



RUDI
RURAL DEBATE
INITIATIVE

Rural Debate Initiative: An Intro

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Executive Summary

Organization Structure

- The Rural Debate Initiative (“RuDI”) is a non-profit organization that seeks to expand access to competitive debate across secondary school students residing in rural areas
- RuDI will provide coaching and workshops to students that want to participate in debate and organize competitive tournaments and debate camps through a virtual format (all via videoconference) at no cost to the students (no tournament entry fees, no debate camp tuition)
- Coaches, tournament organizers and outreach members will be comprised of volunteers passionate about expanding debate
- Given the virtual format and volunteer composition, RuDI will operate as a lower cost organization with no need to provide classrooms for students or food and concessions during debate tournaments
- The organization will be nationally focused which will allow students with lower levels of local debate participation to find coaching, partners and competition across the county

Mission

- RuDI’s mission is to expand the opportunity to compete in debate for students that struggle to get into the activity because of logistical challenges, high cost of debate (i.e. travel, entry fees) and lack of clustered local participation (inability to host tournaments due to the lack of enough participating schools within the region)

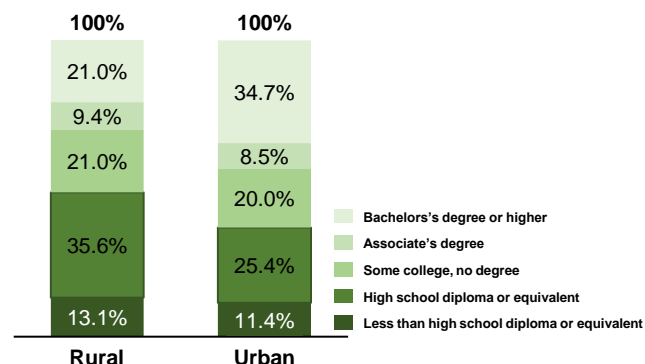
Thesis

- In general, rural regions have high levels of child poverty, lower educational funding and limited opportunities to participate in afterschool activities. These factors compound to make it more difficult to succeed academically in rural settings resulting in lower educational attainment amongst rural residents (21% have a bachelor’s degree vs. 35% among urban residents)
- Competitive debaters have been shown to exhibit significantly higher levels of college readiness, academic performance, standardized test scores and four-year university attendance and graduation rates than non-debaters. RuDI seeks to improve rural participation in competitive debate to help bridge the achievement gap between rural and non-rural students
- In-person competitive debate and other competitive afterschool activities have traditionally been very difficult to implement in rural regions because the long distances between schools make travel both time consuming and costly, and smaller average student populations make finding interested students and qualified instructors in the same school more difficult
 - RuDI will be organized primarily in a virtual format which will allow for the creation of a diverse community composed of rural students from across the country that will not require extensive tournament travel and allow for both partnerships between students from differing schools and coaching between coaches and students located in different parts of the country
 - A virtual debate ecosystem is now a real possibility in a post-COVID world. In 2020 and 2021, there were substantial investments in technology and broadband access that made online learning a real possibility particularly in rural regions. Additionally, many competitive debates were successfully held in a virtual setting in this period

Characteristics of Rural Education

Rural vs. Urban Educational Attainment Level (1)

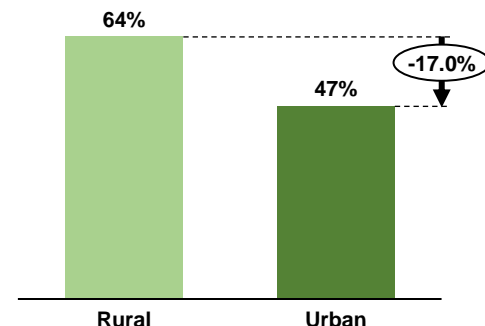
% of total population



Significant gap in 4-year college education

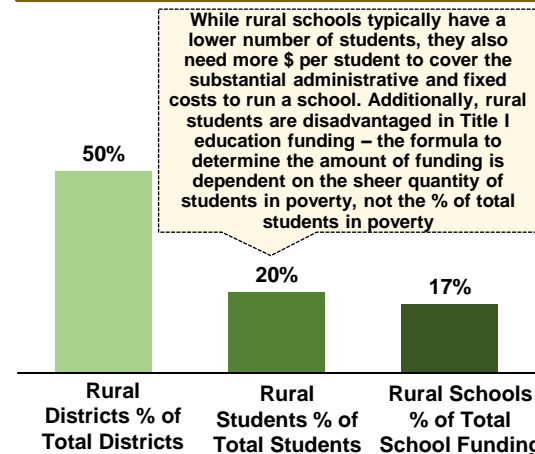
% of Counties with High Child Poverty (2)

