

MINUTES – SPEECH, DEBATE & THEATRE ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
Held May 1, 2024 at MSHSA Office, Columbia, MO

1. Recommends the activity of Speech and Debate utilize the classification procedures outlined in By-Law 5.1 and the Board Policies on Enrollment, Classification, Championship Factor, and Districts. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: The committee based their decisions on numerous proposals brought forth in past years. The 2024 annual ballot strongly supported this notion (84% of responding schools voted in favor). Furthermore, the committee firmly believes this activity is incredibly important and every student should have access to speech and debate. The advisory committee desires to see smaller schools throughout the state find success and they want students to feel confident. Finally, the committee believes a two-class classification system will provide a better competitive opportunity for all students and potentially grow the activity throughout the state.

2. Recommends in the activity of Speech and Debate that Class 1 be divided into 8 districts and Class 2 be divided into 4 districts, with the opportunity to review this decision after one year. The assignment criteria utilized for the assignment of schools to districts are (1) geographic proximity and (2) approximate numerical balance. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: Given the large difference in the number of schools between the two classes, the committee believes this approach to districts will maintain competitive opportunity within each class. Districts will be roughly the same size between the two classes. Additionally, this approach aligns with current MSHSAA Board policy and the committee believes the current policy is the best approach to determining the number of districts per class.

\*\* 3. Recommends the activity of Theatre become a two-class system placing the largest 50% of schools registered for districts in Class 2, the next 50% in Class 1 with the opportunity to review this decision after one year. If there were enrollment ties across a classification break, tied schools would be moved down into the lower class. The Championship Factor would be applied. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: The committee based their decisions on numerous proposals brought forth in past years. The 2024 annual ballot strongly supported this notion (84% of responding schools voted in favor). A primary goal of splitting theatre into its own activity is to increase participation among schools and the goal of classification is to increase equity among the schools. Frequently, the smaller schools lack the resources that many larger districts have, thus the desire to “level the playing field”. Finally, the committee believes a two-class classification system will provide a better competitive opportunity for all students and potentially grow the activity throughout the state.

\*\* 4. Recommends in the activity of Theatre that each class should be divided into 4 districts, with the opportunity to review this decision after one year. The assignment criteria utilized for the assignment of schools to districts are (1) geographic proximity and (2) approximate numerical balance. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: One issue theatre has faced in the past few years is a very large discrepancy in entry numbers between districts. The committee believes 4 districts per class with a balance of schools in each district will improve the quality of competition in each district and allow for better balance in competition throughout the state. It is further hoped that this change will help grow the activity because the balance in entry numbers will help avoid a massive concentration of entries in one area of the state. Districts will be roughly the same size between the two classes.

5. Recommends that each school in class 1 be permitted to enter 2 entries per Speech event and 2 entries per Debate event into the MSHSAA Speech and Debate District Tournament, with the option to reevaluate this recommendation after one year of operation. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: The primary goal in class 1 will be increasing the number of schools and

students taking part in the activity. Under the current system, all schools can enter 2 debate entries in the district tournament and 1 entry in speech events. Many of the smaller schools are strongest in speech events and permitting these schools to have 2 entries in their strongest events will allow their programs to grow, find more success, and recruit more students. More students competing in speech and debate will build confidence and teach students many skills that are applicable in both the classroom and in their lives outside of school.

6. Recommends that each school in class 2 be permitted to enter 3 entries per Speech event and 3 entries per Debate event into the MSHSAA Speech and Debate District Tournament, with the option to reevaluate this recommendation after one year of operation. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: The class 2 schools are comprised of large schools with large and competitive programs. Many of these teams are taking 10+ entries in each event to regular season tournaments so having three strong contenders is well within the realm of possibility. These programs are looking for a more rigorous district competition and this will meet the needs of our larger schools and programs. This will also put district tournament numbers at approximately the same as those of the class 1 district tournaments, given the number of qualifiers on to the state tournament and the number of schools per class.

7. Recommends that at the district tournaments in the activity of Speech and Debate, Class 1 districts qualify the top four in each Individual Event and Debate Event, whereby Class 2 districts qualify the top eight in each Individual Event and Debate Event to the state championships, with the option to reevaluate this recommendation after one year of operation. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: These qualification numbers to the state tournament will allow the two classes to have the same number of entries at the state tournament. This continues to meet the need of providing more opportunities for smaller schools to grow their programs by increasing recognition for their programs and learning from other top competitors at the state tournament while also allowing our larger programs to have a higher level of competition. The MSHSAA Executive Director for Speech and Debate has already verified that we have enough space at the site of our state tournament to increase the number of students attending and competing in the state tournament.

\*\*\* 8. Recommends that in the activity of Theatre, each ~~of the four~~ district tournaments ~~per class~~ qualify the top 2 schools in Reader's Theatre and One-Act Plays from each district to the MSHSAA State Theatre Championships, with the option to reevaluation this recommendation after one year of operation. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: The current system relies on the number of entries in the district tournament to determine whether a district will have 1 or 2 qualifiers to the state tournament. Now that districts will be balanced based on geographic proximity and approximate number of schools, we feel it is best to permit each district to send 2 entries to the state tournament in each event. With a focus on increasing the number of schools participating in theatre events and increasing access to and equity within the activity, setting an equal number of qualifiers between districts will allow for improvements across the board in all three key objectives.

\*\*\* 9. Recommends that in the activity of Theatre, the top two teams from each district in each event (One-Act Play and Reader's Theatre) be randomly placed into two sections ~~of four schools~~ to compete in the preliminary rounds at the MSHSAA State Theatre Championships. The two sections ~~of four schools~~ in each event will perform in the preliminary round with the top two teams from each preliminary section advancing to the final round. Each of the four teams qualifying for the final round will perform again with the top four schools being ranked in order to determine the championship round outcomes (First Place, Second Place, Third Place, and Fourth Place). Motion passed 8-0.

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\*\*\* 10. Recommends developing a sub-committee of the Speech and Debate Advisory Committee to help revise and draft the new MSHSAA Speech and Debate Manual. ~~The sub-committee will consist of the following members: Molly Beck, Ladue Horton Watkins H.S., Matthew Harrison, St. Clair H.S., Talana Hinson, Cassville H.S., Shane Heard, Lafayette St. Joseph H.S.~~ Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: This sub-committee consisting of committee members who volunteered will assist Marty M. Marsh, Assistant Executive Director for Speech, Debate, and Theatre develop the new Speech and Debate Manual based upon revisions of the current Speech, Debate, and Theatre Manual.

11. Recommends eliminating the judging criteria in the Lincoln-Douglas Debate event that reads “No ‘plan’ arguments should be presented by either debater”. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: While Lincoln-Douglas Debate focused on purely philosophical questions for most of its existence, the event now frames many resolutions as a question of policy with a philosophical or moral framing. Prohibiting plans makes approaching the modern version of topics very difficult – if not impossible – for students. For many years, the Speech, Debate, and Theatre Advisory Committee have made an effort to simplify and streamline event rules to help new coaches and new programs have an easier time adjusting to and learning the activity. Outside of Missouri, plans are very common in Lincoln-Douglas Debate because they are permitted. It has become very confusing for students, coaches, and judges to have this rule; this is especially true for new coaches who may be looking at educational resources that provide a lot of information about plans. If we want to continue growing our activity, then we need to align our rules with those of the rest of the country. Additionally, if a goal is to increase equity, it is important to ensure that coaches and students accessing free resources and materials are learning correct approaches to the activity and not being set-up to fail in tournaments.

12. Recommends the elimination of the requirement for schools to provide timekeepers for the district and state tournament. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: The activity of Speech and Debate does not utilize student timekeepers at any other tournaments throughout the year. Requiring them at the district and state tournaments – two high-stakes tournaments – creates a lot of confusion. Below are a few issues that have come up over the years with the student timekeeper requirement:

- Student timekeepers are often timekeeping for an event they are unfamiliar with and easily make mistakes. When this happens ONLY at the district and state tournaments, students are understandably frustrated and upset that their timing is affected by someone unfamiliar with their event at such an important event.
- Some student timekeepers are “volun-told” to serve in the role and do not pay close attention and make multiple mistakes. This creates an inherently unfair competitive environment for students. While some aspects of the activity are unfair due to the nature of the activity, this is one issue that can be removed.
- Requiring coaches to bring extra students to the district and state tournament just to serve as a timekeeper is an unnecessary added financial burden.
- While there are timekeeping roles in some sports, those sports usually have those roles filled throughout the regular season so it does not present a new or unknown situation for competitors, judges, etc. Additionally, it is usually adults fulfilling this role.

- Unlike in sports like swimming and track, competitors are able to time themselves and their opponents during the competition. The best possible check to ensure everyone is following time rules is for competitors to time each other as they are not likely to let their opponent get away with time violations.
- Judges – especially the coach and former competitor judges at the state tournament – time competitors as well because time plays a role in the ballot. The judge, along with the opponents and competitor, have a vested interest in knowing the exact time of each speech.
- Time signals are not necessary and often confuse competitors. Students are accustomed to timing themselves and don't need a more complex situation at districts or state.
- A common argument is that people may protest a time violation without a timekeeper. The most common timekeeper issues that come up are instances of the timekeeper making mistakes; however, there is no real way to argue or protest that.
- Schools that cannot find an additional student to come serve as a timekeeper are kept from competing and this is antithetical to our goal of growing the activity.
- The rules already say not to hold the start of a round due to not having a timekeeper. If the role is unimportant enough that we can start rounds without having the timekeeper present, then it is a requirement we should remove. To grow and increase access to this activity, we should be removing as many barriers as possible.

13. Recommends that Speech and Debate districts move the release date from the Friday of standardized calendar week # 8 to the Friday of standardized calendar week # 14. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: In order for the district tournament host to reserve their building, each district will need to finalize their district tournament site by mid-November. District hosts start the communication process in December in order to host a high-quality district tournament that gives our students the opportunity they deserve. Assigning districts by the Friday of standardized calendar week #14 will give districts enough time to determine a district tournament host and start the planning process before winter break. Additionally, the advisory committee feels this is late enough in the year that schools will have time to determine if they will field a Speech and Debate team. The timing of this process will align with our annual rules review to encourage coaches to talk to their Activity Director's early in the year regarding their program and their intention to compete in the postseason.

14. Recommends that Theatre districts move the release date from the Friday of standardized calendar week # 8 to the Friday of standardized calendar week # 22, with the opportunity to reevaluate in 2025 after a Theatre Advisory Committee has been established. Motion passed 8-0.

Rationale: Schools participating in Theatre have expressed the need to achieve a balance between determining district assignments and district tournament host sites with the time required for coaches/directors to move through the process required for their events. The current Speech, Debate and Theatre Advisory Committee felt standardized calendar week #22 was a good starting point while fully realizing this may need to change in the future once a Theatre Advisory Committee is established and their schedule is reevaluated.