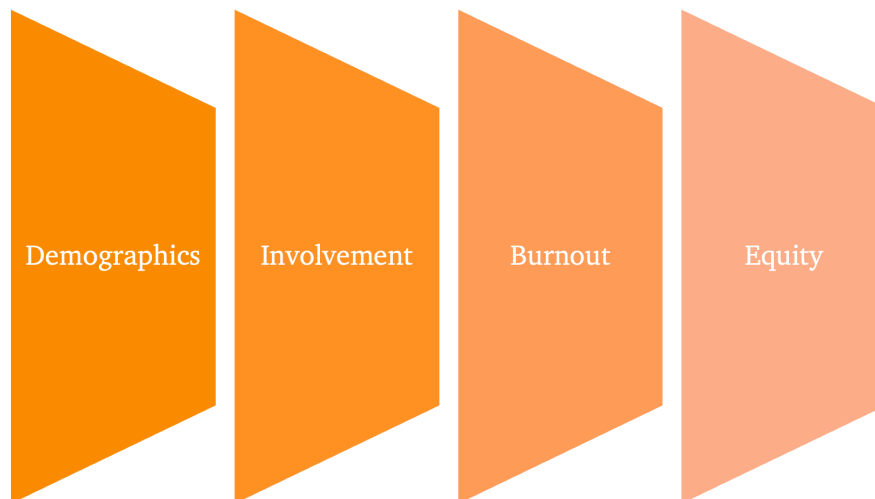
The coaches widely differed in their responses concerning which tools would be most useful in analyzing coach burnout and equity issues. However, they uniformly agreed that a more concise survey would receive more responses. Many suggested that Speech and Debate coaches are busier than most and would not have time to respond to a more in-depth survey (like the AMS-65 or RESTQ). I listened to their advice and consolidated my Phase Two survey into 20 questions. These questions are listed in Appendix B.

Phase Two: Quantitative Survey

First, I simplified my instruments (the Panorama Education Equity and Inclusion Survey, the RESTQ, and the AMS-65) and focused my questions on four major topic areas (summarized in Figure Four).

Figure Four

These were the four main question areas I explored with coaches in the Phase Two survey.



Second, I asked tournament directors from well-attended national circuit and invitational competitions, officers from CHSSA-affiliated leagues, and members of California NSDA chapters (many of whom have concurrent membership with CHSSA) to provide me with coaching mailing lists. My goal was to draw responses from a demographically and experientially diverse group of coaches. In case this sample's level of burnout was as high as my Phase One interviewees, I hoped to use the data to draw conclusions about Question Two.

Absent publicly available data on CHSSA's demographics, it was important that this study's sample was at least representative of the NSDA's demographics. I sought correlations between factors including (a) years of coaching, (b) race, (c) gender, and (d) hours coached and the simplified indicators of burnout (inequities and microaggressions, physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, and financial stress).

While the background questions were open-ended, I used five-point Likert scales to divide coaches by age, years coached, hours spent coaching (both during the school year and the summer), and burnout metrics. These questions are detailed in Table Five.

Table Five

Phase Two's Likert scale-based burnout questions

Questions	Possible Answers
For how many years have you coached Speech and Debate?	1-2 3-5 6-10 11-15 16-25 26+
DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR: How many hours per week, on average, have you dedicated to Speech and Debate coaching?	1-5 hours 6-10 hours 11-20 hours 21-40 hours 41+ hours
DURING THE SUMMER: How many hours per week, on average, have you dedicated to Speech and Debate coaching?	1-5 hours 6-10 hours 11-20 hours 21-40 hours 41+ hours
How connected do you feel to other coaches in the Speech and Debate community? [If you're no longer coaching, how connected did you feel to other coaches in the Speech and Debate community?]	Not at all connected Slightly connected Somewhat connected Quite connected Extremely connected

How connected is your sense of personal well-being to your Speech and Debate involvement? [If you're no longer coaching, how connected was your sense of personal well-being to your Speech and Debate involvement?]	Not at all connected Slightly connected Somewhat connected Quite connected Extremely connected
How often have you experienced feelings of emotional exhaustion based on your Speech and Debate coaching?	Not at all often Slightly often Somewhat often Quite often Extremely often
How often have you experienced feelings of physical fatigue (including sleep quality concerns) based on your Speech and Debate coaching?	Not at all often Slightly often Somewhat often Quite often Extremely often
How often have you experienced feelings of financial stress based on your Speech and Debate coaching?	Not at all often Slightly often Somewhat often Quite often Extremely often
How often have you experienced microaggressions (based on socioeconomic status, disability, gender, gender expression or identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, or religion) in your capacity as a Speech and Debate coach from other coaches?	Not at all often Slightly often Somewhat often Quite often Extremely often
How often have you experienced microaggressions (based on socioeconomic status, disability, gender, gender expression or identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, or religion) in your capacity as a Speech and Debate coach from parents and/or students?	Not at all often Slightly often Somewhat often Quite often Extremely often
If you have experienced microaggressions in your capacity as a Speech and Debate coach, to what degree have they impacted your desire to stay in the activity?	Not at all/not applicable Slightly Somewhat Significantly Extremely

Every question on the Phase Two survey was approved by the CHSSA President before it was released. At the end of the survey, I offered: **If you have any questions, concerns, or other thoughts on this topic, please write them here.** 23 interviewees offered written responses to that open-ended question.

Phase Two: Demographics

The 98 respondents demographically differed from my Phase One interviewees (depicted in Table Six).

Table Six

Summary of Demographic Data from Phase Two of Data Collection

Questions	Answers (out of 98)
Age	31.63% between 25-34 years old, 20.41% 35-44, 16.33% 45-54, 12.24% 55-65, 11.22% 18-24, 7.14% 65+, 1.04% decline to state
Gender	47.9% Male, 44.9% Female, 5.1% decline to state, 2% nonbinary/demigender
Race	61.2% Caucasian/White, 16.33% East/South Asian, 8.16% multiracial, 4.08% Black/African American, 4.08% decline to state, 3.06% Hispanic/Latinx/Latino/Latina, 1% other (“human”)
Ability Status	13.27% Disabled, 3.06% decline to state
Years Coaching	28.57% 6-10 years, 24.49% 3-5 years, 17.35% 11-15 years, 12.24% 16-25 years, 11.22% 26+ years, 6.12% 1-2 years
Categories Coached	88.78% coached debate, 72.45% limited prep, 68.37% platform speaking, 65.31% interpretation of literature, 57.14% student congress
Levels Coached	100% coached high school, 55.1% middle, 28.57% college, 17.35 elementary
Coaching Status	89.80% active

Compared with the Phase One interviewees, the Phase Two respondents were, on average:

1. More likely to be at least 35 years old
2. More likely to be Caucasian/White
3. Less likely to identify as a person with a disability
4. Less likely to have coached levels of Speech outside of high school

Notably, 53% of Phase Two respondents indicated their willingness to participate in a follow-up individual interview (and 46.94% were willing to meet in a follow-up focus group) concerning this survey’s findings.

Phase Two: Limitations

Some respondents objected to the phrasing or scope of some of these questions. For instance, according to one subject:

“One axis of identity worthy of discussion in the debate circuit (that I notice was absent from the survey) is class.”

I believed “socioeconomic status” encompassed “class,” but the term “class” may have yielded different results.

Another respondent remarked:

“This survey did not ask about mental fatigue, only asked physical fatigue [sic].”

I believed “emotional exhaustion” accounted for “mental fatigue,” but a separate question may have been warranted.

A respondent noted:

“You should define ‘microaggressions’ and “disability.””

While I offered examples of microaggressions, I neither defined it nor disabilities on the survey.