% of total counties



Vastly Higher Child Poverty in Rural Areas

Quantity of Rural Schools vs. Funding (2)



- Rural counties across the United States are characterized by **lower educational achievement and higher child poverty** than their urban counterparts
- Constraints on rural areas result in very particular challenges that are difficult to address
 - Transportation is much more costly for rural schools – While rural residents only make up 15% of the total population, rural areas make up 72% of the land mass in the U.S. resulting in significantly more school funding being dedicated to transportation ⁽³⁾
 - Teachers in rural zones often face lower salaries and increased workloads - Science teachers are often asked to teach biology, chemistry and physics, all of which require substantial preparation ⁽³⁾
 - This results in **high teacher turnover** – rural teachers tend to leave in their first three years

All of these factors spark the need to create non-traditional, lower cost methods to improve educational outcomes

1) Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture. Refers to educational attainment for adults 25 or older

2) Source: Public Schools First North Carolina

3) Source: Harvard Kennedy Institute of Politics

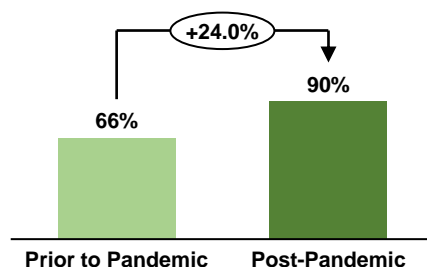
Rapid Technological Growth in Rural Areas

Recent growth in internet and learning device access and the widespread adoption of online debate have created a perfect opportunity to expand participation in debate among students in rural areas

Recent Developments

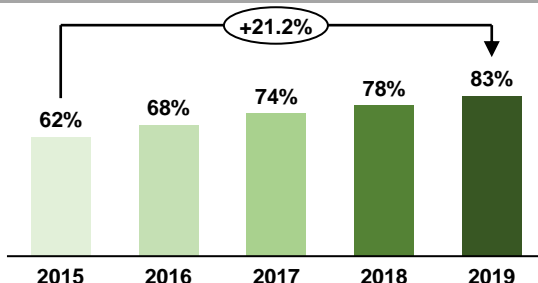
Commentary on Recent Developments

% of Students with 1+ Digital Learning Device (1)



- **COVID has transformed student tech access:** In addition to expanded device access (now at 90%), the National Center for Education Statistics found in a survey that 8 out of 10 schools rated the quality of devices used in learning to be good or very good
- **Significant funding available for tech:** The American Rescue Plan allocated \$122 billion in funding to K-12 education that is available for use through Fall of 2024. There will likely be continued momentum to spend funds on learning devices. Further, The country's Federal Communications Commission (FCC) created an unprecedented \$20 billion fund to motivate mobile operators and service providers to construct broadband networks in underserved and unserved areas.

% of Rural Areas with 25/3Mbps Internet (2)



- **Significant growth in internet access:** Rural communities have continued to improve the adoption of broadband internet access year-over-year, climbing to 83.0% in 2019 based on the latest FCC Broadband Deployment Report and is likely to further increase through 2022. Lack of internet access will no longer be an impediment in accessing debate for most students

Developments in Online Debate

- **Widespread Adoption of Online Debate Post-pandemic:**
 - Out of a sample of 126 debate tournaments, 86 have been held online or are planned to be held online in 2022 ⁽³⁾
 - For in-person tournaments, there are often hybrid models, which allow for students to enter online
 - At the National Debate Tournament (the college national championship), the top 2 teams competed virtually, and 19 out of 78 teams participated online ⁽³⁾

- **Momentum to continue online debate:** Several key coaches in the community have voiced a desire to hold hybrid tournaments in order to improve access to the activity by allowing lower income students to compete that are otherwise unable to afford tournament travel. Providing a forum for online debate would increase equity and improve competition by adding teams that would otherwise be unable to compete
- **Proof of concept in online debate:** COVID marked a turning point in the adoption of online debate as a potential new standard. Over more than two years of successful online debate, the activity has developed new norms to accommodate for online competition

1) Source: Edweek Research Center

2) Source: FCC Fourteenth Broadband Deployment Report

3) Source: Based on available data for 2022 from tabroom.com (site where debate tournaments are often tabulated)

Lower Extracurricular Participation in Rural Communities

Not only is the in-class education of rural schools lacking compared to that of non-rural schools, but rural students also often have limited opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. The challenge is two fold:

