

2020 CHSSA Hall of Fame Inductee

Karson Kalashian



There are many ways to define Karson Kalashian's success in the world of Speech and Debate. Perhaps you could focus on his high school competitive career where he qualified to state and got 5th place in Lincoln-Douglas Debate. Or you could look at when he helped found the UC Berkeley Parliamentary Debate team and lead them to the Octo-Finals of the national tournament. Or perhaps it's the recognition he has received as one of the 2019 finalists for the Educator of the Year award, or the Director's Award from the NSDA. However, for Karson none of those things are as important as the most important title he has ever had, Coach.

What truly defines Karson is that he believes that forensics matters and should be accessible to every student in California, regardless of their circumstances. In his own words, forensics is "A great opportunity for everyone to have a chance to be on an equal playing field."

Throughout his career, Karson has worked tirelessly to build large, inclusive programs at schools with high migrant, and high poverty populations. Across the high schools he has worked at in his career, Karson has coached thousands of young, diverse people from the Central Valley. At times throughout his career Karson's team would serve 200 or more students and provide opportunity for success to everyone.

For some of these students the opportunity to see a world beyond their hometown was only made available because of Karson's efforts to build the skills they need to succeed both in forensics, and in the real world. For Karson "It's not about how many kids I break, or how many trophies I win, it's about how many kids get to go." And every year, Karson's number of students who get to travel extends as he qualifies more and more students from the poorest parts of California, to some of the nation's biggest tournaments, including his own daughters who are following their dad's zealously for the activity.

For a decade, Karson has advocated on the CHSSA Council for equality in opportunity for all students across our state. Always there to volunteer to put in the work necessary to make opportunity a reality, Karson has been a defining voice and advocate through his service to all in our community.

Forensics helped Karson find his voice to advocate for California's kids, so it's only appropriate that our community honor him, and hope that one day Karson's dream of "every school having a team, a coach, and an opportunity" comes true.

