

Marcus Speech & Debate Handbook 2025-2026

Our Mission

To provide a fun and stimulating academic activity that engages students in the research and analysis of global issues, encourages individual expression and independent thought, and promotes social and intellectual development through dialogue.

Participant Goals

- ❖ To become confident, eloquent, and informed public speakers
- ❖ To attend regular practices and compete in as many tournaments as possible
- ❖ To ensure FUN for all through the development of good relationships with teammates and debate communities across the nation
- ❖ To promote cooperative work habits
- ❖ To raise the profile of the team to recruit and retain new teammates
- ❖ To promote the ongoing financial viability of the team through fundraising, if needed.
- ❖ To endorse the pursuit of excellence through participation in summer debate camps

The power of real debate is in the language and intellectual honesty of the debaters, alongside the engagement of spectators.

Ruzwana Bashir

<http://www.brainyquote.com>

I love argument, I love debate. I don't expect anyone just to sit there and agree with me, that's not their job.

Margaret Thatcher

<http://www.brainyquote.com>

Debate and divergence of views can only enrich our history and culture.

Ibrahim Babangida

<http://www.brainyquote.com>

The Debate Year

For most varsity participants, the debate season begins in the summer when they attend various debate camps around the country. As soon as school convenes in August, debaters meet to share their evidence, build cases, and attend after-school practices once a week.

The tournament season for LISD usually begins in September. There are, on average, 8-12 tournaments, usually once or twice a month, ending in February. The debate season may be longer for the team's top competitors, who may attend at least one national tournament and, if they qualify, the Texas Forensic Association (TFA) State Tournament, the National Speech and Debate Association Tournament (Nationals), and/or the Tournament of Champions (TOC).

To qualify for the TFA State Tournament, most debaters must win "state points" at tournaments throughout the season.

To qualify for Nationals, debaters must win a "berth" at the National qualifying tournament. The coach can select only 4 debaters from the school to compete.

To qualify for TOC, debaters must win two "TOC bids", which are given out at certain tournaments to debaters who reach a specified level.

Access the Debate Website here:



<https://sites.google.com/staff.lisd.net/mhsspeechdebate/home>

What to Expect

All tournaments:

Divisions- Students debate in different divisions. First-year debate students start in the “novice” division. Tournaments also may include Junior Varsity and Varsity divisions. The number of debaters who may compete in the Varsity Debate category is limited and the coach may determine attendance.

Rounds- At most tournaments, students debate at least four rounds. Students who “break”, or make it into the final rounds, will debate additional rounds. Those who don’t break should stay and support teammates who do. Although rounds are supposed to end by 10 pm, this is often not the case. Rounds often run late on Friday night, start again by 8 am Saturday, and continue through Saturday night’s award ceremony that follows the end of rounds. For local tournaments, the team travels back and forth each day. For out-of-town tournaments, students stay overnight, in hotels with chaperones.

What happens at virtual tournaments:

Some tournaments are still choosing a virtual platform right now. Students who participate in virtual tournaments will be able to leave school early during 4th period with a School Sponsored absence. They will compete from home. They will need wifi and a personal device with access to Google Chrome in order to compete. Most schools will not allow students to use Chrome. Virtual tournaments will use the website Tabroom.com. Students will be responsible for making sure they attend their virtual rounds as assigned.

What happens at in-person tournaments:

Leaving/Returning- A typical high school-sponsored tournament begins after school. The debate team usually travels to other schools and, depending upon the location, usually leaves around 1:30 pm for area competitions. Students must submit a signed permission slip in order to leave school. We usually do not return until nearly midnight. We usually leave around 6:30 am the following Saturday morning and return around 4:00 pm.

Food- Students are responsible for their own food and should be provided with money or food for each tournament. Tournaments are very demanding and food (especially healthy food) is often not available. **Parent volunteers for assistance with food at tournaments are greatly appreciated!**

Parental Involvement

Be a Judge! Be a chaperone! Be a volunteer!

