

# CHS STUDENT COMPETES IN NATIONAL SPEECH COMPETITION

When Conant High School senior Athena Saldanha joined the speech team, she was less than enthusiastic about it, and wanted to quit at first. With her parent's encouragement and an open mind, Saldanha continued practicing and competing, and realized this is an important skill she enjoys.



Recently, Saldanha was a semifinalist representing the state of Illinois in The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – “A Constitutional Speech Contest,” which is a national-level competition. She competed against 19 students at the state competition to make it to the nationals, and then against 52 students at nationals where she finished in the top 9.

Competitors were asked to prepare and memorize a 10-minute speech about the U.S. Constitution. After that speech, they were assigned a five-minute speech on one of four topics in which they only had five minutes to prepare before competing.

“It's nerve-wracking because you're not sure which of the four is going to be picked, so you are just going through all of them in your head,” Saldanha said. “I did the right of habeas corpus and in the next round I did fair representation.”

She said preparation was a lot of work and required her to memorize each speech she had prepared. She wrote and memorized her 10-minute speech and the four different five-minute speeches she would be assigned during competition, and would practice every night.

Saldanha, who is captain of the CHS Debate Team, vice president of NHS, and involved in several other clubs, earned a \$3,000 scholarship for winning the state competition. She earned an additional \$1,500 for participating in the competition and another \$1,500 for making it to the semifinalist round.

Saldanha said speech has helped her become far more outgoing than she was before, and has helped her overcome her public speaking fears. She encourages other students to get involved in it to prepare for college and their future careers.

“It really just makes you stand out in school, and makes you more personable. “I'm not afraid to go up to someone and just start talking to them anymore,” Saldanha

said. "You need it for every career to really get up in front of a crowd and talk, or to give a presentation."

After graduation, she will attend the University of California-Berkley to pursue an undergraduate education in business with plans to attend law school after. She encourages others to get involved with the American Legion and the scholarship opportunities available for students.

"I encourage people to start getting involved in American Legion and to do it because it's kind of scary at first when you look at all the work that needs to be done. But, once you go through it, it's not that bad," she said. "It's really fun, you learn a lot, and you meet a lot of new people."