Finally, two respondents remarked that snapshot questions might fail to capture a complete and accurate range of experiences since many coaches switch from assistant to head-coaching roles throughout their careers. That, too, is a limitation of my more concise survey.

Findings

Research Question One

The first question asked how Speech and Debate involvement impacted feelings of burnout in coaches. Four major findings emerged in response to this question.

Finding 1: Speech and Debate coaches have mixed feelings about their involvement.

Over 90% of coaches interviewed in Phase Two described the activity as simultaneously exhausting, frustrating, challenging, and rewarding. Many mentioned a feeling of obligation, a need to give back to their students, and a sense of shame around quitting, despite the personal toll the activity takes. As one respondent put it:

“We always preface things with the idea that everything we do is ‘for the kids’. Well, if we’re not here to coach them [because we’ve burnt ourselves out], then nobody will be here ‘for the kids.’”

The Phase Two respondents largely concurred. One participant’s response encapsulates the tension between wanting to give back to the students and receiving appreciation for their hard work:

“I really think the socioeconomic realities around speech and debate greatly exacerbate these issues. The inherent competitive framing of the events can be exhausting, especially if you truly care about long term student well-being. Depending on the format, and one’s personal success, there can be a chronic lack of appreciation of coaches’ hard work and dedication. This obviously is a system wide issue. It would be great to hear if there are potential solutions, or problem areas we could address.”

One coach, who indicated they had coached for between three and five years, expressed her disdain towards the activity’s norms:

“Not a lot of equity in speech. So many students without proper coaches and teachers and who are self-taught. A lot of discrimination and unwelcome feelings toward newcomers to the craft and the tournament circuit. Parents, new teachers, and students do the best they can, but it’s literally trial by fire.”

Nonetheless, she indicated she is still actively coaching. This is indicative of a trend many Speech coaches anecdotally expressed: the activity is flawed but they’re inclined to stick with it.

Finding 2: Speech and Debate coaches take on a multitude of obligations.

When asked an open-ended question, Phase One coaches described a wide range of responsibilities. Their explanation of their duties is summarized in Table Seven.

Table Seven

Summary of responses to the open-ended question about duties

Duties	Response Rate (out of 28)
Skills coaching (research, editing, performance feedback)	89.3%
Internal logistics (lesson planning, practice schedules, dealing with school administration)	78.6%
Socio-emotional coaching (mentorship, leadership development)	35.7%
External logistics (hotels, travel, fundraising, judge recruitment, judge training, judging, parent outreach, tournament volunteering)	67.9%

Coaches detailed the tensions between their various duties. For example, one coach explained how they were obligated to keep their students safe at competitions, but also required to judge at competitions. They were frustrated by the obligation to be separated from their students as they wanted to make sure their students were safe. This frustration was compounded for coaches who volunteered to work in the tabulation room and run logistics for weekend competitions. For coaches of very large teams, the organizational demands can be overwhelming. As one assistant coach noted:

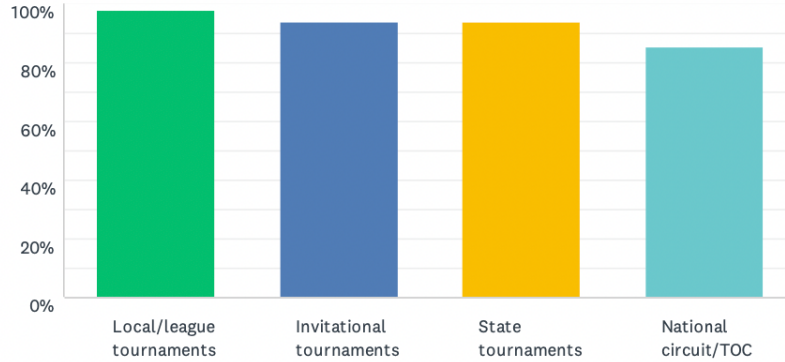
“I’ve seen burnout to some degree, yes. I’ve been an assistant coach for a long time...I’ve seen burnout in [the head coach of a large team]. [They] might get a little bit overwhelmed...I’d see things that are out of character, like losing patience over very small things, or losing control of emotions over little things. I’ve seen it increase for a while...”

These obligations could prove overwhelming if Speech and Debate coaches only competed semi-regularly or only focused on certain sorts of contests. However, over 85% of the Phase Two respondents competed in every major category of competition (as depicted in Figure Five).

Figure Five

Q10 What sorts of Speech and Debate competitions have you prepared students for? Check all that apply.

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



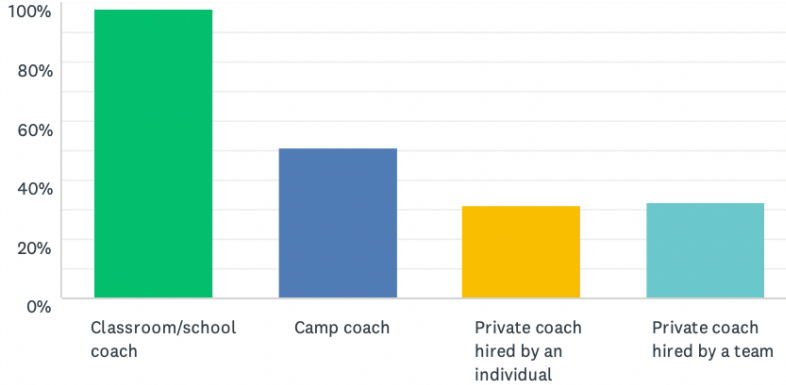
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Local/league tournaments	97.96%	96
Invitational tournaments	93.88%	92
State tournaments	93.88%	92
National circuit/TOC tournaments	85.71%	84
Total Respondents: 98		

As Watts and Short (1990) reported, “Two-thirds of teachers may want to quit the profession, while 36.4 percent are likely to quit. Teachers report higher rates than a national sample of lifetime alcohol, amphetamine, and tranquilizer use.” While some coaches can set their own hours or work for private academies, diffusing some of the work of notoriously stressful classroom teaching, nearly every surveyed coach from Phase Two interacted with students in a capacity as a classroom teacher. This is expressed in Figure Six:

Figure Six

Q8 In which of the following formats have you coached Speech and Debate? Check all that apply.

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Classroom/school coach	97.96% 96
Camp coach	51.02% 50
Private coach hired by an individual	31.63% 31
Private coach hired by a team	32.65% 32
Total Respondents: 98	

Evidently, Speech and Debate coaches must balance the potentially overwhelming combination of classroom teaching duties, skills coaching, internal logistics, external logistics, and socioemotional coaching. As this data indicates, however, they fall short of succeeding in this balancing act.

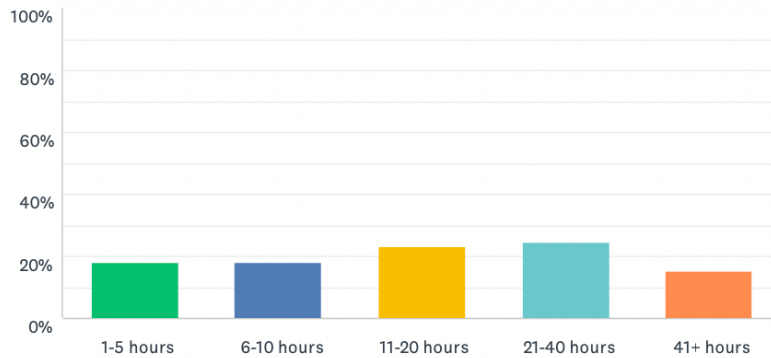
Finding 3: Speech and Debate coaches rarely take time off.

