

Bozeman Hawks speech and debate finishes season strong in national competition

[By Liz Weber Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

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Bozeman High School's speech and debate team received the highest placement of any Montana school at the national competition in recent memory, capping an **undefeated season and state championship**.

The Bozeman Hawks tied for 12th in the National Speech and Debate tournament, competing with more 1,300 schools from 48 states and five countries in a virtual competition that finished on Sunday.

"It is by far the best," said Adam Thane, head coach of the Bozeman High speech and debate team. "I think maybe a school in Montana has been in the top 80 before."

For the first time, the school also won two team awards: Speech School of Excellence and Debate School of Honor in the event, which ran from June 13 to 19.

Not only did the Hawks have one of the best finishes at the competition — the debate team also had one of the largest groups of students qualify to compete.

The school had 31 students, 11 of them seniors, competing. Eighteen of the students made it through the first round of eliminations. The largest number of students to qualify in the past was 20.

“It was a huge group. But the way the season went, it was an [undefeated season](#) all the way through for us,” Thane said. “Taking a huge number to nationals was a corollary to that.”

The seniors’ positivity and hard work throughout the year were infectious and led the team, Thane said.

Six students finished in the top 30, a feat that Thane, who has been head coach for the past eight year, said is rare.

For the second year, the national’s competition was virtual due to the pandemic, with the students meeting at the high school to compete during the events. Despite most of the speech and debate events occurring virtually this year, Thane said it didn’t faze the team.

“The way the season worked out with travel, things could have been a real downer. But really it just meant we all came together and got to know each other a lot better than we otherwise would,” Thane said.

In its inaugural year, the Gallatin High Raptors speech and debate team took four students to the national competition, although none made it past the first round of eliminations, according to Thane.

During the week-long competition, the energy of one moment stands out to Thane.

The whole team had gathered to watch the livestreamed announcement of those who made it through the second elimination round in the speech competition. Each Hawk who made it through the first cut had also made it through the second cut. The whole team cheered.

“It was a pretty special crew,” Thane said. “I’m incredibly proud of them and interested to see what happens to them in the rest of their lives.”