

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**FT. LAUDERDALE:** Two Kentucky students have won recognition as a national champion and a student of the year at the National Speech and Debate Association's National Tournament -- the largest academic contest in the world. Students took part in five days of competition June 18-22 after advancing from district tournaments held from Guam to Maine. The NSDA Nationals dates back to 1931, awards college scholarships to the national champions, and boasts past winners such as Shelley Long (Cheers), Brent Spiner (Star Trek: The Next Generation), Josh Gad (Frozen), and national finalists Oprah Winfrey, Jane Pauley, plus numerous other celebrities, politicians, and leaders in business and education. Kentucky's qualifying contests were held in March at Centre College and the Danville campus of Bluegrass Community and Technical College.

Elena Cecil from LaRue County High School was named the William Woods Tate, Jr., National Student of the Year. This prestigious award is given annually to a student who embodies the NSDA Code of Honor (integrity, humility, respect, leadership, and service), their outstanding academic achievements, and commitment to Speech and Debate. Before being recognized for the award, Elena, along with the other five national finalists, were interviewed by an esteemed panel of educators during the tournament. Cecil has been previously honored as one of the top six contenders for the prestigious award in May. Cecil, a 2018 graduate of LaRue County High School, was named NSDA Student of Year at the end of tournament awards ceremony. Also at the awards ceremony, Jack Neel from Bethlehem High School was named the national champion in Prose. After three days of competition, Neel won top honors in the event after talking his way through 420 entries in eight total rounds.

Kentucky's National semifinalists were Louisville Trinity's Cooper Winrich (Senate), Boone County's Leanne Hays (Dramatic Interpretation), and North Oldham's Spencer Schumacher (United States Extemporaneous Speaking). Hassan Kashif from North Oldham advanced to the 10th round of Lincoln-Douglas Debate and competed well into day three of the five day tournament. National Octofinalists (top 60) were Bethlehem's Alexander Brown (Informative Speaking), Henry Clay's Jade Kropp (Humorous Interpretation), Marshall County's Tessa Northcutt (Humorous Interpretation), and Henry Clay's Cooper Boss (Program Oral Interpretation).