A plurality (46.43%) of the Phase One coaches reported spending an average of at least 21 hours per week specifically coaching Speech; 21.43% spent over 41 hours. Some coaches indicated they spent, including tournaments, at least 80 hours per week coaching. CHSSA-affiliated league tournaments, typically held on weekends, often start around 8 AM and last until 8 PM on Saturdays, but invitational and national circuit contests often last two or three days (Saturday-Sunday or Friday-Saturday-Sunday). The Phase Two coaches' responses corroborated their Phase One counterparts (see Figure Seven below):

Figure Seven

Q11 DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR: How many hours per week, on average, have you dedicated to Speech and Debate coaching?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1-5 hours	18.37%	18
6-10 hours	18.37%	18
11-20 hours	23.47%	23
21-40 hours	24.49%	24
41+ hours	15.31%	15
TOTAL		98

Roughly 40% of Phase Two coaches spend an average of at least 21 hours coaching every week. I can, with reasonable confidence, infer that the respondents are not counting hours at tournaments in their responses. Since tournaments normally last at least 10 hours, it would not make sense for a coach to mark anything less than 10 hours of weekly coaching if they regularly attend competitions.

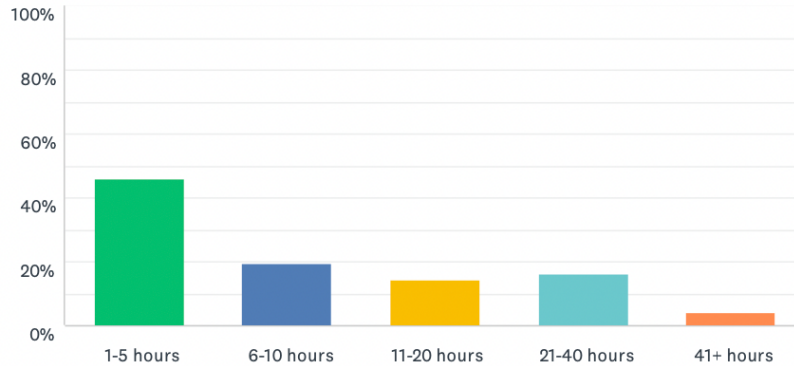
This data's efficacy is limited by a lack of a reference point. For example, a full-time coach without an additional teaching burden would naturally work for 21-40 hours without the burden of an additional 40-hour full-time job.

Additionally, a substantial number of Phase Two coaches spend their summers coaching. See Figure Eight:

Figure Eight

Q12 DURING THE SUMMER: How many hours per week, on average, have you dedicated to Speech and Debate coaching?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1-5 hours	45.92%	45
6-10 hours	19.39%	19
11-20 hours	14.29%	14
21-40 hours	16.33%	16
41+ hours	4.08%	4
TOTAL		98

Over 33% of surveyed coaches spend at least 11 hours per week coaching during summer break. For these coaches, there may be no break at all. There are many Speech and Debate summer camps, many of which promise the possibility of competitive success to proactive students. Many competitively inclined coaches and students, therefore, make Speech and Debate a year-round activity. Some less competitive coaches struggle to keep their students motivated when the camp-coached students return from a summer of practice and enjoy early-season success. Not every student can afford these often expensive sleepaway camps. In this way, inequities are exacerbated while a substantial number of coaches engage in year-round Speech coaching. One coach bemoaned how competitive incentives have led to a never-ending Speech season:

“I’d like to know why our season lasts three times longer than any other competitive activity at the high school level? I believe this is the BIGGEST hurdle to retaining forensics coaches ... Forensics will never flourish unless it changes at this fundamental level. We need a more manageable schedule - one that strikes a balance between offering this great activity to young people and respects and honors the time and families of its coaches.”

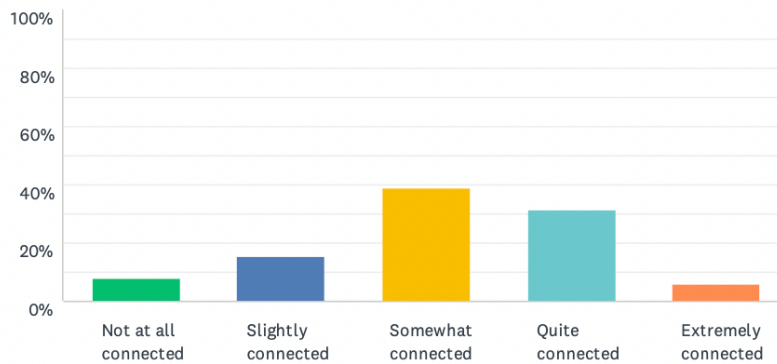
Finding 4: Speech and Debate coaches feel burnt out.

A plurality of coaches consistently describes their Speech and Debate experiences with the symptoms of burnout, including emotional exhaustion and physical strain. McDonald (2001) wrote that “the structure of collegiate debate tournaments and the pressures placed on directors has necessarily created an unsustainable cycle that threatens the physical and mental well-being of coaches and undermines the long-term health of the activity of collegiate debate” (p. 115). This description fits the surveyed population. As **Figure Nine** indicates below, the vast majority of coaches (over 75%) describe their sense of personal well-being as ‘Somewhat,’ ‘Quite,’ or ‘Extremely’ connected to their Speech and Debate involvement.

Figure Nine

Q14 How connected is your sense of personal well-being to your Speech and Debate involvement? [If you're no longer coaching, how connected was your sense of personal well-being to your Speech and Debate involvement?]

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not at all connected	8.16%	8
Slightly connected	15.31%	15
Somewhat connected	38.78%	38
Quite connected	31.63%	31
Extremely connected	6.12%	6
TOTAL		98

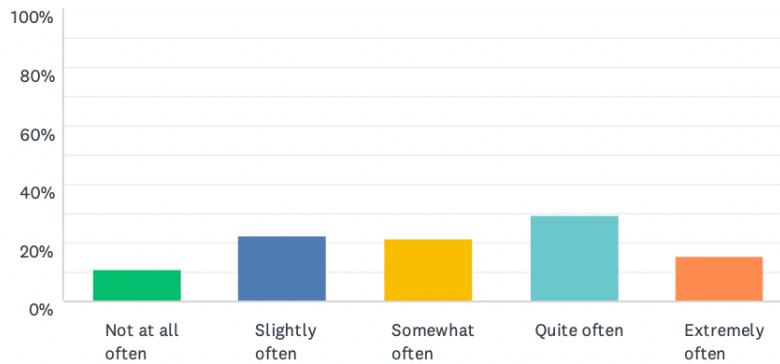
Burnout is a “state of fatigue and emotional exhaustion that is the end result of a gradual process of disillusionment” (Brown & Roloff, 2009). **Figures Ten and Eleven** summarize

the surveyed coaches' experiences with both physical fatigue and emotional exhaustion. **Figure Ten** reveals nearly 66% of coaches directly attribute feelings of physical fatigue ('somewhat,' 'quite' or 'extremely') to their Speech and Debate coaching. **Figure Eleven** suggests nearly 70% of coaches experience emotional exhaustion 'somewhat,' 'quite,' or 'extremely' often because of their coaching.

