

Meet the

Kennedy High School

DEBATE TEAM

At John F. Kennedy High School, a diverse neighborhood school in the Garfield Ridge community, 86% of the students are low-income. Like so many CPS Schools, Kennedy struggles with low academic performance and is working hard to improve student outcomes. The ambitious debate team, formed just two years ago, is a shining light in the school's efforts to promote academic success.

In 2012-13, the novice team started debating in the entry level conference. Intrigued by the intensity of competition and the exposure to real-world arguments, Kennedy's debaters quickly learned the ropes. Now the team has moved up two conferences, and is competing against some of the league's most advanced debaters.

As the Kennedy students debate, they are transforming their classroom learning. JV debater Ignacio Garcia tells us classwork and test-taking have become easier

since he started debate, while teammate Aaron Mendoza says that his reading comprehension has drastically improved.



“Debate gave me opportunities I wouldn't have had otherwise. We invest a lot of time into it and get a huge return.”

- Varsity debater Josh Kendrick

Senior Jenna Bilak finds that her classroom learning is “given substance through debate.” Coach Caitlin Miller says that other teachers approach her often to report that debate kids are showing dramatic improvements in the classroom.

JV debater Alexis Martinez aspires to be the first person in his family to attend college, and says that debate is preparing him for college success. Team Captain Husam Haj revels in his growing ability to connect philosophy with real world problems. During a recent admissions interview at Syracuse University, Senior Emily Steinmetz called debate her most valuable afterschool activity. “You learn so much in a short amount of time that there's a higher sense of impact. It's a different type of learning.” she says.

The Kennedy debaters have become worthy competitors and trailblazers for academic achievement at their school. As the seniors prepare to graduate, the rest of the team will follow in their footsteps -- transforming their lives through debate.