Judging- Debate offers parents a unique opportunity for involvement in a school activity. Many activities only allow parents to be observers, but in debate, parents have the chance to become active participants by serving as judges. Judges do not need to have special expertise; they just need to be good listeners and declare who offered them the best argument. As schools are required to supply a certain number of judges or pay a tournament fee, in many debate programs, parents form the backbone of the judging pool

- A one-day training opportunity will be presented during the school year
- Please sign-up at the Parent Meeting

Parent Judging is a vital part of our Debate program. When including judging expenses, Booster Club fees only cover about 2 tournaments per student and school funds would be depleted after the first tournament. Parent judges make it possible for us to compete in the tournaments we have throughout the year!

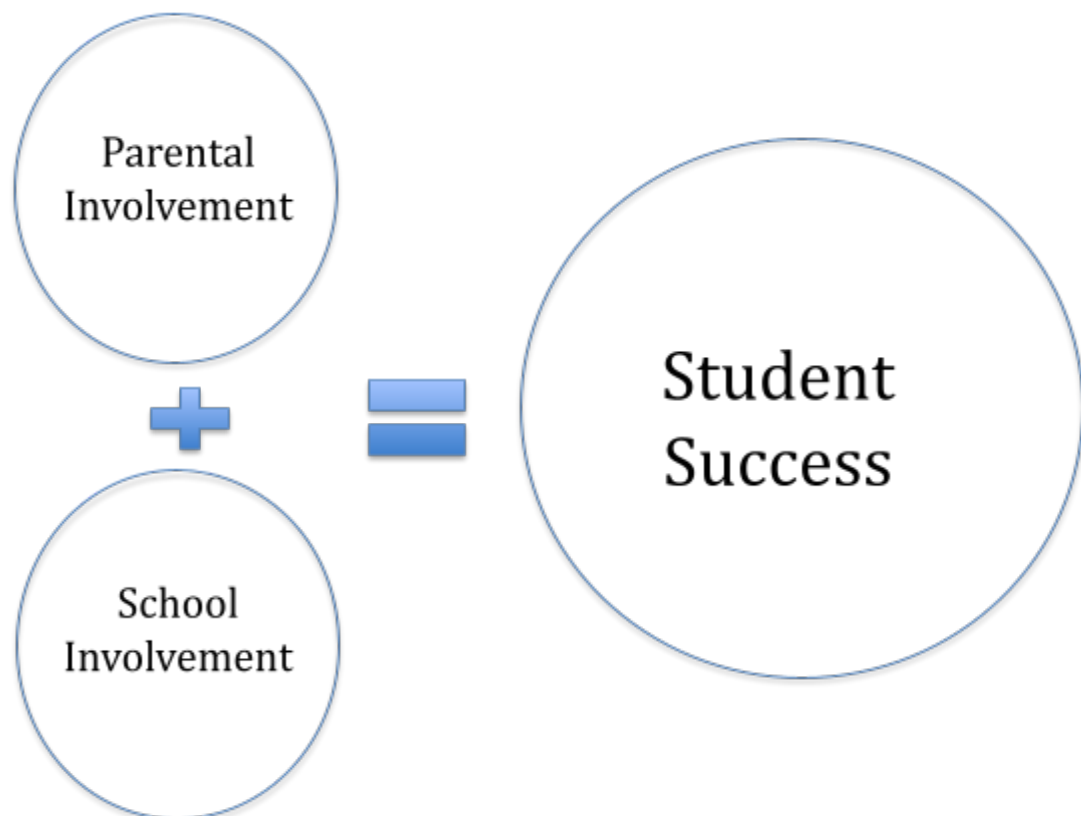
Chaperone- Overnight trips may require parent chaperones in order to be possible

Volunteer- Parents can provide transportation for their students when a bus is not available, meals for tournaments, and help with fundraising

Often, parents value debate not simply because of the benefits it provides their child, but for their overall education.

A “volunteer” background check is mandatory for all participating adults.

- Please go online to LISD to complete this process. [Become a Volunteer](#)



MHS Speech and Debate Code of Conduct

Students will be expected to follow all LISD and MHS policies, tournament-specific rules, and NSDA/TFA/UIL regulations. Any violation of this code of conduct may result in suspension from the team.

The following lists some, not all, expectations, infractions, and consequences:

Alcohol/Drugs/Tobacco/E-Cigarettes/Etc.- Students must follow all LISD and MHS policies in regard to alcohol, drugs, tobacco, e-cigarettes, etc.

