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Siblings are 1st-ever Boston school debate team to qualify for national tournament

Posted by [Matt Rocheleau](#) February 9, 2012 09:45 AM

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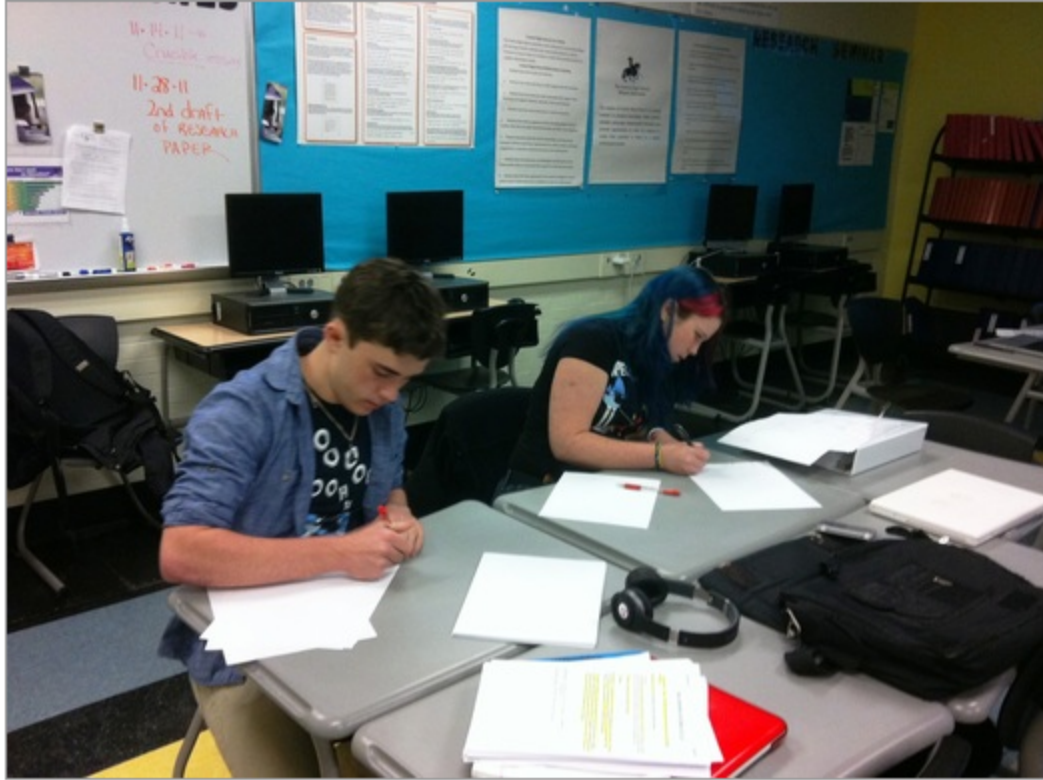
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(Boston Debate League)

Gena White and her brother Ted White are the first Boston schools' debate team to qualify for the National Forensics League competition.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

In what officials believe is a first for the city's public school district, a brother and sister debate team from a Boston school has qualified for the National Forensics League speech and debate competition.

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(Boston Debate League)
Ted and Gena White qualify at the regional competition.

At the New England District Qualifier over the weekend, the New Mission High School debate team of senior Gena White and her brother Ted White, a junior, qualified for the nationals in a double-elimination tournament.

Along with a team from Weston High School, the brother-sister duo will travel to Indianapolis and represent New England during the 2012 “[National Speech & Debate Tournament](#)” in mid-June, during what Steve Stein, director of the [Boston Debate League](#), described as “the most prestigious debate tournament in the country” that “tens of thousands of students compete to qualify for, but only a few make it.”

The tournament has been held annually since 1931, “except for the World War II years,” according to its website.

“Gena and Ted’s success is a testament to the dramatic impact our partnership with the Boston Debate League has had for our students,” the school system said in an e-mail newsletter this week.

Three-and-a-half years ago when BPS first partnered with the debate league nonprofit, 77 students from seven high schools participated in debates, according to Stein. This school year, more than 500 students from 12 high schools and five middle schools have participated in debate competitions, he said.

And, the organization is working with 450 teachers, up from 35 last year, to help the educators use debate techniques in the classroom.

The debate league agency formed six years ago as an all-volunteer organization teaching debate to 25 students from three schools. Since forming a partnership with and gaining funding from the city's school system, the organization has been able to hire paid staff and expand its outreach.

"The success of the debate team has shifted our culture, particularly our culture of achievement," said a statement from Naia Wilson, headmaster at New Mission High School in Mission Hill. "It has caused a positive domino effect where students are proud to be intellectuals."

Stein said the Boston Debate League's sponsors have pledged to cover the costs for the two students and their coach to travel to Indianapolis for the national competition this summer.

"Congratulations to Gena and Ted, as well as to NMHS coaches Ravi Singh, Bristol Kanjoian, and Camden Bahamon - we'll be rooting for you this summer," the school district newsletter said.

The Boston school system fielded other teams at the regional event this weekend -- including West Roxbury Academy, Excel High School in South Boston and Boston Latin Academy near where Roxbury and Dorchester meet.

If either of the top two teams are unable to represent the region in the national competition this summer, a team from West Roxbury Academy is next in line to take that spot as students Heaven Reda and James Macglashing were named New England's the first alternate team.

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(Boston Debate League)

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