Figure Ten

Q16 How often have you experienced feelings of physical fatigue (including sleep quality concerns) based on your Speech and Debate coaching?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0

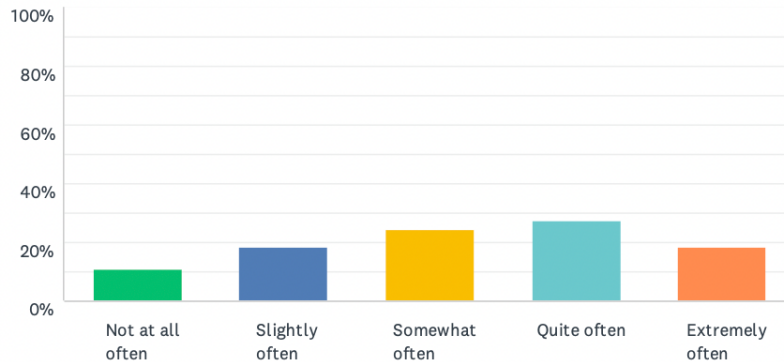


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not at all often	11.22%	11
Slightly often	22.45%	22
Somewhat often	21.43%	21
Quite often	29.59%	29
Extremely often	15.31%	15
TOTAL		98

Figure Eleven

Q15 How often have you experienced feelings of emotional exhaustion based on your Speech and Debate coaching?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not at all often	11.22%	11
Slightly often	18.37%	18
Somewhat often	24.49%	24
Quite often	27.55%	27
Extremely often	18.37%	18
TOTAL		98

While the RESTQ links elements of financial stress to burnout, most of the surveyed population did not link monetary concerns to Speech and Debate coaching. This is likely because many surveyed coaches have the means to regularly attend major national tournaments, which are cost-prohibitive to less financially stable teams. For example, the nationally competitive 2020 Harvard University competition charged Speech students \$70 per entry in addition to an \$85 school management fee and \$40 per entry not covered by a judge (which adds up to nearly \$200 before considering the cost of flights and hotels). Since most high school Speech and Debate teams do not regularly travel to expensive national tournaments, this response is likely nonindicative of the general Speech and Debate (and CHSSA member) population. One of the coaches who claimed to experience financial stress ‘extremely often’ claimed:

“The work is far more consuming than any other work I have done. The compensation is not even close to the skill, knowledge and effort required.”

Another coach furthered:

“The exhaustion in coaching (in my experience) stems not only from the hours with the kids and the long tournament days but also from the lack of financial support for

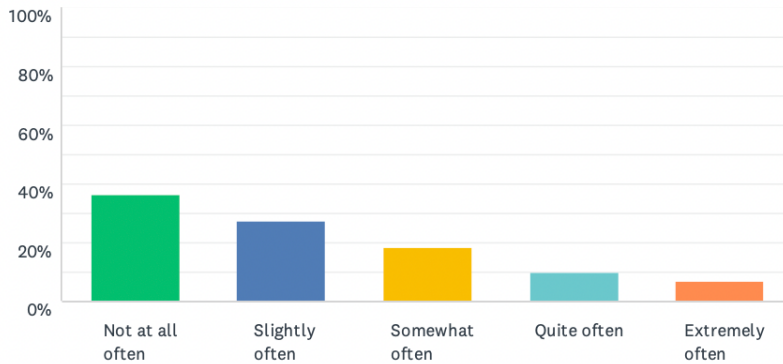
the activity. FUNDRAISING IS THE BANE OF MY EXISTENCE and between that and all the hoops we must jump through, and the endless paperwork required it's often overwhelming. Coaches are also often pressured to give up EVERY weekend for this activity at the expense of their personal life and sanity - leading to burnout!"

The financial findings are summarized in **Figure Twelve**.

Figure Twelve

Q17 How often have you experienced feelings of financial stress based on your Speech and Debate coaching?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not at all often	36.73%	36
Slightly often	27.55%	27
Somewhat often	18.37%	18
Quite often	10.20%	10
Extremely often	7.14%	7
TOTAL		98

Research Question Two

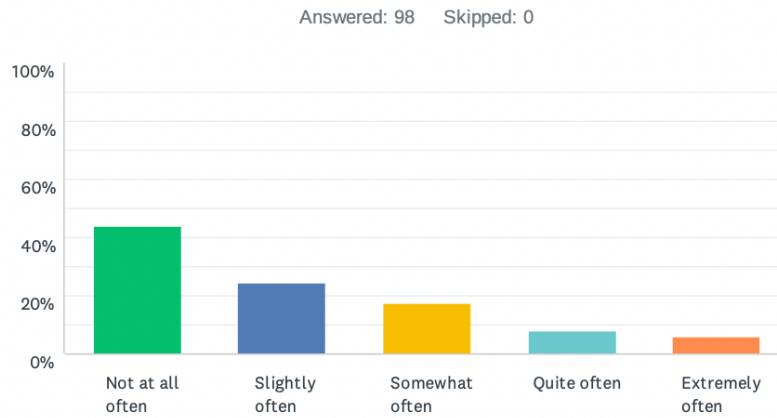
My second research question asked how demographic factors impacted feelings of burnout in Speech and Debate coaches. Two additional findings emerged in response to this question.

Finding 5: Speech and Debate coaches, when experiencing microaggressions, are unlikely to leave the activity because of those inequities.

First, Speech and Debate coaches indicated experiences with micro-aggressive behavior. 61% of coaches who identified as having a disability, 47% of female coaches, and 45% of Asian/Black/Latinx/multiracial coaches claimed to experience microaggressions ‘somewhat,’ ‘quite,’ or ‘extremely’ often. Additionally, as **Figures Thirteen and Fourteen** indicate, coaches are more likely to experience these microaggressions from their fellow coaches than parents or students; while nearly one-third of surveyed coaches claimed to experience micro-aggressive behavior from other coaches, just over 20% attributed similar behavior to parents and students.

Figure Thirteen

Q18 How often have you experienced microaggressions (based on socioeconomic status, disability, gender, gender expression or identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, or religion) in your capacity as a Speech and Debate coach from other coaches?

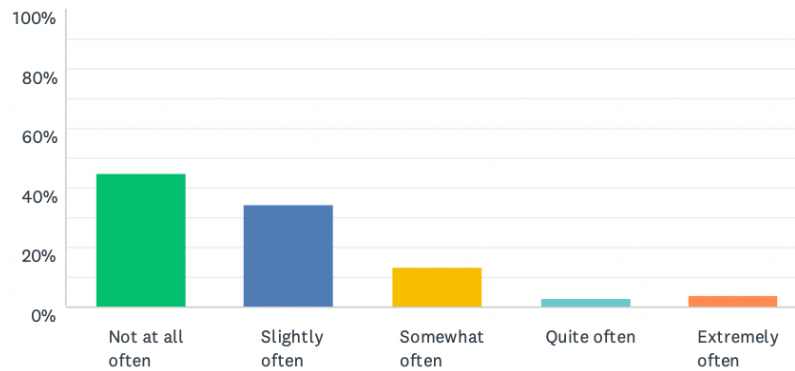


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not at all often	43.88%	43
Slightly often	24.49%	24
Somewhat often	17.35%	17
Quite often	8.16%	8
Extremely often	6.12%	6
TOTAL		98

Figure Fourteen

Q19 How often have you experienced microaggressions (based on socioeconomic status, disability, gender, gender expression or identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, or religion) in your capacity as a Speech and Debate coach from parents and/or students?

Answered: 98 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not at all often	44.90%	44
Slightly often	34.69%	34
Somewhat often	13.27%	13
Quite often	3.06%	3
Extremely often	4.08%	4
TOTAL		98

After further delving into the data, these findings indicate that women, coaches with disabilities, and coaches of color are all more likely to experience microaggressions in the activity than males, coaches without disabilities, and white coaches.

- 35% of self-identified white male coaches said they experienced microaggressions ‘somewhat’ or ‘quite’ often from coaches, parents, and/or students in comparison with 48% of white females. No white male coaches said they experienced microaggressions ‘extremely often.’
- 45% of coaches of color said they experienced microaggressions ‘somewhat,’ ‘quite,’ or ‘extremely’ often.in comparison to 34% of white coaches.
- 61.5% of coaches with disabilities said they experienced microaggressions ‘somewhat,’ ‘quite,’ or ‘extremely’ often.

More coaches described experiencing microaggressions than linked microaggressions to a desire to stay in or leave the activity. Intuitively, I hypothesized that facing discrimination may lead marginalized coaches to quit. However, as one coach explained, dealing with bias made them more likely to dig in their heels and stay.

