

THE BUSINESS, ENGINEERING, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY



@ BENJAMIN S. CARSON MIDDLE SCHOOL

OFFICE OF GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION

Leads: Jeremiah Blount, II & Johnny Walker

Teachers: Barry E. Blackmon

Renee' Cushmeer

Patricia Gibson

Patia Odom-Mitchell

Rhonda Robinson



2013-2014 School Term

Greetings BEST Academy Community,

We are honored to share this brief activity summary of *The BEST Academy GREAT DEBATERS*.

The Business, Engineering, Science and Technology Academy at Benjamin S. Carson Middle School (B.E.S.T.) has a long tradition of excellence in debate. 1985 witnessed the founding of the Atlanta Urban Debate League (AUDL) as a partnership between the Atlanta Public Schools and Emory University's Barkley Forum. The organization has since expanded to:

24 UDL programs in major U.S. cities. 40,000 students and teachers have been through the program. 90% have graduated from high school; 75% have matriculated to college. [-http://atlantadebate.org](http://atlantadebate.org)



Those foundational days heralded great achievements at West Fulton, the school which sat upon this very site. In our present iteration, we work to build upon that legacy.

In Fall, 2012, *The BEST Academy GREAT DEBATERS* was formed after a year's silence; under Principal Womack's leadership, with Site Coordinator Smart's support, and with my guidance as Head Coach, Jeremiah

Blount, II. Some of the factors that compelled us to take this step follow:

* Among African American male students, debaters were 70 percent more likely to graduate from high school, three times less likely to drop out, 50 more likely to reach the ACT college-readiness benchmark for English, and 70 percent more likely to reach the ACT benchmark for reading

*90% of debaters go on to earn at least one graduate degree.

*For both gifted and at-risk students: When engaged, both groups of students act out less, by as much as 50%.

*Debate students tend to score better on standardized tests including the SAT and ACT, as well as state accountability assessments.

[-http://atlantadebate.org](http://atlantadebate.org)

In addition, as Gifted Lead Teacher, my focus centers on expanding opportunities for our young men to shine in an academic context. Elevating academics to the status of school sports teams encourages middle school-aged students to excel; whether they start as gifted, as regular education, or as struggling students. Each of these groups is well represented on our team,



and Debate's potential as a force for life change has proved true:

[Debaters'] daily speech is more liberally seasoned with a logical, reasoning flavor that allows them to navigate daily challenges more effectively. Not only do the boys more closely examine text dependent questions to reach appropriate conclusions, but they are more likely to question situations when reasonable thinking is not present; both in text and in daily life. In the days of the Common Core Standards, this cannot be overstated. This type of bravery lends them an edge that empowers them to enter into any arena with greater aplomb.

-Coach Blount, Summer 2013 AUDL Voice Newsletter

BEST Debate holds a brief meeting each morning during our Advisory Period, and the team travels to Georgia State University for a practice session with college level debate team members and professors each Thursday, returning at 7:00 p.m. In a season that spans September to March, we compete one Saturday per month with schools from as far as Calhoun, Georgia, according to the schedule that follows. We have recently petitioned to sponsor our first on-site tournament on January 18, 2014.

On Tournament Day, the GREAT DEBATERS meet at BEST at 7:00a.m, and board a bus to a Georgia high school or university. The BEST Men compete in teams of two against their opposition, before a judge. They battle in two rounds before lunch, and two after lunch, before participating in a massive same-day Awards Ceremony and returning to the BEST Academy by 5:30 p.m. Debate Coaches and school and parent volunteers serve as judges for the typically 80 rooms of debate matches simultaneously underway.

The benefits of debate are beyond reckoning:

Consistent with Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*, students consciously pursue the former aspects before benefitting from the latter:

- Daily recognition/ praise/ participation as GREAT DEBATERS
- Weekly field trips to Georgia State University for Debate Center with college-level debaters/ professors and snacks
- Monthly Tournaments/ field experiences with a full day out, regional travel, free pizza, and building new friendships
- A sense of team unity (a first, for some), "dress up" (BEST blazers for competition), opportunities to win medals
- Internalization and exhibition of word, reading, presentation, organization, note-taking, study, persuasiveness, reasoning, argumentation, and social skills
- Greater confidence in self, ability, fearlessness, decision-making, academic achievement and mental-over-physical power; and social and emotional growth

As such, we use real achievement and lavish praise as a means to realizing those lofty final objectives.

-Coach Blount, Letter to BEST Teachers, September, 2013

The Business, Engineering, Science and Technology Academy GREAT DEBATERS extend our deepest thanks to the BEST Administration, APS Social Studies Dept., After-School All-Stars, AUDL, and the 100 Black Men for continued support of our Debate Team efforts. The words above can only minimally express the positive changes that are evident in our young men. This academic enrichment is a vehicle that will carry the BEST Men to new heights. Indeed, we are now a part of a developing seven-year debate program that includes the middle and high school experience. Confidence, achievement, exposure, maturation, and scholarship dollars will certainly follow. All of these factors are key to our mission of producing the BEST Men.

Asante Sana (Thank you very much),

Jeremiah Blount II, MS

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Gifted Lead Teacher

Moot Court Coach

Guitar Instructor

