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**NATIONAL STUDY SHOWS DEBATE LINKED TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

BOSTON, MASS. – A recently published study, *“Interscholastic Policy Debate Promotes Critical Thinking and College-going: Evidence From Boston Public Schools,”* conducted by Beth Schueler from the University of Virginia and Katherine Larned from Harvard University, shows that participation in Boston Debate League’s After School Debate program is associated with improvements in English Language Arts (ELA) achievement and increases in the likelihood that students graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary education.

The study was published in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Educational Research Association. It drew upon data from the Boston Debate League (BDL), Boston Public Schools (BPS), and the National Student Clearinghouse, focusing on students enrolled in BPS from the 2007–2008 to 2017–2018 school years.

“This study highlights the profound impact of BDL’s After School Debate program,” remarked Kimberly Willingham, the Executive Director of the BDL. “It demonstrates how debate not only develops students’ confidence and leadership skills, but leads to significant academic achievements. With as little as one year of participation, debaters show improvement in the areas of literacy and critical thinking - skills that will prepare them for college, career and engagement with the world around them.”

The study also sheds light on the unique role of debate as a powerful intervention for addressing inequality in reading achievement and higher order thinking skills. Remarkably, students who started in the lowest-performing quartile of the ELA MCAS saw the most substantial gains with just one year of engagement in debate. These gains were most pronounced among students who are disproportionately Latino and Black, low-income, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities.



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*Founded in 2005, the Boston Debate League (BDL) prepares young people for college, career, and engagement with the world through debate-inspired learning in the classroom and beyond. The BDL serves nearly 700 middle and high school students annually, with the help of nearly 500 community volunteers, and partners with more than 40 schools to support school-based debate teams, host a series of city-wide tournaments, and provides instructional coaching and professional development to hundreds of teachers. For more information, visit [www.bostondebate.org](http://www.bostondebate.org).*