“Any microaggressions have usually made me dig in my heels even more. ‘No one puts Baby in the corner!’”

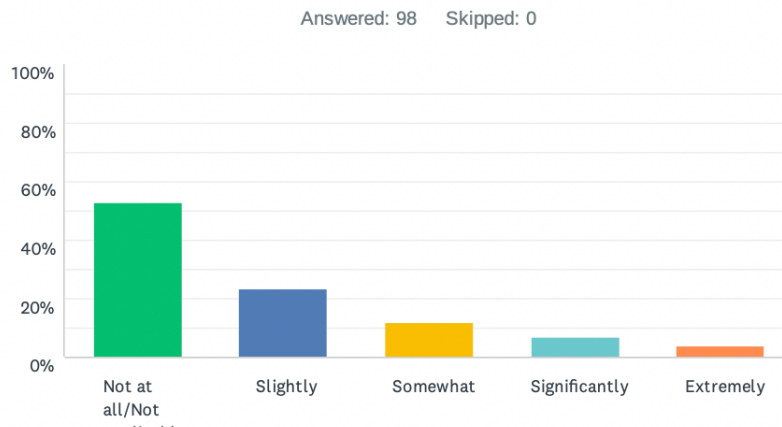
Another coach explained why dealing with sexism, racism, and ableism in the community made them want to coach more: they wanted to change it and make it a more inclusive space for their students and future generations of educators.

“Microaggressions have impacted my desire to be in the activity on a number of levels, but two that come to mind are A) it has meant I’ve stopped pursuing close friendships with other debate coaches and B) it has been an impetus to stay involved and help students in my position.”

Based on the quantitative analysis, these are likely microaggressions experienced by the coaches. If a coach behaved in a discriminatory manner towards another coach, which my analysis indicates is more likely to be initiated by a coach than a parent or student, it makes sense for the second coach to disconnect from the first.

Figure Fifteen summarizes these findings:

Q20 If you have experienced microaggressions in your capacity as a Speech and Debate coach, to what degree have they impacted your desire to stay in the activity?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not at all/Not applicable	53.06%	52
Slightly	23.47%	23
Somewhat	12.24%	12
Significantly	7.14%	7
Extremely	4.08%	4
TOTAL		98

Finding 6: Speech and Debate coaches are frustrated by inconsistencies in rules and norms.

Many coaches referenced their frustration with a lack of a centralized Speech and Debate authority. A spokesperson for the National Speech and Debate Association, when posed with the problem of cracking down on sexual harassment in privately-run Speech and Debate camps, admitted to lacking an accreditation process for coaches, judges, tournaments, and camps (Gray, 2020). As Gray (2020) reported:

“And because debate camps function differently than most traditional summer camps, the American Camping Association accreditation system does not necessarily apply. (The ACA suggests that all camps, regardless of structure or focus, become accredited to signal that they are “fully invested in understanding and implementing policies that reflect industry recognized standards in the health, safety, and risk management of camp operations.”)”

This accreditation problem is indicative of the problems beyond Speech and Debate camp regulation. While the NSDA promotes itself as the definitive authority on high school Speech and Debate (for instance, its Twitter handle is @speechanddebate), it has not taken on the task of enforcing its authority on interstate matters of judge education, community accountability, tournament rules, and transparency in the tabulation room. One coach lamented:

“I think that a lot of the systemic issues that people on the margins of the speech and debate community face are generally upheld by the power structures in the community. Also, we've made it easy for people who prey on children to be part of this community, to the detriment of all.”

Without the NSDA to enforce national norms, state organizations like CHSSA—which anecdotally operate with a fraction of the NSDA’s budget and outreach--must create regional rules. These regional norms sometimes conflict with the NSDA and TOC’s standards. For example, debate at the CHSSA state championship is substantially less speedy and technical than debate at the Tournament of Champions, which leads some top California debaters to skip the CHSSA tournament entirely based on the expectation that their judges will be untrained and unable to process their nuanced arguments.

Additionally, this lack of norm enforcement leads to a split in coaching philosophies. While some coaches ignore the national circuit tournaments and focus on their state competitions, others try to impose national circuit norms on the state tournament, leading to a divide that one coach characterized as a conflict between “educator” and “competitor” coaches. Another coach suggested there does not need to be an arbitrary distinction between the two categories (someone can be competitively successful and still focus on developing life skills over winning trophies), but this perceptual divide leads to

feelings of alienation and discontent between already burnt-out coaches. Three coaches' remarks characterize this sense of estrangement:

“Although I am a white male who responded that he doesn't feel any microaggressions in any capacity, I do feel a bit of "imposter syndrome" in my capacity as a coach. I want my kids to do well, and I try to find them opportunities to grow, but I have never been a competitor in speech and debate. There is definitely a "class" division between a coach who focuses on local/league comps, and a circuit coach.”

“I find the Speech and Debate world quite rude and toxic.”

“The other coaches in my league are very drama driven; I mostly ignore their emails. There are constantly huge email chains where people get upset at the smallest things. If I did get involved, it would emotionally exhausting.”

One NSDA-affiliated coach indicated problems of community safety are unlikely to be solved until the NSDA substantially reevaluates its willingness to engage in legal battles in hypothetical scenarios with coaches and judges who have their accreditation revoked. Some norms come down to coach and student preference and cannot be systematically controlled. However, other models—in particular, standards of ethical behavior and transparent systems of consequences—are normal in high school sports. For example, the University Interscholastic League of Texas has eight pages of specific, year-round rule violations and penalties for students and coaches. CHSSA's 107 pages of state tournament-related bylaws regulate student behavior in rounds in vague terms. There are no bylaws specifically designed to define (or specific consequences listed for violations of) good judge and coach behavior. Some of CHSSA's leagues (such as the Tri-County Forensic League and the Golden Gate Speech Association) have independently defined these terms. Recently, CHSSA adopted a paragraph-long equity policy:

“The California High School Speech Association is committed to providing its participants, judges, coaches, and members the opportunity to pursue excellence in their endeavors. This opportunity can exist only when each member of our community is assured an atmosphere of mutual respect. CHSSA is committed to maintaining an environment that is free from all forms of harassment and discrimination. Accordingly, all forms of harassment and discrimination are prohibited, whether committed by participants, judges, coaches, or observers. CHSSA is committed to the enforcement of this policy. Individuals who are found to have violated this policy will be subject to the full range of sanctions, up to and including removal from the tournament premises and prosecution by authorities. Any individual or group of individuals who believes they have been a victim of harassment and/or discrimination should report it via the Equity Office Intake Form or other appropriate authority immediately.”

While removal from the state tournament may seem like a significant deterrent to bad behavior, some coaches remarked that it is not specific enough. First, it does nothing to regulate bad behavior at CHSSA-sanctioned league tournaments before the state championship. Second, it lacks clarity on what CHSSA intends to happen in a case where (for example) a coach is removed mid-tournament for harassment but consequently leaves their students without a mandatory chaperone. The paragraph (and the word 'equity') appears nowhere in CHSSA's official bylaws. Based on conversations with CHSSA leadership, equity is a driving focus of the current body. Unfortunately, while this anti-discrimination work may be conceptually front and center for them, mechanisms of equity enforcement are functionally absent in their governing legislation. Without a clear way to handle equity issues, the "toxicity" in the activity may fester, and burnout will continue.

Recommendations

My final question asked, considering my earlier findings, which organizational rules and procedures can mitigate burnout in Speech and Debate coaches. Based on these six primary findings, I developed five recommendations for the California High School Speech Association to address these feelings of burnout.

