



The Future of District Qualification

Aligning the Competition with our Mission

The NSDA is committed to aligning its programs with its core values while ensuring that the mission and vision of the organization are met. The district tournament series is a core program of the organization that ought to provide an educational opportunity for member students that aligns with the mission, vision, and core values of the organization while serving as a fair and impartial qualifier to the NSDA National Tournament.

We have heard from our members that the current up/down system, along with its myriad of options, caveats, and stipulations within the procedural manual in both speech and debate, creates large barriers to meeting key goals of the organization.

In response to this feedback, the NSDA began to pilot an alternative concept for qualification in 2018-2019, and that pilot program will continue in 2020-2021 with a few modifications. We hope that this new method will make tournament participation more accessible, make the tournament rules and procedures easier to understand, and make district tournament participation a more worthwhile experience. We are also working to ensure that this new method embraces the use of technology while understanding its limits to achieve the goal of increasing efficiency, accuracy, and overall transparency of the process of qualification.

In building the pilot qualification methods for speech, debate, and Congress, we had three goals:

1. The new system dramatically eliminates most of the above concerns while limiting the creation of new issues.
2. The benefits of the changes should outweigh any of the new potential harms.
3. A new plan should excite the membership as it accomplishes the task of eliminating these outlined barriers, and consequentially, positively impacts our mission goals.

The pilot qualification methods for all speech and debate events will eliminate the up/down method. The pilot methods will mirror a standard tournament structure. We believe that standardizing practices will make procedures for district tournament qualification substantially easier to understand and implement. By modeling the rules, pairing methods, and tiebreakers off tested practices, we can make our qualification process more in line with community consensus, lower the barrier to entry for new coaches, and increase the transparency and accuracy of our process.

Thank you for your support of your district's tournament, coaches, and students! We are excited to work with you to determine how to best align our competition rules with our mission and vision. New modifications to the pilot system are highlighted in yellow below.



Debate Pilot (PF, LD, CX, BQ)

The debate pilot qualification rules will go into effect permanently as the sole set of rules governing district tournaments in 2021-2022. This year, districts may choose to use either the pilot debate qualification rules or the traditional up/down qualification rules.

Districts who choose to use the pilot debate qualification rules may choose one of three methods to run their debate events. This method must be used for all debate events (PF, LD, CX, and BQ).

Method 1: Round Robin

- Each entry hits every other entry once
- 1, 2, or 3 judge panels
- No elimination rounds are necessary
- Qualifiers are determined by total ballot count (or by head to head if there is a tie)
- This option was added in response to feedback from districts with small debate entry numbers stating that the double down method and other 2 pilot methods require too long of a tournament.

Method 2: Single Elimination Bracketed Tournament

- 4 prelim rounds required, or 3 rounds if there are 4 entries
- 1 or 3 judges may be used in prelims.
- Rounds 1-2 will be preset, and the rest will be powermatched.
- The District Committee can choose whether all winning records or any entries with 1 or 0 losses will advance to elimination rounds.
- Elims use 3 or more judges.
- Speaker points are awarded to determine seeding in elimination rounds. Speaker points have no bearing on who clears to elimination rounds. Speaker points only determine WHO debates in elimination rounds. This is in comparison to the double down method where there are no speaker points and elimination round pairings are random within the bracket.
- Same school hits are protected against in prelims, but not in elims.
- Advancing entries will be placed in a single elimination bracket. The tournament continues until the number of entries active is equal to or lower than the number of qualifiers.
- Entries in all powermatched and elim rounds will be seeded using the SOP method.
 - SOP scores are calculated by adding the seeding of the entry together with their average opponent seed up to that point in the tournament
 - Goal of evening out the difficulty of the brackets over the course of the tournament

Method 3: Double Elimination Bracketed Tournament

- Same rules as the single elimination bracketed tournament in terms of prelims, judge requirements, and how students clear to elimination rounds.
- An entry must lose two debates in elims before they are eliminated from the tournament.
- This method will require more elimination rounds than a single-elimination bracket.
- The addition of this method is in response to districts' feedback that they fear an undefeated student may lose in the first elim round, especially when same-school hits are not protected in elims.



Speech Pilot

The speech pilot qualification rules will go into effect permanently as the sole set of rules governing district tournaments in 2021-2022. This year, districts may choose to use either the pilot speech qualification rules, the traditional up/down qualification rules, or the traditional California Plan rules.

Features of the speech pilot:

- Minimum of 3 prelims
- 1, 2, or 3 judges may be used in prelims. All speech events must use the same number of judges in the prelim rounds.
- Prelims will be preset with varied speaker order.
- Judges rank each entry 1-7; no ranks are adjusted.
- Events with 8 or more entries must advance to elims. If there are less than 8 entries, no elims are required.
- The District Committee chooses how many entries will advance to elims in each event and announces that number before the tournament begins. The break point must meet the following minimum standards:
 - A minimum of 25% of an event's entry total (rounded up to the nearest whole number) OR 4 entries, whichever is smaller, must advance in each event.
 - All entries whose rank totals are tied with an advancing entry must also advance.
 - This change is in response to district feedback that they would like more autonomy to break more than 25% of the entry total.
- Seeds going into elims are determined by rank total, dropping the highest rank if each entry has 4 or more scores.
- Elims are snakes, and speaking order is determined based on previous speaker positions.
- Placement after each elim, including finals, will be determined by:
 - Add total ranks in all prelim rounds, dropping worst prelim rank
 - Add total of elim ranks multiplied by two

Congress Pilot (Now Permanent Rules)

The Congress pilot qualification rules have gone into effect permanently as the sole set of rules governing district tournaments in 2020-2021. These rules can be found in the Unified Manual.

In Congress, there are currently over 30 variations in which a district can follow the manual and determine a qualifier. This number will be reduced in the pilot to standardize the Congress qualification process while maintaining the ability of districts to make choices that are best for their district.

Features of the Congress Pilot:

- Minimum of 2 rounds
- One of those rounds must be a final round
- Each round should be scheduled to allot a minimum of 10 minutes per student in a chamber, e.g. a 20 student chamber should be at least 200 minutes long. However, if there are 25 or more students in a chamber, the district may choose to hold four hour rounds instead. This change is in response to districts' feedback that large chamber numbers would create a tournament that is too long.



- The District Committee may choose to either allow coaches to select which chamber their students will compete in or randomly place students in each chamber using approved software.
- Scoring will be done the same as the previous district tournament method, with students with the lowest cumulative rank total advancing to the next levels of competition.
- Districts may choose to allow student cumulative rank totals to determine national qualifiers.

Timeline and Process

A full Pilot District Tournament Manual is available online: <https://www.speechanddebate.org/pilot-district-qualification-manual/>

Districts will opt in to run the pilot debate method or pilot speech method. Districts may choose to run one, both, or none of these pilot methods. To opt in, district chairs will select that they will run the pilot(s) on their District Dates Form on Tabroom.com. Districts must opt-in by October 31 if any part of their district series begins in this calendar year or by November 30 if their district series begins in the next calendar year.