- Students caught with drugs, alcohol, tobacco, e-cigarettes, etc., during the school day, during after-school practice, at a tournament, during an overnight trip, or during travel to or from a tournament will be immediately expelled from the team and face disciplinary consequences as warranted

Dress- Professional dress is mandatory in order to travel and compete. However, please do not let the dress code prohibit participation. Speak to Mrs. Hightower if meeting the dress code poses a challenge.

Ladies Options:

- Slacks and a nice blouse or sweater, a skirt (approximately knee length or longer) and blouse, or a business suit with appropriate shoes. (Flip-flops, athletic shoes, and house shoes are not appropriate footwear)
- Appropriate fit, please

Gentlemen Options:

- Button-down shirt and tie, khakis or dress pants, suits, sweater vest with a collared shirt, polo style shirt, and appropriate shoes. (Flip-flops, athletic shoes, and house shoes are not appropriate footwear)
- Appropriate fit, please

Dress Code Violation Consequences-

- 1st time- Warning
- 2nd time- suspension from the current tournament
- 3rd time- parent conference and further suspension

Drops- Drops negatively impact the team and the tournament hosts. Drops after the official drop date will not be allowed without cause (illness, family emergency, etc.)

- If a student is well enough to attend school the day of the tournament they entered, they will be considered well enough to attend the tournament.
- Drops with cause will be subject to repaying the tournament drop fee and a partial transportation fee before a student is allowed to attend subsequent tournaments
 - If a student must drop with cause, the student or the parents should contact Mrs. Hightower as soon as possible or they will be considered a no-show.
- Drops without cause or no shows will not only be subject to the tournament drop fee and partial transportation fee, but will also result in a 1 tournament suspension the 1st time, 2 tournament suspensions the 2nd time, and suspension from the team after the 3rd time.

Failures- We abide by UIL failure rules

- No pass/No Play
- If a student is forced to resign from a tournament due to failed grades, the student will be responsible for the tournament drop fees

Individual Tournaments- Individual tournaments constitute those tournaments that students would like to attend but are not on the team tournament schedule.

- Students may choose to attend no more than **TWO** individual tournaments per school calendar year.
- Mrs. Hightower and tournament hosts must approve entries in advance.
 - Mrs. Hightower will contact tournament hosts for approval.
 - Students are not to contact tournament hosts.
- All tournament entries **MUST** be completed by Mrs. Hightower through the official MHS Tabroom account.
- Students must attend practices in order to sign up for tournament participation.
- Students are **NOT ALLOWED** to enter tournaments on their own under any circumstances and are not allowed to contact tournament hosts directly.
- Students **MAY NOT** attend an individual tournament unless a Parent/Guardian will be in attendance and serving as their judge and chaperone
 - Parents must sign a statement agreeing to provide transportation and serve as the judge and chaperone before entries will be granted.
 - Only parents, not students, are allowed to enter the Tab Room at individual tournaments.
 - Parents may work out an agreement between themselves if more than one student would like to attend the tournament; however, all parents must then submit a statement to Mrs. Hightower concerning the agreement before entries will be allowed.
 - Attending an individual tournament without an adult chaperone is a violation of TFA Rules.
 - See below for TFA Rules Violation Consequences
- MHS **WILL NOT** provide entry fees, transportation, judges, or any assistance outside of completing the tournament entry.
- Permission will not be granted for students to attend individual tournaments out of state unless the tournament is a national-level tournament that the student has earned entry into.
- If students and parents elect to attend individual tournaments, LISD, MHS, and the MHS debate team will not be liable for any incident or accident that may occur.
- Individual tournament disqualifications are treated the same as team tournament disqualifications (see below).

National Speech and Debate Honor Society: The NSDA Honor Society recognizes students for participation in speech and debate activities.

- Students earn merit points for participation in tournaments.
 - To remain a member in good standing, students must participate in a minimum of 3 tournaments from September through March of the school year.
 - To receive merit pins or honor cords to be worn at graduation, a member must be in good standing for that school year.
- Members of the Honor Society are held to the NSDA Code of Honor below.

NSDA Code of Honor

“As a student or coach member of the National Speech & Debate Association, I pledge to uphold the highest standards of humility, equity, integrity, respect, leadership, and service in pursuit of excellence.”