These recommendations are modeled on Glen, Suciu, Baugh, and Anson's (2015) five-step Design Thinking model (empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test). Garvin, Edmondson, and Gino (2008) suggest that the first building block of a learning organization is a supportive learning environment, which includes psychological safety, and appreciation of differences, openness to new ideas, and time for reflection. Design thinking, iteration, and uncertainty can be difficult for teachers who are wary of change to conceptualize (Henriksen, Gretter, & Richardson, 2020). Improvement science-oriented balancing measures may account for the adverse consequences of experimentation since not all experimentation is beneficial (Lewis, 2015). Finally, I determined a need to provide CHSSA with thorough data visualizations of my findings, since data fluency can empower organizations to make more informed comparisons on the efficacy of the various change initiatives/ideations we propose (Gemignani & Gemignani, 2014).

Recommendation 1: Gain perspective and capital by connecting with alumni and retirees.

My findings indicated that coaches felt burnt out because, in part, they are incentivized to do too many things with too little financial support. Financial inequities can lead to overwork. To better study this concept on a broader scale and get the capital to solve structural problems, CHSSA should follow the NSDA's proactive fundraising and outreach model.

CHSSA, an organization with over 50 years of history, has a comparatively meager level of systematic outreach to their thousands of alumni and retired coaches. There is no regular newsletter (in comparison to the NSDA's quarterly *Rostrum* magazine). There is intermittent fundraising. As a former outreach director, I was instructed to reach out to partner organizations for sponsorships in the months leading up to the state championship. However, these alumni outreach efforts should be substantially augmented via a three-pronged approach.

1. **Fundraising:** Luong's (2000) findings correlate Speech and Debate experience with collegiate admissions. College graduation is correlated with increased lifelong income. As Broady and Hershbein (2020) reported, the median earnings of bachelor's degree graduates are higher than the median earnings of high school graduates for all 98 majors studied. Consequently, Speech and Debate alumni

may have more purchasing and fundraising power than the general population. I advise CHSSA to call on coaches to create an alumni database for fundraising purposes. This money can be used to help low-income schools cover hired judge fees and entry fees at league and state-level competitions.

2. **Feedback:** In addition to raising the money to better finance in-need students, CHSSA can use an alumni database (of former students and coaches) to better understand the impact of Speech and Debate on its former participants. This burnout survey is limited by its focus on available contributors, most of whom are still coaching. Getting feedback from graduates who no longer have a competitive stake in the outcome of future tournaments may lead to a clearer picture of problems and solutions.
3. **Coaching:** Finally, the general shortage of Speech and Debate coaches leads to many coaches taking on more duties than they have time or energy to healthily complete. If more coaches can volunteer time and share the burden, the bulk of the work may be more sustainably diffused. An alumni newsletter may alert prospective coaches to opportunities in their area. When considered alongside step two (feedback), CHSSA can also use qualitative questions to unearth specific roadblocks between unwilling prospective coaches and the decision to help teams.

Recommendation 2: Create certification programs by partnering with the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA).

The NSDA, CHSSA's sister organization, has already developed resources for judge and coach education. However, they have stopped short of following major high school sports and educational associations and creating formalized processes for judge and coach certification. This lack of clear, transparent, standardized systems has led to many of the cultural problems—unabated toxicity and microaggressions—within the coaching community. I advise CHSSA to develop a committee specifically to fulfill four goals:

1. **NSDA Outreach:** Work with the NSDA to determine what has prevented them from finalizing their own judge and coach certification courses. The NSDA previously floated a coach accreditation program; I completed several Google Forms related to my coaching experience before being approved. Then, it was taken down without any direct explanation or notification. Better understanding the internal issues the NSDA has dealt with throughout iterations of their program may prevent CHSSA from making the same mistakes.
2. **Judge Certification:** Create courses (or adapt existing courses from the National Federation of State High School Associations) for judges to complete before being allowed to judge at CHSSA-affiliated competitions (league or state tournaments). CHSSA uses the Tabroom.com software to run its state championship tournament; Tabroom has a function that prevents student or judge registration without uploaded documentation. If the NSDA can develop a certification that automatically links to Tabroom and indicates which judges have completed the courses, CHSSA has an easy way to verify judge education; without that, CHSSA

can still alter the Tabroom software to allow coaches to manually upload verification documentation.

- 3. Bylaw Revision:** Create a committee to thoroughly incorporate and explain the recently adopted equity language directly into CHSSA's bylaws, address potential scenarios that may result from their implementation, and consider how CHSSA leagues may be incentivized to adopt the same language at their local tournaments.

Moreover, increasing diverse representation may change how future generations view an activity. Miller, Nolla, Eagly, and Uttal (2018) discovered that, across five decades, children became more accustomed to associating the image of a scientist with a female because of increased media representation and observation. Schofield (2001) furthers that observing successful exemplars from historically marginalized groups increases the likelihood that similarly marginalized students will participate in those events. Addressing barriers to success and participation for coaches may have ripple effects for students.

Recommendation 3: Design guidance for 'quality of life'-oriented roles at Speech and Debate competitions.

Multiple surveyed coaches complained about the deleterious impact of Speech and Debate involvement on their quality of life. They described a harrowing sleep schedule, nutritionally poor food options, and a tournament staff with too many duties to comfortably accomplish by themselves. CHSSA has recently provided accommodating spaces, good food options (including vouchers for in-need students), mental health-oriented perks (such as therapy dogs), and a reasonably spaced-out schedule for students. I advise CHSSA to document and distribute best practices related to mental and physical health to their affiliated leagues and California invitational tournaments. This should include developing guidelines for ombudspeople, equity officers, and venue specialists. Some coaches described their willingness to help run tournaments and demystify the process of tabulating the competitions but doubted their expertise. A standardized list of roles and responsibilities for modern competitions—both in-person and virtual—may help lower the barrier to entry.

Recommendation 4: Create committees to reimagine tournaments' length, the span of the competition season, and the awards system.

First, the introduction of online tournaments offers new opportunities to experiment with at-home, pre-recorded, and hybrid Speech tournaments that are less demanding of coach time and energy. Consider a tournament with four preliminary rounds—two of them judged asynchronously over the week before the tournament and the final two judged on the day of the weekend tournament. Students would have to prove their mastery of two different mediums (pre-recorded and live) to advance to elimination rounds. The time to complete the live weekend tournament would be reduced to a

fraction of its former iteration, giving students and coaches more time for non-Speech activities. I recommend that CHSSA create a committee to experiment at the league level with these alternatives.

Second, every state has its own independent body dedicated to high school forensics and/or performance-related activities. Some state organizations, such as the Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA), intentionally limit the number of tournaments students or teams can attend before losing eligibility at their state championship contest. This minimizes coaches' incentives to take their teams to year-round weekend competitions. CHSSA can consider implementing similar rules to prevent coaches from burning out. If there are Speech tournaments every weekend, some coaches will feel incentivized and pressured to take their students to tournaments every weekend. Currently, the most resourceful teams can enter every tournament, giving them a tremendous competitive advantage over the teams who can only afford to attend a handful of tournaments. This recommendation may also mitigate the resource divide between wealthy and less fortunate programs.

Finally, there are alternative frameworks for tournament results that may disincentivize awards-obsessed coaches from maintaining toxic mindsets.

1. CHSSA recently incorporated supplemental events into its offerings at the 2021 online CA state championship—open to all CHSSA students, even those who did not qualify to the state tournament. This measure increased opportunities for coaches and students to compete at the state championship and expanded the number of teams who were able to take state awards back to their districts and receive praise and support from their local community.
2. The California community college state championship (and Phi Roh Pi community college national championship) does not award students first, second, or third place. Rather, it separates top students into bronze, silver, and gold tiers. Generally, students who advance to the second-to-last elimination round (semifinals) win a 'bronze' award; students who place in the bottom half of the final elimination round win a 'silver' award; and students who place in the top half of the final elimination round win a 'gold' award. This system is spreading outside of community college; for instance, the 2021 National Online Forensics Championship hosted their middle and elementary school championships with this system. Anecdotally, many younger coaches reported experiencing or observing a need to coach a state champion (and, in some cases, dealing with "toxic" feelings of dissatisfaction when coaching state runners-up or finalists). This alternative is worth exploring.

