

Get Out the Vote for Debate Team

October 15, 2010 10:30 AM Kelly Wilson
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A New Orleans middle school's debate team, launched and coached by Tulane students working with the Tulane Center for Public Service and English department, is competing to win a \$50,000 grant from the Clorox "Power a Bright Future" contest. Online voting is now under way for the after-school debate team, and Sophie B. Wright Charter School debaters hope they come out on top.



The young debaters from Sophie B. Wright Charter School celebrate their win in a debate competition. (Photo from Ryan McBride)

The Clorox Co. launched an [online competition](#) to support school programs that energize, inspire and promise to make a difference. The project that gets the most votes before Nov. 1 will receive the \$50,000 grand-prize award, and the next top vote-getter in each category (learn, play and create) will get \$20,000.

In the application submitted to Clorox, representatives from the charter school argue that the grant would help them "anchor a debate renaissance in New Orleans in part by hosting spectacular, citywide, no-fee tournaments for many years to come."

Initiated and coached by Tulane students who have taken or are currently enrolled in postdoctoral teaching fellow Ryan McBride's [service-learning course](#), "Aristotle in

New Orleans,” Sophie B. Wright's extracurricular program empowers middle school students to engage in competitive speech and debate, sharpening their skills in critical thinking and civil discourse.

According to Tulane students working as coaches for the 16 budding orators currently involved in the program, the debate team has bolstered the confidence of the 11- to 13-year-old scholars. Tulane students also are working to help launch a high school debate team at the school this year.

Jeff Darling, a senior majoring in neuroscience at Tulane, says that after a semester of mentorship, a student who initially was too shy to talk was able to “give a speech to 60 people and do so without blinking.”

“These debaters are the ones that will give back to the world,” says Tulane pre-law junior and English major Jessie Farrell, “and the best part is because of this program, they are aware of the opportunity and power that comes along with this voice.”

The final Power a Bright Future grant winners will be announced in December.

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