- **Humility:** A member does not regard oneself more highly than others. Regardless of a person’s level of success, an individual always looks beyond oneself to appreciate the inherent value of others.
- **Equity:** A member respects individuals and their individual differences as well as fosters equity, diversity, and inclusion. A member promotes empowerment for people from all backgrounds, including race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and ability.
- **Integrity:** A member is honest, ethical, and adheres to the competition and conduct rules of the organization. A member follows the NSDA discrimination and harassment policy and abides by the rules of their schools, tournaments, and localities.
- **Respect:** A member demonstrates civil discourse in their interactions with others. A member maintains and contributes to a safe space and welcoming environment for all.

- Leadership: A member is aware that their words and actions influence others. A member commits to thoughtful and meaningful words and actions that reflect NSDA core values.
- Service: A member exercises their talents to provide service to peers, the community, and the activity. At all times, a member is prepared to work constructively to improve the lives of others.

Officer Expectations- Officer positions are voluntary and are elected by Debate Club members. All officers are expected to meet the following expectations.

- Officers will be elected in April or May of each year for the following school year.
- Officers must attend a minimum of 3 tournaments during the school year in which they hold an office.
- Officers must regularly attend after-school practices from September through March.
- Officers must assist with after-school events, such as the homecoming carnival or Marcus at a Glance.
- Officers must give reasonable advance notice (barring illness) if they are unable to attend expected practices or events.
- Officers holding a "Captain" position must be prepared to assist other students in their specific category.

Officer Expectations Violation Consequences-

- 1st violation- Officers will be given a verbal reminder of expectations.
- 2nd violation- Officers will be given a written warning, including a reminder of expectations
- 3rd violation- Students will be put on a probationary period of one month. Any violation during the probationary period will result in a loss of position for the remainder of the school year.
- Continued violations will result in a loss of position **and** a disqualification for holding an office in the future.
- Violations of other Debate policies may also result in a loss of position **and** a disqualification for holding an office in the future.

TFA Rules- We must follow ALL TFA rules at every tournament. Violation of these rules compromises our ability to compete in local tournaments and our reputation as a team.

- TFA rules mandate that all student tournament entries be affiliated with the school the student attends.
 - All tournament entries MUST be completed by Mrs. Hightower through the official MHS JOT/Tabroom accounts.
 - Students are NOT ALLOWED to enter tournaments on their own under any circumstances.
 - Any student caught cheating or using an individual Joy of Tournaments or Tabroom account in order to enter a tournament on their own will be in violation of TFA rules and the MHS Debate Code of Conduct.
 - TFA Rules mandate that a school-appointed adult chaperone must be in attendance at all times at tournaments
 - Any student caught competing at an individual tournament without a parent or school-approved guardian in attendance will be in violation of TFA rules.

TFA Rules Violation Consequences-

- 1st time- Conference with parent and student, loss of the right to two individual tournaments, and suspension from the next team tournament
- 2nd time- Conference with parent and student, and indefinite suspension from the team
- 3rd time- Removal from the team

Tournament Disqualifications Consequences - Any student disqualified from a tournament will face the following consequences.

-From a Tournament Official: (cheating; violation of tournament, TFA, or NSDA rules)

- 1st time- Indefinite suspension from the team following a parent/administrator conference; possible permanent removal from the team
- 2nd time- Removal from the team; disciplinary action taken by an AP at Marcus if warranted

-From Debate Coach: (violation of MHS Debate rules or code of conduct)

- 1st time- Parent conference; suspension from next tournament
- 2nd time- Indefinite suspension from the team; disciplinary action from Marcus AP if warranted
- 3rd time- Removal from the team; disciplinary action taken by an AP at Marcus if warranted

Tournament Specific Rules

-Each tournament invitation outlines specific expectations; however, in addition to those, please remember the following:

