

[THIS IS A DRAFT. More data is to come. Please voice any suggestions/concerns to pairforensics@gmail.com. A reminder that by filling out the form, there was an agreement that your name is to be included in the final letter/petition. If you are no longer comfortable with this, please let us know ASAP.]

Dear Executive Board of the Pennsylvania High School Speech League:

After conducting a statewide tournament survey for the 2024 PHSSL State Championship, we found key issues in judge training and judge bias that we would like the Board to provide solutions for with the help of our policy change suggestions. As part of Pennsylvania Inclusion and Resources, PA's first and only student-led debate equity organization, we hope to ultimately enhance the competitive caliber and elevate the equity standards of next year's tournament.

Inequities experienced by competitors

Inexperienced judges

- Around 50% of competitors had an inexperienced judge in 6 of their rounds:
 - [PASTE SURVEY GRAPH HERE]
- Persuasive & Informative Speaking:
 - People got 1s & 6s in the final round; need clearer distinction on ranking
 - Extremely mixed judge comments on Info visual aids, inexperienced judges, people breaking to final rounds without visual aids at all
- Lincoln-Douglas Debate:
 - Pool inaccurate to talent of debaters due to inadequate judging; "It's unacceptable the top debaters in the state couldn't see break rounds because of bad judging."
 - "Not flowing/paying attention. My quarterfinal round had a person who voted on my opponent citing more cards, which is simply unacceptable."
 - "Certain judges did not understand the event of POI and how it worked, I'm under the impression that some judges thought it should be similar to prose or poetry. However, POI is a lot more dynamic and includes a lot of blocking and variation in characters. It seems that some judges didn't understand this."
 - "Some unclear or not elaborated RFDs (on both when I lost or won) including one or two that pointed to a "lack of evidence" (this in EXD where, as Mr. Edwards pointed out, they should be weighed equally as other claims and warrants)"
 - Majority Public Forum debate-style judges in a Lincoln Douglas round

Potential judge biases

- Lincoln-Douglas Debate:

- Multiple reports of parents judging the events their kids competed in, compromising the ethicality of results
- Similarly, we want to avoid: parents judging kids from the same school

DEI Issues

- Toxic competition: teams yelling during speech/cross-examination rounds: “There is a line between competitive and being rude.”

Our Solutions

*Inexperienced judges - **enhance event-specific judge training & new policies***

- Judge policies
 - All judges should be properly trained, ideally with certification, in the respective events they will be judging. They must have more than a superficial understanding of the event. This includes adhering to NSDA judging guidelines/conventions, including guides to judging regarding personal biases, and other notes regarding cards (debate), visual aids (speech), and the like.
- General policies
 - Speech: we would be interested in seeing a cumulative approach to ranking/breaking to elimination rounds—”so that inexperienced judge(s) in an elimination round interfere minimally with a competitor's performance.”

*Potential judge biases - **enforce new judge policies***

- Enforcing new judge policies limiting contact (judging-wise) between competitors/judges affiliated (or previously affiliated) with the same school
- Considering having more judges in preliminary events

*DEI issues - **transparency***

- Judges should call out obviously rude and toxic behavior in a debate space: “If the judge is able to recognize it so much to put it in the RFD then they should have called it out during the round.”

General suggestions

- [WRITE HERE]

Speech and debate is an essential part of countless high school careers, culminating, for Pennsylvanian forensicators, at the PHSSL State Championship. The integrity of this activity at the state level deserves to be upheld for the sake of not only Pennsylvanian competitors, but out of respect for the dedication of families, coaches, teams, and schools nationwide.

We commend the hard work of the PHSSL Executive Board in championing forensics throughout Pennsylvania. Our interests are your interests—although many aspects of the forensics world are far from perfect, we hope that through considering our proposed solutions, the PHSSL Executive Board may recognize the collective effort of students across Pennsylvania to improve their state tournament, one step at a time.

Our continued self-examination and improvement have, and will continue to embody Pennsylvania forensics' tenacity, initiative, and spirit.

Sincerely,

Pennsylvania Inclusion & Resources

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*[*more names to come]*

*Including TOC qualifier-competitors, state finalists, nationally-ranked & district champions