



First Voice

ACADEMY

Find your voice. Use it with confidence.

Pilot Program Results

Naperville Public Library, 95th Street branch • Meeting Room C • July 28–30, 2026 • 9:30–11:30 AM daily • 16 students, grades 6–8 • Free

First Voice Academy is a free three-day public speaking program I founded and directed for middle school students. Sixteen students made up the inaugural cohort. Every student delivered an original speech to their peers at the First Voice Showcase on the final morning. Students rated their speaking confidence on a 1–10 scale on Day 1 and again on Day 3; the results below reflect the 14 of 16 students who completed both the baseline and final forms.

6.2 → 8.7

average confidence,
Day 1 to Day 3

+45%

average individual
improvement

100%

of students surveyed
improved

14 of 14

would tell a friend
to do it next year

WHAT THE NUMBERS SHOW

- **Every student who completed both surveys improved.** Not one score stayed flat or dropped.
- **Average gain of 2.5 points** on a 10-point scale, with three students gaining 4 points.
- **Two students rated themselves 8 or higher on Day 1. By Day 3, all 14 did.**
- **14 of 14 students said they would recommend the program** to a friend for next year.

WHAT CHANGED FOR ONE STUDENT

DAY 1 — WHAT MAKES SPEAKING HARD

“When everyone is looking straight at me.”

DAY 3 — WHAT I CAN DO NOW

“I don’t get scared when people are looking at me.”

IN THE STUDENTS' OWN WORDS

“It helped me so much, to speak.”

— Student, Grade 6

“You learn to use your voice with confidence, and you get to make your own presentations.”

— Student, Grade 6

“It can really help you be confident in public speaking.”

— Student, Grade 6

“They encourage you and teach you how to be confident.”

— Student

“It was super fun and we learn a lot. Totally worth it.”

— Student, Grade 6

“Hadley, Layla and Sanj are super nice and helpful.”

— Student, Grade 8

“Meeting new people — and getting lollipops!”

— Student, Grade 6

WHAT MADE IT WORK

Students learned a simple, repeatable structure — hook, message, close — and spoke every single day, starting within the first hour of Day 1. Instruction was peer-to-peer: high school DECA and speech competitors teaching students only a few years younger, with adult supervision on site at every session. The showcase was peer-only by design, which kept the stakes low enough that students were willing to try.

Thank you to the Naperville Public Library. Hosting First Voice Academy at the 95th Street branch removed every cost and travel barrier for families and gave the program a home that families already trust. The library made this possible.