2021-2022

Speech and Debate Guidance:

Returning to face-to-face practice, events, and competition

UPDATED APRIL 8, 2021

This guidance was prepared by the National Federation of State High School Associations and the National Speech & Debate Association.

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Key Takeaways for Administrators

1. The NFHS, the NSDA, and more than 125 performing arts organizations are supporting a [scientific study](#) to learn how COVID-19 may spread in the course of speech and debate instruction and competition. The results of this research have informed our understanding and, subsequently, the development of effective mitigation strategies for speech and debate education. The following safety guidance is suggested for face-to-face participation as a result of preliminary results from the aerosol study:

   - When advised by the CDC, state, or local health department, a well-fitting mask should be worn by all students, teachers/coaches, and adjudicators in all classrooms and competition spaces.

   - Planning for instruction and events should follow any time restrictions, room capacities, and ventilation needs as recommended by the state or local health department for the speech and debate students to meet and practice.

   - Good hygiene norms should be followed, and school approved disinfection strategies should be used.

2. There are many scheduling models being developed across the nation (e.g., block scheduling, flipped classrooms, small group pull-outs, and staggered scheduling). Speech and debate education can and should occur in all scheduling models. **When it is safe to do so, face-to-face instruction and events should be prioritized as they provide the greatest opportunity for student learning, growth, and social and emotional development.** If your school is offering extracurricular programs, speech and debate activities should be included in those offerings.

3. If a school district allows students at high-risk to opt out of in-person attendance, and online learning is provided for those students, speech and debate education should be part of the education provided to those students.

4. Online speech and debate education and events should be treated as a supplement to in-person participation. High quality, content-valid speech and debate participation can be conducted in a multitude of ways which should each be considered including face-to-face, hybrid, and online.

Key Takeaways for Educators and Coaches

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Return to Speech and Debate Education Activities

The NFHS and the NSDA believe it is essential to the physical, social, emotional and mental well-being of K-12 students across the nation that students return to regular, face-to-face speech and debate activities as soon as it is deemed safe to do so. The NFHS and the NSDA also recognize the likelihood that all students will not be able to return to speech and debate activities at the same time in all schools, regions and states. There will likely be variations in which activities can be held in the various parts of the country. While we would typically have reservations regarding such inequities, the NFHS and the NSDA endorse the return to school-based speech and debate activities in any and all situations where a return can be done safely.

Prioritizing Face-to-Face Events

As schools develop plans for the new school year, the health, safety, and security of our students, faculty, and staff is the predominant consideration. During this pandemic, many school communities were able to lean into their strengths, but also faced new challenges. We showed strength by being flexible and allowing students to participate during a difficult time. For example, in speech the participants were able to have their performances reviewed and adjudicated in a nearly online only setting. However, often the participants were not able to experience fellow competitor performances. Additionally, they were given limited opportunities to share their perspective and performances with a wider audience which is fundamental to the activity.

COVID-19 Aerosol Study

The CBDNA, the NFHS, the NSDA, and more than 125 performing arts organizations are supporting a scientific study to learn how COVID-19 may spread via aerosol distribution and develop mitigation techniques to prevent or lessen aerosol distribution during speaking, acting, singing, and playing of wind instruments. The results of this research will inform our understanding and, subsequently, how to safely resume face-to-face activities. We encourage you to check here for updated information.

Additional Resources to Support Speech and Debate Educators

This document was made possible by the ongoing collaboration that exists between the NFHS and the NSDA. We encourage anyone who wants to further explore the topics discussed here to visit the NFHS and the NSDA websites for more information, including:

- NFHS COVID-19 Resources
- NFHS Speech and Debate Page
- NSDA Resources Page
- NSDA Homepage

Returning to face-to-face Speech and Debate Instruction, Events, and Competition

Speech and Debate Recruitment for Fall, 2021

Maintaining a speech and debate program during the COVID-19 pandemic was vital to the future of speech and debate in our schools. It is critical now that administrators and teachers partner to develop plans to continue speech and debate instruction for the 2021-2022 school year and beyond. Recruitment for our programs and teams is paramount as we move away from the pandemic and into the auspicious next era of speech and debate. The NSDA has a robust strategy for recruitment for both online and in-person. There are many resources you can find on advocacy to create a well-rounded message.

