

The Opportunity

The Elsik Debate Team's afterschool program fosters a dynamic and supportive environment for students, encouraging them to express themselves confidently and helping them find and pursue their interests and passions. By participating in structured debates and collaborative activities, students develop a strong sense of ownership and empowerment. The program also provides positive learning experiences that enhance critical thinking, public speaking, and teamwork skills. The Elsik Debate Team is dedicated to nurturing well-rounded individuals who are prepared to excel both academically and personally.



In Practice

The Elsik Debate Team afterschool program cultivates articulate, confident, and critically thinking students. Their mission is to empower young people by providing a platform for self-expression, fostering intellectual curiosity, and promoting leadership skills. The program runs Monday through Friday from 3:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. for students in 9th to 12th grade, with an average attendance of 50 students daily.

A typical day at the program begins with a brief group meeting where students discuss the day's objectives and any upcoming events or competitions. Students then engage in rigorous debates, receive constructive feedback, and participate in skill-building activities such as public speaking drills, research sessions, and critical thinking exercises.

The program offers exposure to different debate formats, including Lincoln Douglas, Public Forum, and Policy Debate, allowing students to explore diverse aspects of argumentation and advocacy. They regularly invite guest speakers from various fields, such as law, politics, and journalism, to discuss real-world applications of debate skills and potential career paths, and organize field trips to local universities, courts, and city council meetings. The program also includes workshops on topics such as ethical reasoning, media literacy, and civic engagement, which help students connect their debate experiences to broader societal issues. These opportunities give students a firsthand look at how debate skills are utilized in various professional settings, broadening their horizons and sparking new interests, while structured debates and continuous practice help students develop essential skills such as logical reasoning, persuasive communication, and effective research techniques.

Overall, the Elsik Debate Team afterschool program is a nurturing space where students can explore their interests, build essential life skills, and gain the confidence to pursue their passions. By providing diverse activities, real-world connections, and a supportive community, they help students unlock their potential and prepare for future success.

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

Edgar Euceda

Elsik Debate Team, Houston, TX



“Joining the Elsik Debate Team has been a transformative experience for me. When I first started, I was shy and terrified of speaking in front of others. The supportive environment of the afterschool program helped me gradually overcome this fear. Through regular practice and constructive feedback, I developed the confidence to express my ideas clearly and persuasively. The diverse activities offered, such as public speaking drills and ethical reasoning workshops, sparked my interest in social justice and civic engagement. I vividly remember a guest lecture from a local politician that inspired me to consider a career in law. The program also fostered a sense of community, where we encouraged and supported each other. One of my proudest moments was winning my first debate competition, which boosted my self-esteem and motivated me to keep improving. The skills I gained—critical thinking, effective research, and persuasive communication—have been invaluable, not just in debates, but in all areas of my life. The Elsik Debate Team has truly helped me discover my passions and prepared me for future success.”

Outcomes

The activities and supports provided by the Elsik Debate Team have had a significant impact on students, who report a greater sense of comfort when expressing their opinions. According to a recent in-house survey, 85% of students reported increased confidence in public speaking and critical thinking. Teachers have noted a 20% improvement in students’ grades in subjects requiring analytical skills. One parent shared, “Since joining the Elsik Debate Team, my child has become more articulate and confident. Their participation in class discussions has improved remarkably.” Additionally, students have expressed that the supportive environment of the program has helped them feel more engaged and motivated in their overall academic journey. For example, one student, Maria, initially joined the program with a fear of public speaking. With consistent practice and support from peers and mentors, she overcame her fear and became an eloquent debater. Her newfound confidence and skills earned her a scholarship to a prestigious university, where she plans to major in political science. Another student, Kaden, discovered a passion for journalism after attending a guest lecture by an investigative reporter. The lecture inspired him to join the school newspaper and pursue a summer internship at a local news station. The debate program’s emphasis on research and critical questioning directly contributed to his success in his endeavors.

The Challenge

Despite 85% of Texas parents supporting public funding for afterschool programs and 80% of voters nationally wanting federal, state, and local leaders to provide more funding for afterschool programs, too many young people are missing out. Nearly 25 million children are not in an afterschool program but want to be, including more than 2.5 million children in Texas. It’s evident that greater investment in afterschool and summer programs is needed to make sure that all young people have the same opportunities as the young people in the Elsik Debate Team afterschool program.

Edgar’s Tips

To foster a supportive environment that helps youth prepare for future careers:

- ▶ Encourage peer mentorship and provide regular, constructive feedback.
- ▶ Offer diverse activities and guest speakers to help students explore various interests and career paths.
- ▶ Create opportunities for real-world experiences, such as field trips and community engagement projects, to connect learning with practical applications.