

Second high school splits Bozeman's ranked speech and debate team

[By Liz Weber Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

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After a season that saw it ranked 23rd in the world, Bozeman High School split its highly competitive speech and debate team into two, with the opening of the district's new high school.

The Hawkers team ended last season with one of its highest rankings from the National Speech and Debate Association, but students at both schools say they're ready to tackle the new season of competitions and challenges.

"It adds a bit more normal," Parker Summerhill, a senior at Bozeman High School, said of the start to the season. "Whatever it looks like, I'm just excited to have it back."

Speech and debate team students gathered recently echoed the excitement to be back with teammates, and discussed the importance of thoughtful rhetoric during these times.

"With how divided the country is, we have to be able to argue both sides (of an issue). Knowing how to understand the other point is important," said Mason Scurry, a senior at Bozeman High.

In September, the [Montana High School Association](#) – which oversees high school interscholastic activities – announced updates on its district, divisional and state tournaments, and safety requirements for practices. The MHSA board also voted to postpone the start of [speech and debate](#).

Adam Thane, the head coach at Bozeman High School, said tournaments are scheduled to take place in December, with the state competition scheduled for

early January. But as of now, he said the teams are in a holding pattern of sorts, with practices unable to take place until MHSAA allows it.

But preparations are still underway at both high schools, with practices scheduled to begin in early November.

In anticipation of the opening of Gallatin High, Thane said he began expanding the ranks of the Hawks speech and debate team the last few years so there would be enough students involved for two high schools. Last year, there were between 120 and 130 students on the team.

Thane said this year there are 55 to 65 returners to the Bozeman High team, with roughly 35 freshmen who have filled out an interest form.

He said it would be different with two teams in the district, especially splitting the pool of available assistant coaches to pull from.

“Starting a new team is challenging enough but starting a new team during a pandemic is even more so,” said Lynn Holsinger, the new speech and debate coach at Gallatin High School.

Holsinger, who was an assistant coach at Bozeman High School for five years, said she had mixed feelings over the creation of the second team.

“We’re sad to part with Bozeman High but also excited to build a new team,” she said.

Holsinger said Thane and the assistant coaches have been a great support.

She said there are 23 students who were previously with the Bozeman team but will be returning with the Gallatin Raptors. She said at least 20 freshman have also expressed interested in joining during a recent info meeting.

Thane and Holsinger said their students were excited and ready to get started preparing for competitions. They both said working with speech and debate students reaffirms their faith in humanity, especially now.

“In the present day, the ability to listen, to understand the validity of a belief system and to express your own belief system is crucial,” Thane said. “It should be practiced more than it is.”

The district has a long tradition of a strong speech and debate team. Thane said for the last 47 years, the high school team has placed in the top three at the state tournament.

Last February, the Bozeman High School team [placed second in the state tournament](#), losing to Flathead High School. At the end of nationals last year, the Bozeman High School junior Macy Thompson was ranked in first place for informative speaking — the first time a Bozeman competitor placed first in the world in their category.

Thompson said she was just excited to get back to giving speeches again, after about three months off.

Thane said the Bozeman School District had the benefit of watching and learning from Kalispell, which [split Flathead High into two schools](#) with the creation of Glacier High in 2007.

“Having that insight has made the whole process easier, and we’re keeping an open line of communication with the coaches (at Gallatin High),” he said.

Both head caches said they were looking forward to watching the development of a new team, with Thane saying he was “excited to see what they make of it.”

“I’m looking forward to this brand new team and the new school,” Holsinger said. “And letting (the students) develop it into something that will be a legacy and will last here.”