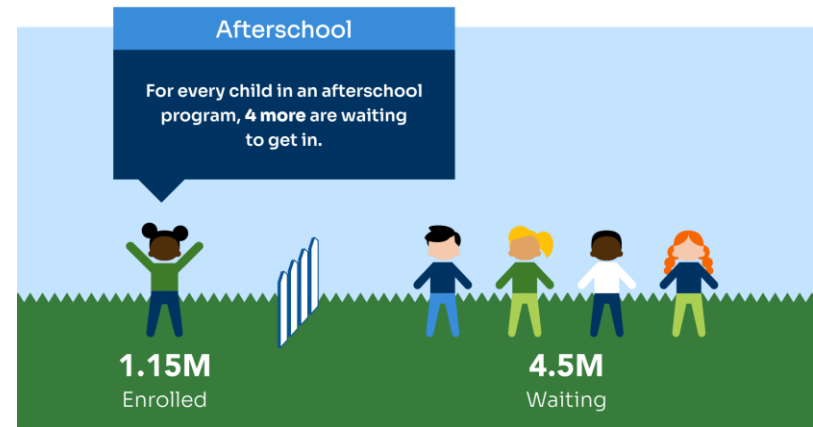
1. Lack of Programs

Demand for afterschool programs in rural areas is at an all time high but the number of available opportunities has not caught up to demand due to a lack of funding and human resources to pilot and maintain the programs

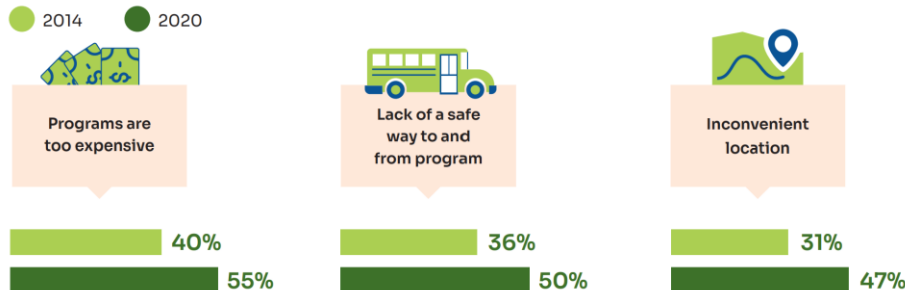
2. Barriers to Participation

Even for existing programs, there are many barriers to participation for both the parents and the students that make sustained participation difficult. These concerns are especially pronounced in rural areas

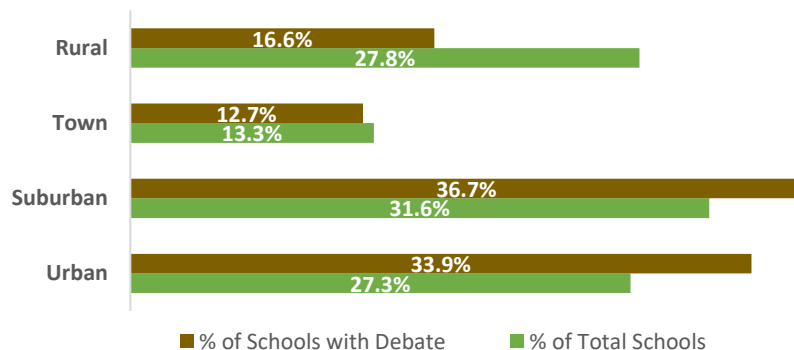
Demand for Afterschool Activities Severely Outstrips Availability



Parents' Reasons for Being Unable to Participate in Afterschool Activities



% of Schools Participating in Debate vs. % of Total US Schools (1)



In the current state, debate as an activity suffers from all three concerns outlined above

- Debate has many associated costs. Intensive summer debate camps are necessary for the advancement of a debater, but the typical cost is ~\$3,000 for a 4 week program
- Travel and lodging is often required at debate tournaments
- Debate is a team activity that typically requires partners at similar skill levels which can discourage participation among students that attend schools with less interest in debate

As a result, debate is an activity that the resourced excel in

1) Source: National Speech and Debate Association and National Center for Education Statistics
 2) Source: AfterSchool Alliance report

Why Debate?

Research has proven debaters to have...

- Higher **GPA** (0.66 points) (1)
- Higher **Math SAT score** (52 points) (1)
- Higher **High School Graduation Rate** (40%) (2)
- Higher **College Readiness and Admission Rate** (1)
- Higher **Reading and Writing SAT score** (57 points) (1)

Skills and traits gained through debate....