Team Recruitment Strategies | National Speech & Debate Association

Five Student-Led Recruitment Tips ft. Jaylon Muchison | National Speech & Debate Association

Advocacy | National Speech & Debate Association

School Recruitment Toolkit

Social Distancing and Speech and Debate Instruction

Social distancing will most likely be a part of the return to school across all grade levels and content areas.

Transportation will present challenges for every school district. School staff will need to accommodate social distancing while transporting students to school, field trips, and other events.

Speech and debate event organizers will need to be cognizant of all current social distancing safety measures in planning for events. Online events may need to be utilized for safety and to provide more equitable access for those who cannot travel.

General Safety Guidelines for face-to-face Speech and Debate Instruction

The following general safety guidelines are suggested for all speech and debate educators.

Preparation:

- Create a template and measure classrooms to determine the best setup to adhere to state and local social distancing requirements.

- Consider use of larger facilities as available, and measure and pre-set these spaces as well.

- Prepare for how students enter and exit the classroom, along with how materials such as laptops, evidence tubs, scripts, and stands are used. Proper planning can help reduce person-to-person contact outside of the recommended social distancing.

Performances and competitions:

- Know the state and local audience restrictions per room.

- Have a plan to instruct visitors on policies specific to your building.

- If audience members are not allowed an alternative is streaming online.

    - The school must have a proper public performance license. In most cases, a performance license held by the school is sufficient to allow for streamed online performances, so long as the video is only streamed live and is unavailable for viewing after the conclusion of the live performance.

    - Speech and debate coaches will need to follow any school policies for online content as it pertains to student and parental permission.

Budget Implications.

As the above lists indicate, additional costs may be incurred to safely provide speech and debate instruction under social distancing guidelines. These additional costs may include:

- Binders, scripts, laptop stands, and other typically shared classroom supplies

- Digital cameras, microphones, ring lights, reliable internet access, and laptops for online speech and debate events

- Funding for judges and additional coaching staff

- When traveling, additional modes of transportation

- Appropriate air exchange for classrooms and practice spaces of at least 3 ACH per hour minimum

- Well-fitted masks for students and teachers

- Appropriate cleaners per the recommended guidelines from the research, and based on the total number of students

The best time to begin a conversation about the budget with your administration is now. There is a lot of uncertainty in the coming months. Planning ahead and letting school administrators know what the potential needs may be will help ease those conversations later once the reality of the coming school year becomes more focused.

Online Speech and Debate Instruction Considerations

Viability of Online Instruction

Speech and debate educators have demonstrated that online instruction can continue to support learning when students cannot be present together. There are several questions educators need to ask while preparing for online instruction. Answers will vary by educator, school, and administrative policies:

1. What have I learned from online instruction and coaching this year that can be applied to the future, if needed?

2. How do I help my students progress in the curriculum and meet the standards?

3. How do I assess student learning?

4. How do I meet the needs of all learners?

    a. How do I provide accommodations for students with Individualized Education Programs?

    b. How do I provide accommodations for students with 504 plans?

    c. How do I provide differentiation and specific learning interventions?

    d. How do I support students who do not have access to an environment conducive to participation?

5. How do I reach my students who do not have quality internet access?

    a. What are school policies that relate to internet access?

    b. What will be the level of in-person contact time?

    c. What are the alternative methods of instructional delivery if internet access is unavailable?

6. How do I foster student engagement?

7. How can online instruction be used to prepare for a return to ensemble instruction for secondary students?

8. What resources do I need to effectively deliver online speech and debate instruction?

9. What professional development do I need to deliver various forms of speech and debate education effectively? What professional development or self-reflection do I need in order to check unconscious bias accentuated by technology?

10. Do I have proper copyright permissions in place for the instructional materials being used in an online learning environment?

Opportunities in Online Instruction

With proper planning, many of the objectives that are taught in a face-to-face environment can be taught in an online setting. online instruction provides some unique opportunities to offer an individualized approach that will benefit all learners, including video modeling and differentiation opportunities. As with all instruction, teachers should embed appropriate accommodations for students with Individualized Education Programs and 504 plans.