Recommendation 5: Expand the scope of this report and receive feedback from the community at large before implementing the other recommendations.

CHSSA should use the data discovered in phase two (and the database of individuals who included their contact information in the survey) to conduct their own systematic

interviews about the feasibility of these recommendations. They should further develop systematic data collection mechanisms so that additional insights could be gained for continuous improvement.

Historically, CHSSA's Executive Board has operated with several layers of distance between themselves and the ground-level coaches. They rely on elected officials from leagues to report on goings-on at league tournaments. Anecdotally, this reliance has allowed political disputes to get in the way of thorough information-gathering. For instance, if a league president has a competitive incentive to mischaracterize their league's views on a new bylaw, and there is no data to contradict their improper characterization, minority viewpoints from their league may be ignored or misrepresented. Gathering more ground-up data—especially to inform the fidelity of their council-level decisions--may improve the legitimacy of CHSSA decision-making in the eyes of the general population. Additionally, incorporating student advocates and representatives into the council, as one respondent suggested, may also increase the CHSSA Executive Board's capacity to act responsively.

Limitations and Conclusions

Like all research, this project has limitations. In addition to some concerns explored in my earlier sections, there was a relatively low number of respondents to the qualitative portion of the data collection (only 98 out of 612 coaches responded – a rate of merely 16%). Second, the most burnt-out coaches are likely the ones who have already left the activity, but I did not interview many of them. More research is needed to determine what the bulk of already-retired coaches believe about burnout in the activity. Third, there were technological limitations to my data collection. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all my interviews were conducted online, and my reach was limited. If this study was explored during a pandemic-free season, I would have enjoyed easier access to a wider number of coaches at the 2020 and 2021 CHSSA State Championship tournaments. Fourth, since I was the sole coder and reviewer of the data, my own confirmation bias as a Speech and Debate coach and CHSSA member may have played a role in skewing my analysis. Fifth, while every coach I interviewed had experience with CHSSA and California competitions, not every coach was an active CHSSA member. If I constrained my sample to current CHSSA members only, my results may have differed.

This quality improvement project sought to understand the prevalence of burnout in Speech and Debate, its connection to demographic factors, and ways the California High School Speech Association can address it. This is not an exhaustive report on burnout in Speech and Debate, but it is the most comprehensive work to address the causes, harms, and solutions of emotional and physical exhaustion in CHSSA's recorded history. Major findings revealed that while coaches report feeling burned out, many remain in the activity. This exhaustion imperils coaches' sense of well-being, capacity to guide and serve as healthy role models for their students, and the long-term growth of the activity.

As many Speech and Debate students advocate for their activity to become more inclusive and accommodating, I fear they will be hampered by their already-exhausted coaches, many of whom lack the emotional energy to meaningfully engage with their demands. In my view, addressing the systemic factors that cause inordinate levels of coaching burnout is a prerequisite to solving many of the other, more widely studied cultural issues in the activity.

When researching this project, I discovered a tweet by one of the most successful Speech and Debate competitors in history – a national award winner at the middle, high school, and collegiate levels (Nellans, 2021).

I do not wish to exist in the same timeline as adult speech and debate. A disturbing idea, toxic, truly cursed. Somebody has created an all-ages professional forensics league where people compete to win money. And apparently some people are supportive of this idea?!?!

Over a hundred Twitter users liked her tweet. On a gut level, I understood the sentiment. This activity drives many of its long-time participants away. The elements of obsessive practice, the unhealthy amounts of time spent practicing and competing, the unethical tendency of some participants to put victory before virtue, and the lack of systemic accountability for bad behavior are all daunting.

However, there are many examples of highly popular adult iterations of high schoolers' activities. There are high school chess clubs and adult chess world championships. There are high school sports teams and professional sports leagues. There are high school drama performances and adult Broadway shows. What is it about Speech and Debate that engenders such powerfully phrased sentiments of exhaustion and disgust?

I fell in love with the activity over 10 years ago, steadily experienced feelings of burnout, worthlessness, and toxicity as I grew unhealthily obsessed with it, and want to see this potentially remarkable experience help others access their potential without forcing them to risk experiencing the same sort of misery. Speech and Debate competitors and coaches can talk a great game, but the time has come to accelerate action and seek systemic solutions to the endemic problem of burnout.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Phase One Survey Questions

The following questions correspond to PHASE ONE of the study, which entails a series of interviews and focus groups designed to develop the most applicable questions for PHASE TWO (the mass survey) and PHASE THREE (the solutions-oriented Design Thinking interviews/focus groups). I cannot yet include the questions for PHASES TWO AND THREE because their content will depend on PHASE ONE.

DISCLAIMER: I am collecting information for a research study on the intersection of ableism, equity, stress, and burnout in Speech and Debate coaches. The interview is confidential -- this means that we won't use your name, but we will use the information you provide to report back data in aggregate.

These are our three research questions:

1. What tournament rules and procedures can combat burnout and stress in high school Speech and Debate competitions?
2. Which factors exacerbate burnout and stress in high school Speech and Debate coaches?
3. How can Speech and Debate tournaments improve accessibility and equity?

Our study has three phases. This interview is part of phase one, where I am gathering community feedback to develop the most useful measures for a comprehensive coach survey. Phase two involves that survey's data-gathering. In phase three, once the data is gathered, I will conduct another series of interviews and focus groups dedicated to finding solutions for problems uncovered in phases one and two.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you decide at any point during the interview that you would like to stop your participation, you may do so at any time. I will record your response to each question and read back to you what I have written if requested.

If I have misunderstood what you have said or inaccurately recorded your response, please let me know and I will make corrections before moving to the next question. To help ensure that I accurately capture your responses, I would like to record your interview. The recording will not be shared with anyone other than me, the Primary Investigator. Opting to record the interview is completely optional. Should you decide during your interview that you would like to stop recording, you may do so at any time. Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable answering a particular question, please feel free to skip it. May I record this interview? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Identity/Background Questions

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) What is your age?

- 3) What is your current occupation?
- 4) How would you describe your gender identity?
- 5) How would you describe your racial identity?
- 6) How would you describe your sexual orientation?
- 7) Would you describe yourself as a person with a disability?
- 8) Would you like to elaborate on any of your previous answers?

Speech and Debate Experience Questions

- 1) For how many years have you coached Speech and Debate?
- 2) Which Speech and Debate categories have you coached?
- 3) In which of the following formats have you coached Speech and Debate: private coach hired by a team, private coach hired by an individual, camp coach, classroom/school coach, other?
- 4) Which levels of Speech and Debate have you coached: elementary school, middle school, high school, college, other?
- 5) Which sorts of Speech and Debate competitions have you coached for: local/league, invitationals, state, circuit, nationals, other?
- 6) Why would you say you began coaching Speech and Debate?
- 7) Are you still coaching Speech and Debate?
 - a. If so, why?
 - b. If not, why did you stop?
- 8) How many hours per week, on average, did you dedicate to Speech and Debate coaching?
- 9) What were your primary duties as a Speech and Debate coach?
- 10) What words come to mind when you think about your Speech and Debate coaching experience?
- 11) Would you like to elaborate on any of your previous answers?

Research Questions

First, let me define burnout for the purposes of this study. From Smith, Segal, and Robinson (2019): “Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands.” Are there any questions about that definition?

