

Mentor night

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Speech students learn from peers and vice versa.

Nice job, Zac Franzen told Cale Moore after the Gothenburg High School sophomore presented an informative speech about people at different levels of technological understanding.

Franzen, a senior, then suggested ways for the first-year speech student to improve “Techno Teen.”

“Make sure you keep eye contact with people in the crowd,” he advised. “Gesture your points and make sure you don’t laugh at your own jokes.”

Earlier, Franzen stopped Moore in the middle of his speech to show him how to change his informative poster boards without blocking his face.

Welcome to Mentor Night—a Wednesday activity for Swede speech students where more experienced students mentor the less experienced.

Moore said mentoring is valuable because he receives opinions about his events from other

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people besides advisor Dan Jensen and assistant advisor Keri Dudley.

“It helps improve my speech because if I have too many speeches in front of the same judges, I hear the same comments,” Moore said. “It’s also nice to get opinions from your peers, not your coaches.”



Franzen agreed, noting that mentees receive different perspectives on what they’re doing.

In addition, he said mentors know what they’re doing because they’ve been in the same shoes as those being mentored.

Moore is also mentored in duet acting with Ryan Ostendorf and entertainment and extemporaneous speaking.

Mentoring this year is particularly valuable with about 15 students involved in extemporaneous speaking and 43 kids signed up for speech.

Jensen said they started mentor night four years ago out of desperation.

“Every kid couldn’t be seen in a half-hour practice and some kids do more than one event,” he said. “We wanted to give an audience to every kid and this—Mentor Night—is a neat byproduct.”

Jensen said he thinks it helps both the mentor and mentee.

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For example when he taught English, he said he became a better teacher by reading and evaluating student writing.

“They improve by critically evaluating another student’s work,” Jensen explained.

Peers also infuse an enthusiasm that coaches cannot.

Another example is when a humorous prose performer is having trouble developing a character.

Jensen said he puts the performer in a room with other wacky kids in the same event and “it’s amazing what they come up with.”

Mentor night begins after school Wednesdays at 3:45 p.m. and ends at 6:15 p.m. There are four to six sessions in each 30-minute session so each student practices his or her event once. Mentors sign up when they are available.

Dudley said mentoring is a great team-building activity.

“Everyone feels invested in other kids when they’re working with them,” Dudley said. “It helps mentors be better competitors because they can see the other side of it.”

Criteria to be a mentor includes that a student must have been in speech for two years, competed in a variety of events and work well with other students.

This year the five mentors are Franzen, Elisa Meridith, Brennan Costello, Chris Block and Ashlee Bruntz.

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Both Meridith, who was mentoring Costello, and Costello said they like the different viewpoints students receive.

“It’s also sometimes hard to get a coach every week,” Costello said.

Mentors, Meridith said, can point out something different that someone else may not have noticed.

Bruntz said mentoring is fun and gives mentors a chance to see all of the events teammates perform.

However mentoring can be difficult when mentors might not know how to help their mentees, Bruntz noted.

Rebecca Miller, who is in her first year of speech, said she likes Mentor Night but it sometimes makes her nervous.

“That’s because you know the people who are watching you,” Miller said.

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