

# Leadership

## Board of Directors Spring Minutes

West Des Moines, IA  
April 25-26, 2025

The NSDA Board of Directors held its spring meeting April 25-26, 2025, in West Des Moines, IA. In attendance were President Byron Arthur, Vice President David Huston, Jamelle Brown, Alan Coverstone, Sara Gibson, Adam Jacobi, Erez Kalir, Renee Motter, Jay Rye, and Holly Williams.

### CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME

*President Arthur called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.*

### TEAM BUILDING

Holly Williams led the Board through a team-building exercise.

### MISSION MOMENT

President Arthur presented a mission moment designed to set the tone for the meeting and purposefully remind all present of the mission, vision, values, and goals as they deliberated and conducted business on behalf of the current and future membership.

### LEGAL/CONFIDENTIAL MATTERS

Each Board meeting includes time allotted for relevant updates on any pending legal matters or other business that requires discussion in executive session.

### REVIEW MEMBERSHIP CORRESPONDENCE

Letters submitted to the Board were included in the meeting materials to inform the Board of ideas, requests, and concerns that have been submitted for consideration.

### STANDING AND AD HOC COMMITTEE MINUTES AND Q&A

Members submitted questions about the prior standing and ad hoc committee minutes. Chairs provided updates not covered later in the meeting.

### HONOR SOCIETY POINTS STRUCTURE

#### Moved by Motter, seconded by Jacobi:

“Approve the proposal to increase Honor Society speech points to no less than three.”

**Passed: 9-0** (Arthur, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

After careful consideration and discussion, the Board unanimously agreed that students who compete in NSDA speech events should receive no less than three Honor Society points per round. Students who receive a rank of 1 will continue to receive six points, a rank of 2 carries five points, and a rank of 3 carries four points. Students who receive a rank of 4 or worse in any round will receive three points for participation. **This change will go into effect in August 2025.** [Read More »](#)

#### Moved by Coverstone, seconded by Rye:

“Approve the proposal to reduce the requirement for earning NSDA points for competition from four to two schools participating, promoting dual meets.”

**Passed: 10-0** (Arthur, Brown, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

The Board also agreed to lower the minimum number of schools required to participate in an event for it to be eligible for NSDA points from four to two. The goal is to provide more accessible opportunities for participation and recognition, especially for small, rural schools. There must be two schools present at a tournament or scrimmage in order for points to be earned; students are not eligible to earn points for practice rounds against their own teammates. **This change will go into effect in August 2025.**

## NATIONAL TOURNAMENT HOST CITY ROTATIONS

### Moved by Gibson, seconded by Coverstone:

“Establish a rotation schedule for National Tournament locations that includes at least three cities.”

**Passed: 8-0** (Arthur, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Motter, Rye, Williams)

After careful consideration and discussion by the Board of Directors, the Competition and Rules Leadership Committee, and the Student Leadership Council, the Board endorsed the concept of a multi-city rotation schedule for the National Tournament. The goal of moving to a multi-city rotation is to enable the Association to enter long-term hotel contracts that lower the cost of accommodations for schools, increase opportunities for local sponsorships, and create predictability for schools who attend the event each year. The rotation will include at least three cities to ensure students still get to experience new and exciting tournament locations. [Read More »](#)

## NATIONAL TOURNAMENT BID CONSIDERATIONS

### Moved by Jacobi, seconded by Rye:

“Approve the bid from the city of Des Moines, IA to be future hosts of the National Tournament.”

**Passed: 9-0** (Arthur, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

### Moved by Williams, seconded by Jacobi:

“Approve the bid from the city of Albuquerque, NM to be future hosts of the National Tournament.”

**Passed: 9-0** (Arthur, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

### Moved by Williams, seconded by Coverstone:

“Approve the bid from the city of Richmond, VA to be future hosts of the National Tournament.”

**Passed: 9-0** (Arthur, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

The Board considered proposals from the cities of Des Moines, IA, Albuquerque, NM, and Richmond, VA to be future hosts of the National Tournament. All were approved as future sites for the NSDA National Speech & Debate Tournament. The Executive Director will now work with each city to finalize agreements for future hosting. Once finalized, the specific dates will be announced.

## CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION UPDATE

The NSDA has kicked off its 100th anniversary! The Board was briefed on the ongoing elements of the celebration and what to expect for the rest of 2025.

## DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING

Staff introduced the Board to the upcoming fundraising campaign plans and discussed the Board's role in these initiatives. Additionally, staff discussed current work with FGS Global in PR and communications.

## STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIC GROWTH PLAN

The Board reviewed the current FY25 Strategic Plan Objectives through Q2. Staff provided an update on the work done to develop the FY26-FY30 Strategic Growth Plan further, and the board discussed current priorities.

## FINANCE BUSINESS

### Moved by Motter, seconded by Brown:

“Approve the Q2 financial report presented by the Internal Affairs Committee.”

**Passed: 10-0** (Arthur, Brown, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

### Moved by Brown, seconded by Motter:

“Approve the FY26 pre-budget proposal by the Internal Affairs Committee.”

**Passed: 10-0** (Arthur, Brown, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

The Board was provided with the Q2 financial report and a pre-budget proposal for FY26. The Internal Affairs Committee presented its recommendations on the budget proposal.

## RECESS

### Moved by Jacobi, seconded by Coverstone:

“Recess for the evening.”

**Passed: 10-0** (Arthur, Brown, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

*The meeting recessed at 4:30 p.m. on Friday.*

## RECONVENE/CALL TO ORDER

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*President Arthur called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday.*

## BELONGING AND INCLUSION

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The Board discussed the organization's working action steps in this area. The Board participated in exercises to reaffirm and/or revise the Board's position on its core values and Honor Code. The Board and staff have agreed to continue discussions on how the organization can further live out its commitment to create access and opportunity to all students and schools.

## MEMBERSHIP MODEL

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### **Moved by Coverstone, seconded by Jacobi:**

"Approve a flat fee membership model beginning in the **2026-2027 school year** that includes school membership, resource package, and unlimited student memberships for a price of up to \$349. Subsidies for school membership will be available based on need."

**Passed: 9-0** (Arthur, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

The Board discussed the potential restructuring of the NSDA membership model to one in which all member schools pay a single annual flat rate fee and receive all membership benefits for that fee. The Board considered feedback from various stakeholders, including the Competition and Rules Leadership Committee, Student Leadership Council, and membership correspondence. The Board voted unanimously to streamline our membership system into one single fee. For this fee, schools will receive school membership, full access to all NSDA resources including the Resource Package, and unlimited student memberships for no additional cost. The price of this annual membership package has been capped at \$349. **In addition, the organization is committing to a subsidies program to assist schools in need of additional financial support. While this model will initially result in lower membership revenues for the NSDA, the organization's growth efforts will focus on attracting new and more schools to membership.** The simplification of this system will improve internal and external processes, create a new value proposition for schools membership as it covers the Honor Society, competition access for students, and resources and curriculum, create predictable budgeting for schools and coaches, give school districts the ability to bulk purchase memberships, and ensure educational resources are available to all. More information on the new membership fee structure will be available as planning takes place throughout the 2025-2026 school year. **The new model will begin with the 2026-2027 school year.** [Read More »](#)

## NSDA DISTRICT LEVELING AND SCHOOL ENTRY LIMITS

### Moved by Jacobi, seconded by Williams:

“Approve the district leveling and district entry limits as endorsed by the CRLC.”

**Passed: 9-0** (Arthur, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

The Board discussed a change to the district qualification levels system, endorsed by the Competition and Rules Leadership Committee (CRLC). They also discussed a proposal by the Executive Director on school entry limits at the NSDA district competitions. The Board approved two major changes:

1. **Remove restrictions that limit an individual school's district participation based on the size of the school.** This change is designed to increase competition opportunities for students and school programs of all sizes and make it easier for districts to earn additional qualifiers in popular events.
2. **Base a district's level on the number of schools in the district.** In the existing system, a district's level is determined by either the number of schools, number of students and/or degrees, or the number of schools with NSDA charter status. Given the move to a flat fee membership model, the number of students and degrees in a district is no longer representative of the strength of that district because student memberships are unlimited. The Board heard feedback from the CRLC and coach membership that NSDA charter status is difficult to understand and punitive because it is taken away when a school fails to meet the requirements. This new change bases a district's level only on the number of schools within the district. The goal is to streamline the qualification

process, make it easy for districts to understand, track, and impact their level for the following year, and incentivize continued growth of programs at the district level. The full list of changes are described below.

**Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year**, the NSDA will implement the following changes:

- All active member schools will be allowed to enter up to four entries in all NSDA district speech and debate events, regardless of their school strength.
- All active member schools will be allowed to enter up to two students in the district Senate and up to 10 students in the district House. Students must participate for the entirety of the preliminary rounds of the competition to be counted as an entry at the district tournament.
- A district's level will be based on the number of paid member schools the district has by July 31 of the year prior using the following scale:
  - Level 1: Districts with between 8-14 active (paid) schools
  - Level 2: Districts with between 15-29 active (paid) schools
  - Level 3: Districts with 30 or more active (paid) schools
- All Level 1 and 2 districts must have at least four entries from two schools in an event for it to be viable as a qualifier. Level 3 districts must have at least 10 entries in an event to qualify the 3rd qualifier.
- The Board also agreed to continue to allow districts to earn additional qualifiers in any event that meets the following entry and participation thresholds:

Qualifiers to the National Tournament – Entries Required per Event				
District Level	1 Qualifier	2 Qualifiers	3 Qualifiers	4 Qualifiers
Level 1	4 entries	16 entries	30 entries	50 entries
Level 2		4 entries	30 entries	50 entries
Level 3		4 entries	10 entries	50 entries

- Note: Although the new leveling policies will take effect for the 2026-2027 school year, the NSDA will honor the district level established under the current system through the 2027-2028 school year if it is higher to allow districts time to meet the new standards. [Read More »](#)

## BOARD MEMBER CANDIDATES VOTE

### Moved by Jacobi, seconded by Williams:

"Approve the nomination of Josh Swartzel to be a member of the Board beginning August 1."

**Passed: 10-0** (Arthur, Brown, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

The Governance Committee presented its recommendations for appointing individuals to new terms to the NSDA Board of Directors. Josh Swartzel was appointed to serve. In addition, in executive session, the Board unanimously agreed to extend the term of Sara Gibson through the 2025-2026 school year.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND CRLC REPRESENTATION PROPOSALS

### Moved by Coverstone, seconded by Rye:

"Approve the proposal to create a full-voting Alumni Member seat on the NSDA Board for an alum who (a) is 18 or older, (b) graduated high school within the past five years, and (c) has competed in at least one NSDA event; the seat carries a one-year term aligned with established annual Board terms calendar (renewable once). Task the Governance Committee—working alongside this first Alumni Member—with designing and bringing back by June 2026 detailed policies for outreach, nomination, interviewing, selection, onboarding, and mentoring of future alumni members. (Necessary NSDA Bylaws changes would need to be made.)"

**Passed: 10-0** (Arthur, Brown, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

The Board considered and approved a proposal by the Governance Committee to change the NSDA Bylaws to establish a full-voting seat on the Board of Directors to a young alumni member. The term of the seat will be one year and will be renewable once.

### Moved by Rye, seconded by Motter:

"Approve the proposal to allow the Executive Director to appoint members of the Student Leadership Council to the Competition and Rules Leadership Committee."

**Passed: 10-0** (Arthur, Brown, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

The Board considered and approved a proposal by the Governance Committee to change the NSDA Bylaws to allow the Executive Director to appoint members of the Student Leadership Council to the Competition and Rules Leadership Committee.

## 2025 NATIONAL TOURNAMENT

The Executive Director updated the Board on various logistical aspects regarding the upcoming National Tournament in Des Moines. Some issues discussed were current participation numbers, plans for safety and security protocols, key changes from the prior year's Nationals, efforts the organization is taking to address coaches' caucus concerns, and an introduction of the new judge grant program.

## F26 CALENDAR PLANNING

The Board reviewed a draft FY26 Board Meeting Calendar before the meeting and discussed any necessary changes before establishing the formal calendar.

## PRESIDENT CLOSING REMARKS AND ADJOURNMENT

President Arthur recognized Alan Coverstone for his service on the Board.

### Moved by Jacobi, seconded by Motter:

"Adjourn."

**Passed: 10-0** (Arthur, Brown, Coverstone, Gibson, Huston, Jacobi, Kalir, Motter, Rye, Williams)

*The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m. on Saturday.* ✎

*Please read the addendum on the following pages for additional information about Honor Society changes in 2025-2026, membership model changes in 2026-2027, district leveling changes in 2026-2027, and the upcoming National Tournament host city rotation.*

## QUESTIONS? CONCERNS? IDEAS?

We want to hear from you! Send your feedback to [board@speechanddebate.org](mailto:board@speechanddebate.org).

*Note: The following email was sent to NSDA member coaches on May 21, 2025.*

The NSDA Board of Directors has a bold vision: a speech and debate program in every school. In order to help us best understand how to realize that vision, we engaged in extensive conversations over the last two years with a range of stakeholders including coaches, students, district leaders, alumni, administrators, and leaders of other speech and debate organizations. We also conducted targeted focus groups with students and coaches from rural, urban, and small school communities to better understand their unique needs and challenges.

We learned a lot, and at our Spring Board Meeting on April 25-26, the NSDA Board discussed what changes that learning requires us to make as a community. While in many ways the issues we discussed were different, there were two themes that consistently emerged—we need to simplify our processes, and we need to make them more fair.

Please read on for important updates for the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 school years.

## 2025-2026 Honor Society Changes

**Simplified Speech Points:** The NSDA is committed to celebrating a student's pursuit of excellence. Through conversations with students and coaches about the Honor Society, a consistent theme emerged: the current system is overly complicated and doesn't always reflect the level of work students put into preparing for competition. This is particularly true in speech, where a student may spend hours researching, writing, memorizing, and delivering a performance, only to receive a single Honor Society point if they place last in a round. In comparison, a student who participates in a debate round will receive three points, even if they lose.