Speech and debate educators must account for various technology limitations such as microphone or audio quality, lighting, internet connectivity, etc. Equity issues must also be considered by educators, administrators, and district level personnel. Students could be sharing technology with siblings, parents, and others in their household and may have limited access to a computer for assignment submission, video lessons, etc. Educators must consider each of these issues when planning lessons and assignments for their students.

The ability to participate in practice rounds and give performance speeches for peers creates community and connections with and between students. These types of connections could be difficult to replace in an online setting without deliberate planning. Educators must continue to build community and connection with students through timely feedback that helps students build individual skills and create worthwhile performances, speeches, or arguments/cases. Educators are encouraged to seek professional learning opportunities through various organizations in order to teach and coach effectively in an online environment.

Competition and Events

Deciding how, where, and when to host a speech and debate tournament or event has become more complex. Below are a series of guiding questions that can assist you in making this decision:

General

- Does your state or local health department still have restrictions?

- Is there a non-budgetary advantage to holding an online component?

Face-to-face

A "typical" speech and debate event where all participants are in one location and moving around a building to performance and debate rooms.

- Are you able to conduct the event while implementing local or state level health restrictions?

- Do your intended participants have access to participate in person?

- Can incorporating an online division enhance your event?

Online

An online system that can be synchronous (live performances/debate), asynchronous (recorded), or a combination.

- Which video conferencing platform works best for your event?

- Will your event be synchronous, asynchronous, or a combination?

- What policies will you put into place to address technology issues (i.e., lagging video/sound, Wi-Fi or hardware issues, etc.)?

- What policies will you have to address equality of access issues?

Hybrid

A combination of face-to-face and online participation.

- How will you define hybrid?

- Under what circumstances will a participant be able to compete online instead of face-to-face or vice versa?

- Under what circumstances will an adjudicator be able to participate online instead of face-to-face or vice versa?

- How can a hybrid model supplement a face-to-face speech and debate event?

Advocating for Arts Education in 2021 and Beyond

This document aims to support educators in planning for the various scenarios anticipated, so that solutions are available as decisions are being made. Having plans ready will help keep arts programs viable but may not be sufficient to maintain adequate support in every situation. Fall of 2021 will bring with it many challenges. Schools will be asked to do more with less, leading to concerns regarding potential implications for arts programs.

Such concerns are valid and call attention to the perennial need for effective arts education advocacy. Arts educators should consider how to demonstrate quality in their program, how to remain relevant and visible in the community, and how to stay connected with the most effective advocates for arts programs: students and parents. Now is also an opportune time to consider how one articulates the value of arts education to education decision-makers. The most powerful benefits of arts education are those that are intangible and sometimes difficult to describe. The abilities to confidently perform and to respond in an informed way are sufficient to justify arts as a curriculum to be made accessible to all. They also establish a foundation upon which students can pursue personal growth that will serve them throughout their lives.

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Recent efforts in research and standards policy lend credence to an argument that arts educators have made for years: that arts education helps students in their social and emotional development. Even a cursory glance reveals several compelling explanations why this might be the case: arts activities are laden with social and emotional processes; arts educators often work with the same students for multiple years, positioning them to positively impact students' individual growth; all people, especially youth, appreciate some arts, and students frequently report that participation in the arts is their favorite part of school.

Speech and debate instruction, events, and competitions also incorporate community-advancing activities, presenting students with opportunities to develop relationship skills. Students participating in speech and debate events work collectively toward shared goals, exercising skills including collaboration, communication, and conflict resolution. Speech and debate provides experiences that positively impact students' proclivity for empathetic thinking and behavior, leading to more social awareness. Social awareness and relationship skills, combined with self-awareness and self-management skills, enable students to act and reflect in more informed and critical ways, ultimately supporting them in responsible decision-making.

The lives of students are enhanced and enriched by participation in speech and debate education. Speech and debate educators must be aware of the need to promote and embed social and emotional learning into instructional practice whether working with students face-to-face, online, or both during the next school year.