- Students are not allowed in the Tab Room at any time.
 - Students may not request to see ballots, ask to judge, or enter a tournament Tab Room at any time without the coach's consent.
- Students are not allowed to contact tournament directors (via phone, e-mail, etc.) regarding entries, drops, or being on the waitlist.
 - All contact must be done through Mrs. Hightower.
- All teams and judges, as well as facilities, are to be treated with respect at all times
- Good sportsmanship is paramount.
 - Refrain from speaking ill of other competitors and judges (Wait to vent on the bus to heading home)
- Students must attend all tournaments they sign up for. (See drops above)
 - If, for some reason, a student cannot attend (family emergency, sick, etc.), they are expected to notify the coach as early as possible so the entry fees paid on their behalf can be reimbursed by the tournament.
 - If this is not possible, they are responsible for paying the total fee or finding a replacement.
- If an emergency has delayed a student's departure to/from a tournament, please contact the coach on their cell phone.
 - Every reasonable effort to locate tardy/missing students in a timely manner is undertaken, but students will either miss the tournament entirely or be left behind (requiring parents to provide transportation).
- Students are expected to attend all rounds as scheduled, even for virtual tournaments.
 - Although tournaments are also social gatherings, arriving late to rounds or skipping rounds is not tolerated and will have consequences.
- Students must stay in contact with the coach throughout the tournament.
 - Parents need to be aware that, while there are chaperones in attendance, supervision at either hotels or tournaments is limited (there cannot be one adult for every student).
 - Students are expected to act maturely and responsibly. If, for any reason, it is thought that a student cannot live up to these expectations, they will not be allowed to attend.
 - If the student cannot be contacted for an extended period of time and they are not actively in rounds, they will be considered in violation of tournament rules.

Tournament Rules Violation Consequences:

- 1st time- Parent conference; suspension from next tournament
- 2nd time- indefinite suspension from the team; disciplinary action from Marcus AP if warranted
- 3rd time- removal from the team; disciplinary action taken by an AP at Marcus if warranted

Transportation- On most occasions, a bus will be provided to and from each tournament. If this is not the case, students will be notified in advance. Students should not plan to leave tournaments early. Students will be expected to remain at the tournament until all MHS students are finished competing unless early departure has been previously arranged and approved by Mrs. Hightower. If there are less than 10 students attending a tournament, parents will be asked to provide transportation for their student.

• STUDENTS MAY NOT DRIVE THEMSELVES TO TOURNAMENTS.

- The **ONLY** exception to this rule is the Flower Mound Swing tournament in January.

- A parent granting permission for a student to drive is **NOT** acceptable and the student will still be considered in violation of tournament rules.
- Individual tournaments are **not** an exception to this rule. Parents will be required to provide transportation. Students caught driving themselves will be considered in violation of tournament rules.
- In the event that a rental car is taken rather than a bus, students will not be allowed to leave the tournament early. All students departing in the rental car will be required to return in it as well. This prevents a single student from being put in the position to ride alone with the coach.
- An addendum of rules will be provided for any overnight trips

Transportation Rules Violation Consequences:

- 1st time- Parent conference; suspension from next tournament
- 2nd time- indefinite suspension from the team; disciplinary action from Marcus AP if warranted
- 3rd time- removal from the team; disciplinary action taken by an AP at Marcus if warranted

Team Meetings

- Team meetings are currently taking place on Tuesdays after school in room W129
- This may change as the year goes on.
- Students are **required** to attend meetings on the weeks they are competing in a tournament.
 - Non-attendance means their entry will be dropped, and the student will be responsible for any drop fees assessed by the tournament.

Please be aware that this is not a comprehensive list. It is impossible to foresee all situations or incidents that may take place throughout the school year. Incidents not expressly covered under the code of conduct will be evaluated on an individual basis and may result in any or all of the following consequences, depending on the infraction:

- Warning
- Parent phone call/conference
- Suspension from the tournament(s)
- Removal from the team

Please complete and return the portion below:

MHS Speech and Debate Code of Conduct Acknowledgment

Students will not be allowed to compete until this acknowledgment has been signed and returned

Student:

- ☐ I have read and understood the MHS Speech and Debate Code of Conduct.
- ☐ I agree to abide by the MHS Speech and Debate Code of Conduct or accept the consequences should I violate it.

Print Name

Signature

Date

Parent/Guardian:

- ☐ I have read and understood the MHS Speech and Debate Code of Conduct.
- ☐ I agree that my student will abide by the MHS Speech and Debate Code of Conduct or accept the consequences should they violate it.

Print Name

Signature

Date