- 1) To what degree have you personally experienced stress or burnout related to Speech and Debate? Please elaborate.
 - a. To what degree have you noted others’ stress or burnout related to Speech and Debate? Please elaborate.
 - b. Are there tournament rules or procedures that exacerbate feelings of stress or burnout in Speech and Debate? Please name them (and why).

- c. Are there tournament rules or procedures you've experienced that mitigate feelings of stress or burnout in Speech and Debate? Please name them (and why).
 - d. Are there tournament rules or procedures you've thought about, but not personally experienced, that mitigate feelings of stress or burnout in Speech and Debate? Please name them (and why).
- 2) Have you experienced issues of accessibility and equity related to Speech and Debate? Please elaborate.
- a. To what degree have you noted others' issues of accessibility and equity related to Speech and Debate? Please elaborate.
 - b. Are there tournament rules or procedures that exacerbate issues of accessibility and equity in Speech and Debate? Please name them (and why).
 - c. Are there tournament rules or procedures you've experienced that mitigate issues of accessibility and equity in Speech and Debate? Please name them (and why).
 - d. Are there tournament rules or procedures you've thought about, but not personally experienced, that mitigate issues of accessibility and equity in Speech and Debate? Please name them (and why).
- 3) Are there any community norms or issues you haven't already mentioned that contribute to a negative environment for Speech and Debate coaches, exacerbating burnout?
- 4) Would you like to elaborate on any of your previous answers?

Survey Tools

- 1) I'm going to share my screen and show you questions from the Panorama Equity and Inclusion guide. Please take a moment to review the questions (9-10). Are there any questions that you see as particularly important to include in a comprehensive coach survey to answer our research questions?
- a. Are there any questions here that you see as particularly distracting or irrelevant in a comprehensive coach survey to answer our research questions?
 - b. Are there any Speech and Debate-specific survey questions on the broad issue of Equity and Inclusion that are not represented in the Panorama Equity and Inclusion guide?
- 2) Now, I'm going to share my screen and show you questions from the AMS-65, a Microaggression Scale. Please take a moment to review the questions (14-16). Are there any questions that you see as particularly important to include in a comprehensive coach survey to answer our research questions?
- a. Are there any questions here that you see as particularly distracting or irrelevant in a comprehensive coach survey to answer our research questions?

- b. Are there any Speech and Debate-specific survey questions on the broad issue of ableism that are not represented in the AMS-65?
- 3) Finally, I'm going to share my screen and show you measures from a survey related to coaching stressors (6-7). Please take a moment to review the measures. Are there any measures that you see as particularly important to include in a comprehensive coach survey to answer our research questions?
 - a. Are there any measures here that you see as particularly distracting or irrelevant in a comprehensive coach survey to answer our research questions?
 - b. Are there any Speech and Debate-specific survey questions on the broad issue of coach stressors that are not represented in this survey?

Concluding Questions

- 1) Is there any general or specific topic related to our research questions that you would like to elaborate on?
- 2) Would you be open to sharing this interview opportunity with other coaches in the community?
- 3) Would you be open to a follow-up interview related to our findings from Phase Two, our comprehensive survey, after enough data is gathered?

Appendix B: Phase One Survey Questions

These questions were distributed through the url
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/speechburnoutresearch>.

As a doctoral student in the Leadership, Learning, and Organizations program at Vanderbilt University, I am inviting you to participate in a capstone project about issues of equity, access, stress, and burnout in the Speech and Debate community. You have been identified as a potential respondent because of your experience as a Speech and Debate coach.

This study has been approved by the President of the California High School Speech Association (CHSSA). There is so much that Speech and Debate can and must do better for both its students and coaches and your feedback will assist us in getting there. Participation is voluntary and your response will be kept anonymous (unless you opt in to share your contact information for a follow-up). Participation or nonparticipation will not impact your relationship with CHSSA. Agreement to participate will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate and that you are at least 18 years of age.

*** 1. What is your age?**

18-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+
Decline to state

*** 2. How would you describe your gender identity?**

Decline to state
Please specify:

*** 3. How would you describe your racial identity?**

Decline to state
Please specify:

*** 4. Would you describe yourself as a person with a disability?**

Yes
No

Decline to state

*** 5. Are you currently a Speech and Debate coach?**

Yes (I'm still coaching)

No (I'm not currently coaching)

*** 6. For how many years have you coached Speech and Debate?**

1-2

3-5

6-10

11-15

16-25

26+

*** 7. Which Speech and Debate categories have you coached? Check all that apply.**

Platform Speaking [Oratory, Informative, etc.]

Limited Prep Speaking [Impromptu, Extemporaneous, etc.]

Interpretation of Literature [Humorous, DUO, POI, etc.]

Student Congress

Debate

*** 8. In which of the following formats have you coached Speech and Debate? Check all that apply.**

Classroom/school coach

Camp coach

Private coach hired by an individual

Private coach hired by a team

*** 9. Which levels of Speech and Debate have you coached? Check all that apply.**

Elementary school

Middle school

High school

College

*** 10. What sorts of Speech and Debate competitions have you prepared students for? Check all that apply.**

Local/league tournaments

Invitational tournaments

State tournaments
National circuit/TOC tournaments

*** 11. DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR: How many hours per week, on average, have you dedicated to Speech and Debate coaching?**

1-5 hours
6-10 hours
11-20 hours
21-40 hours
41+ hours

*** 12. DURING THE SUMMER: How many hours per week, on average, have you dedicated to Speech and Debate coaching?**

1-5 hours
6-10 hours
11-20 hours
21-40 hours
41+ hours

*** 13. How connected do you feel to other coaches in the Speech and Debate community? [If you're no longer coaching, how connected *did* you feel to other coaches in the Speech and Debate community?]**

Not at all connected
Slightly connected
Somewhat connected
Quite connected
Extremely connected

*** 14. How connected is your sense of personal well-being to your Speech and Debate involvement? [If you're no longer coaching, how connected *was* your sense of personal well-being to your Speech and Debate involvement?]**

Not at all connected
Slightly connected
Somewhat connected
Quite connected
Extremely connected

*** 15. How often have you experienced feelings of emotional exhaustion based on your Speech and Debate coaching?**

Not at all often
Slightly often
Somewhat often
Quite often
Extremely often

*** 16. How often have you experienced feelings of physical fatigue (including sleep quality concerns) based on your Speech and Debate coaching?**

Not at all often
Slightly often
Somewhat often
Quite often
Extremely often

*** 17. How often have you experienced feelings of financial stress based on your Speech and Debate coaching?**

Not at all often
Slightly often
Somewhat often
Quite often
Extremely often

*** 18. How often have you experienced microaggressions (based on socioeconomic status, disability, gender, gender expression or identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, or religion) in your capacity as a Speech and Debate coach from other coaches?**

Not at all often
Slightly often
Somewhat often
Quite often
Extremely often

*** 19. How often have you experienced microaggressions (based on socioeconomic status, disability, gender, gender expression or identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, or religion) in your capacity as a Speech and Debate coach from parents and/or students?**

Not at all often
Slightly often
Somewhat often
Quite often

Extremely often

*** 20. If you have experienced microaggressions in your capacity as a Speech and Debate coach, to what degree have they impacted your desire to stay in the activity?**

Not at all/Not applicable

Slightly

Somewhat

Significantly

Extremely

*** 21. If you have any questions, concerns, or other thoughts on this topic, please write them here. (This is an anonymous survey; if you do not share your email, I will be unable to respond to questions.)**

Decline to state

Please describe below

Questions, thoughts, or concerns:

*** 22. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview or focus group with other respondents concerning this survey's findings? [Check all that apply.]**

Yes, in an individual interview.

Yes, in a focus group.

No.

*** 23. If you answered affirmatively to the previous question, please supply your name and email.**

Decline to state

If you'd like to supply the contact information: