

Leadership



Competition and Rules Leadership Committee September Meeting Minutes

September 15, 2026

The NSDA Competition and Rules Leadership Committee (CRLC) held their virtual meeting September 15, 2026. In attendance were Brian Alford, Byron Arthur, Jamelle Brown, Lori Crews, James Harris, Meg Howell-Haymaker, Rahul Iyengar, Daphne Kalir-Starr, Kelley Kirkpatrick, Kerry Konda, Kim Lenger, Bo Lint, Xavier Liu, Gabriel Lopez, Greg Malis, Jeffrey Miller, Gail Nicholas, Stephanie Owen, Demarcus Powell, Jay Rye, George Tennison, Aaron Timmons, Kathy Tobin, Elisabeth Venetiou, Rachel Wilczewski, Chase Williams, and David Yastremski.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

SUBCOMMITTEE AND RULE CHANGE PRIORITIZATION

A majority of the Competition and Rules Leadership Committee's work will take place in subcommittees. The Office of the Executive Director identified potential subcommittee focus areas based on the Association's strategic priorities. The CRLC selected the following areas to prioritize in 2026-2027: Middle School Growth Strategy, Assessment of Debate Evidence Rules, and Assessment of Artificial Intelligence in Speech and Debate. The committee also reviewed member-submitted rule change proposals and prioritized those to be considered during the 2026-2027 school year.

EXTEMP NOTECARD PILOT

Moved by Malis, seconded by Kalir-Starr:

"Discontinue the high school district tournament Extemporaneous Speaking notecard pilot beginning with the 2027-2028 school year. Continue to allow students in Extemporaneous Speaking at the Middle School National Tournament to use a notecard."

Passed: 17-9

Aye: Alford, Crews, Harris, Iyengar, Kalir-Starr, Kirkpatrick, Lint, Liu, Malis, Miller, Nicholas, Owen, Rye, Timmons, Tobin, Williams, Yastremski

No: Brown, Howell-Haymaker, Konda, Lenger, Lopez, Powell, Tennison, Venetiou, Wilczewski

Beginning in 2024-2025, districts were given the option to participate in a pilot allowing students in Extemporaneous Speaking to use the front and back of a 4x6-inch or smaller notecard during their district tournament speeches. The notecard was required to be prepared during the competitor's preparation period, and pre-written or previously used notes were not permitted. The pilot was not implemented at the High School National Tournament, but notecards were permitted at the Middle School National Tournament. In 2024-2025, 33 districts elected to participate in the pilot, compared to 18 districts in 2025-2026.

The Competition and Rules Leadership Committee reviewed survey feedback and discussed whether to continue, discontinue, or expand the use of notecards in Extemporaneous Speaking. Members discussed the

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potential benefits of notecards for accessibility, source verification, and supporting students who struggle with memorization, particularly at the middle school level. The group also raised concerns about maintaining the rigor of the event, consistency in judging, and differences in rules between district tournaments and the National Tournament. Members acknowledged the importance of clear guidelines for notecard use and supporting students in developing skills without relying on notes.

Following discussion, the committee voted to discontinue the high school district tournament notecard pilot beginning in 2027-2028 while continuing to permit notecards at the Middle School National Tournament. Districts may continue to participate in the pilot during the 2026-2027 school year. Notecards will remain prohibited at the High School National Tournament and will no longer be permitted at high school district tournaments beginning in 2027-2028. Students competing at the Middle School National Tournament may continue to use notecards.

DISTRICT GROWTH PLAN REQUIREMENTS

The Competition and Rules Leadership Committee reviewed a proposed framework for district growth plans, splits, transfers, combinations, and dissolution. The proposal aimed to encourage district growth, establish clearer standards for district changes, and maintain a positive National Tournament experience for participants. Under the proposed framework, districts with fewer than 15 schools would be placed on a two-year growth plan developed in collaboration with NSDA staff. Districts that did not meet established growth metrics would no longer be eligible to host national qualifying tournaments, and schools would have the option to transfer to an adjacent district. The proposal also included reviewing district split requests every two years and transferring authority over individual school transfer requests from district chairs to the national office.

Committee members raised concerns that the proposed requirements could disproportionately impact small and rural districts, particularly those facing geographic barriers, significant travel costs, or challenges recruiting

and retaining coaches. The group also discussed whether district requirements should consider active participation and tournament entries rather than school membership alone, as well as what resources the Association could provide to support district growth. Following discussion, staff will continue developing a strategy that encourages district growth while accounting for the unique challenges faced by different districts and maintaining a positive National Tournament experience for participants.

EQUITY PAUSE

The Competition and Rules Leadership Committee used the [NSDA Equity Lens](#) to reflect on the nature of their meeting deliberations and whether their decisions and decision-making processes are transparent, accountable, and reflect the organization's core value of equity.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m. 

QUESTIONS? CONCERNS? IDEAS?

We want to hear from you! Send your feedback to lauren.burd@speechanddebate.org.