Amidst the recent broadband advancements in rural areas and in recognition of the benefits of debate, a new model is needed to take advantage of the moment and the Rural Debate Initiative is the answer

We help lower the cost of debating to virtually 0 by facilitating and encouraging virtual debate

We help bypass the distance barrier by hosting and organizing online debate camps and tournaments

We link individuals around the country by building a nationwide community of driven individuals

We are building a new future for debate - one where those with limited access to debate can be afforded the opportunities they deserve

1) Source: National Association for Urban Debate Leagues

2) Source: DebateUS

Organizational Structure



Executive Board

- Advise on the strategic development of RuDI and maintain accountability over key initiatives
- Reach out to and maintain relationships with major donors and present RuDI thesis to acquire grants
- Manage and maintain the finances of RuDI



Director

- Oversee day-to-day operation of RuDI and serve as the point of contact for the heads of each team
- Recruit and manage staff members
- Establish contact and present RuDI to university partners



Head of Outreach

- Oversee and track outreach progress and assign outreach contacts to regions and schools



Head of Coaches

- Develop coaching materials and curriculum
- Track student progress and assess student level to create partnerships and assign students to divisions

Head of Community Organization

- Schedule, coordinate, manage and oversee tournaments and debate camps
- Oversee community fundraising efforts
- Recruit community organizers

Community Organization Team

- Organize and facilitate tournaments and debate camps
- Coordinate coaching sessions and elicit feedback
- Perform community fundraising

Outreach Team

- Establish and serve as point of contact for rural high schools
- Present RuDI introductory presentation to school authorities

Coaches

- Host weekly zoom session with students
- Preparation of teaching materials and homework
- Judge at tournaments and teach at debate camps

Students



Development Overview

Phase 1

Recruitment



Outreach Team

- Reach out to high school authorities and present RuDI intro presentation and materials
- Maintain contact with high school staff and assist with student registration and onboarding

- Establish connection with university partners to identify interested college debaters that can serve as potential coaches
- Maintain contact with university partners and assist with coaches' registration and training



Students



Coaches

Phase 2

Weekly Sessions



Community Organizers

- Pair students with coaches
- Gather the availability of coaches and students to coordinate weekly training sessions
- Monitor and manage the internet forum and assist school staff with outside of classroom activities
- Organize practice debates
- Elicit feedback from coaches and students to improve curriculum and processes



Students

- Prepare for and lead weekly coaching sessions
- Maintain an active presence on the online forum to answer questions
- Track weekly session participation and fill out session reports
- Judge practice debates



Coaches

Phase 3

Tournaments



Community Organizers

- Coordinate logistics of debate tournaments, including date, number of rounds, judge allocation and team pairings
- Coordinate logistics of summer debate camps including timing of camps, assigning students and coaches into labs and organizing practice debates



Students

- Judge at and help students prepare for debate tournaments
- Encourage students to participate in debate tournaments and provide emotional support and mentoring
- Teach labs in summer debate camps and judge practice debates



Coaches

Leadership Bios



Grant Zhang, Executive Chairman

- Grant is currently an associate at H.I.G. Capital, a private equity investment firm where he specializes in investing in, professionalizing and supporting the growth of emerging businesses. Grant started his professional career at Firelight Capital Partners, an upstart growth focused private equity investment firm that partners with and accelerates the growth of nascent consumer brands
- Grant graduated from the Stern School of Business at New York University with a B.S. in Business and a minor in Mathematics. Grant debated at NYU for a year and a half and then transitioned to become an assistant debate coach at the Ransom Everglades School in Miami, FL. Grant helped a team from Ransom Everglades qualify to the Tournament of Champions
- Grant started off as a debater at Foothill High School in Henderson, NV and then transferred to Green Valley High School in Henderson, NV. At Green Valley, Grant qualified to the Tournament of Champions and was ranked as one of the top 25 teams in the country in the HS Impact Coaches Poll



Kelly Mu, President

- Kelly is currently a paralegal at Rosen, Bien, Galvan and Grunfeld LLP, a law firm specializing in civil rights litigation. She advocates for incarcerated people with disabilities and investigates prison staff misconduct. Kelly is also a small business owner and entrepreneur, managing and developing a Chinese restaurant in southern California
- Kelly graduated from the University of Chicago with a B.A. in Political Science and a minor in East Asian studies. It was in college that Kelly became interested and started participating in debate. She mainly competed in the British Parliamentary style, receiving regional and national successes
- Kelly has had extensive non-profit building experience. During college, Kelly worked in legal content development for Shakti, a non-profit providing information and resources to survivors of domestic violence in India through chatbots. She worked to aid the development and expansion of the organization, assisted with budget allocation, executed growth strategies and helped to secure funding through grant applications. Prior to Shakti, Kelly was a program development intern for African Peacebuilding Network at the Social Science Research Council where she was responsible for marketing and social media management. She launched a promotional video series and broadened the organization's social media reach and influence