The feedback from our community underscored a need to more fairly recognize the commitment it takes just to compete. To address this, the Board unanimously approved a new baseline: students in NSDA speech events will now receive no fewer than three points per round. Those who place first, second, or third will still earn six, five, and four

points, respectively, but those placing lower will receive three points for their participation—honoring the preparation and skills demonstrated, even when a top rank isn't achieved.

This change will both simplify the process for entering points, making it easier for new coaches and students to understand, and reinforce that every round of competition represents meaningful work.

## Reduced School Requirements for Tournaments:

The NSDA believes that every student—regardless of location or school size—deserves the opportunity to be recognized for their competitive efforts. Under the current system, students can only earn Honor Society points at tournaments with four or more schools participating. This rule has made it harder for students in rural or isolated areas to gain recognition for their efforts—even when they are actively competing against peers from another school.

The Board has approved a change to lower the minimum school requirement for earning Honor Society points at competitions from four schools to two schools, and clarified that students are not eligible to earn points for practice rounds against their own teammates. This change acknowledges that high-quality competition can take many forms, especially in smaller or under resourced communities.

**Middle School Points Alignment:** The NSDA is committed to ensuring that all students and coaches are recognized for their work, regardless of grade level. In February 2024, in service of that commitment, the Board of Directors approved a change to align the merit points awarded to middle school students and their coaches with those awarded at the high school level. Beginning August 1, 2025, middle school competitors and their coaches will earn the same number of points for rounds of competition as their high school peers.

While point values will not be applied retroactively, this change marks an important step toward creating a more consistent experience for NSDA members across all levels. It affirms that dedication to speech and debate deserves to be celebrated equally—whether it begins in middle school or later in a student's journey.

The NSDA will observe the impact of this change on total points earned for students to determine whether any other changes to the Honor Society are necessary over time.



## 2026-2027 Membership Model Changes

Our membership model is too complicated. Basing the cost to a school on the number of student members makes it hard to budget at the beginning of the year and creates a disincentive for coaches to sign students up as members, making it harder for them to access resources and gain Honor Society benefits. This complicated model has also caused confusion with school administrations and additional work and cost to coaches.

As a result, the NSDA has developed a streamlined flat fee annual membership model that will allow students, regardless of location or school size, to have access to the Honor Society, student competition opportunities, and curriculum resources.

Beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, the NSDA Board approved a flat fee membership model that includes school membership, the resource package, and an unlimited number of students from a school for a price of \$349 annually. This model assumes the use of digital, printable membership certificates; paper certificates and seals will continue to be available for a small fee.

Subsidies for school membership will be available to existing and new schools based on need to help bring us even closer to realizing our vision—a speech and debate program in every school. This change is not intended to increase revenue to the organization; in fact, it may initially result in lower overall membership revenue for the NSDA. This remodel seeks to make membership and resources easier to navigate and access for current schools and new schools alike.

## 2026-2027 District Leveling Changes

In conversations with students, coaches, and alumni, as well as feedback from the Competition and Rules Leadership Committee (CRLC), we heard a desire to simplify the district tournament process and create more opportunities for participation. Participation limits for small schools and a complicated and punitive formula for determining how many qualifiers a district receives in each event were among the complexities frequently mentioned. The Board's change to the membership pricing model also necessitates a change in this formula.

As a result, the Board voted to simplify and expand participation at district tournaments by establishing the following changes for the 2026-2027 school year:

- Allowing all NSDA member schools to enter up to four entries per event
- Allowing all NSDA member schools to enter up to 10 students in the district House competition
- Creating a simpler district leveling system based on the number of NSDA member schools
- Maintaining opportunities for districts to earn additional qualifiers in events with higher student participation

Additional details and a breakdown of the proposed leveling system are included in the Board minutes at the top of this document.

## National Tournament Host City Rotation

The National Tournament was established to showcase the best speech and debate performances and thereby elevate the quality of speech and debate occurring around the country. As a result, the NSDA continuously seeks ways to make the National Tournament as accessible as possible.

In looking for ways to decrease the overall cost for attendees, but keep a high-quality experience, we found that when we return to a city more than once, the benefits grow: long-term contracts mean the NSDA can negotiate lower hotel rates for schools, local partners commit to higher levels of financial support for the event, and coaches are able to make better informed decisions about travel and meals to lower costs for their team.

As a result, the Board has endorsed a model that allows for a return to the same region once every three years, while not precluding a one-year commitment to a single city. This provides consistency and planning while still offering students geographic variety across their competition years. Most importantly, it helps us create an experience that is more predictable and sustainable for all involved. We believe this model is a critical step forward in ensuring the long-term success of the National Tournament and in supporting the growth of speech and debate nationwide. The next two tournaments after Des Moines will take place in Richmond, Virginia, and Phoenix, Arizona. Details for future tournament locations confirmed as part of this schedule will be available in late 2025 or early 2026.