**Urban Debate League – April 2017 Curriculum**

There are only 3 weeks of practice this month (because New Haven schools have their Spring Break in April) and since we have two tournaments, Osterweis and UDL’s 3rd, this month’s topic is education. It’s meant to be a little more accessible than past curriculums to allow for more time for debating and drills during practice. The skill being highlighted this month is rebuttal speeches.

**Week 1 – Context and Osterweis Prep**

* Overview for the month
	+ Osterweis: Sunday, April 9th – really try to promote attendance as much as possible! It’s a great tournament for first-timers, because of the novice division, and also great for more experienced debaters because it’s bigger and allows for more competition with good feedback.
		- Use the email invitation that should’ve been sent to all coaches to provide additional information:
		- Different format (7-8-8-8-4-5 minute speeches)
		- Free breakfast/lunch
		- Novice and varsity divisions
		- YDA feedback
	+ Last UDL tournament of the year is April 28th
* General background information – discussions and debates about education often center around 3 main subtopics
	+ Goals of education
		- Discuss:
			* What is the purpose of school/education?
			* How is the American education system accomplishing or failing to accomplish these goals?
			* American students consistently rank behind students from several European and Asian countries in academic subjects – what does this say about our education system and changes that do or don’t need to be made?
		- Areas of debate under this subtopic often have to do with balancing different educational priority or reforming the way subjects are taught – one example of a common debate is standardized testing and the extent to which it’s necessary/detrimental.
	+ Control of student life
		- To what extent do students (high school students, for example) have control over their own decisions at school? To what extent should they have more freedom?
			* This freedom can relate to clothing (uniforms), behavior, courses, free speech
		- In loco parentis – while students are at school, teachers or other adults often legally assume the acting role of a parent or guardian
		- Past Supreme Court cases have resulted in students forfeiting some of their first amendment and privacy rights while at school – lockers can get searched, they can be punished for certain types of speech, etc.
	+ Accessibility to education
		- The quality of education varies widely from community to community, often across class lines
			* Most school districts are at least in part funded by property taxes, which means that the best neighborhoods often have access to the public schools with the highest funding
			* There is a wide disparity between suburban and inner-city schools in major urban centers like New York and Chicago, for example.
		- How can we correct for educational inequality? Should money be able to buy you a better education?
* In preparation for Osterweis, hold a practice debate using Osterweis format (longer speeches, 7-8-8-8-4-5 minutes respectively) instead of typical UDL format on one of the following two topics.
	+ Standardized testing (related to the goals of education)
	+ Free public college (relation to accessibility to education)

**Week 2 – Rebuttal Strategy and Practice**

* Start by discussing rebuttal strategy
	+ While rebuttal strategy will obviously be important in the last two speeches of the round, in order to convince your judge, it’s important for rebuttal to be interwoven into every speech (except maybe the PMC).
	+ When responding to an argument, the goal should be to ensure that by the end of your rebuttal, the judge no longer buys the argument to which you’re responding.
	+ Briefly explain the A-R-E mnemonic
		- Rebuttals should target the Assertion (claim), Reasoning (warrant), and/or Examples of the opponent’s argument
	+ Helpful rebuttal hints:
		- Explain why the argument is factually incorrect
		- Explain how the argument relies on unsound logic
		- Explain why, though the argument may be true, it’s irrelevant to the round or not as important as something else
* Next, spend some time discussing the background of one of the timely issues in education policy: school choice
	+ In a nutshell, school choice programs are ones that try to offer parents/students a wider array of educational options that the public school they would normally attend. One such program is that of school vouchers – families are given “vouchers” as an alternative to their local public school with which they can attend a private school or different public school and use the taxpayer funds that would otherwise have been spent on them at their local public school.
	+ Brainstorm how this impacts accessibility to education and some of the advantages and disadvantages of such a system.
* Work on rebuttals by doing the following drill on the topic of school choice:
	+ Have students split into two groups; one side should brainstorm arguments in favor of school choice and one should think of arguments against. Coaches should help students come up with a variety of arguments, like the ones below
		- In favor
			* Vouchers give parents and students more choices, especially if their own school system don’t meet standards
			* School vouchers could allow lower-income students to access a higher level of education they may not be able to otherwise
			* School vouchers, and the prospect of funds being taken out of public schools, incentivizes schools and districts to increase performance.
		- Against
			* School vouchers violate the separation of church and state because oftentimes, the private schools students use vouchers to go to are religious
			* Some studies have shown that students who use vouchers don’t actually perform better in school than students who don’t
			* Even successful voucher programs are just short-term solutions and drain money out of public schools, making them worse in the long-run and perpetuating the problem that created a need for vouchers in the first place
			* More well-off students can take better advantage of school vouchers than lower-income students because they usually have better information about schools in their area and are more able to travel long distances, for example.
	+ The side in favor of school vouchers has 1-2 minutes to present one of their arguments. Then, the opposing side should respond to the argument, and the government side should respond to the response. Keep alternating between sides. Feel free to allow additional responses if students want to keep debating a certain contention.

**Week 3 – Practice Debate!**

* Reminder: the last UDL tournament of the year is April 28th. Encourage students to attend as best you can!
* Have a practice debate on one of the following topics; whichever you didn’t use during Week 1:
	+ THB the use of standardized testing improves the American education system
	+ THB a public college education should be free for graduating American high school students
	+ Feel free to debate another education-related topic, like school uniforms or student-free speech, if students aren’t interested in one of the above.