

Chicago Debates Middle School

Guidelines and Policies SY2025

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1.1 Coach Involvement in Policy Making

Chicago Debates (CD) frequently solicits coaches' advice, opinions, and commentary via surveys, emails, and direct meetings. When there are sufficient volunteers, there will be a meeting of all coaches at each tournament during one of the preliminary rounds. This time is largely for coaches to communicate with each other about best practices, upcoming plans, and expectations as well as communicate recommendations with CD staff.

The Coaches Council (described in 1.2) is charged with recommending coach-informed program updates, discussing and deliberating League Guidelines and Policies, and remaining up to date on current league protocols. All concerns, objections, endorsements, and ideas that Coaches wish to put in front of the CD staff and administration about league guidelines and policies should be brought up first by the appointed Coach Council representative. Any school-based concerns should be addressed to a coach's Chicago Debates appointed Program Officer for School Support.

There will be times when CD has to make decisions counter to the majority of coaches' recommendations due to operational, financial, logistical, or other constraints. When possible, every attempt will be made to reach a compromise.

1.2 Coaches Council

Chicago Debates (CD) greatly values the feedback and input from our coaches. As a result, we have quarterly meetings with two representatives from each conference which makes up the Coaches Council. The Coaches Council is made up of three coaches per "Grant Park" and "Navy Pier" conferences. Two coaches will represent the "DEE" on the council. Terms on the Coaches Council will last for two years beginning the day after elections and ending on the last day before elections. As an advisory board, the Coaches Council's primary purpose is to support and inform the development and implementation of CD protocols, policies, and guidelines by providing requests and feedback that represent the needs of each conference. Additionally, the Coaches Council is expected to advocate for the needs of the coaches and debaters within their respective conferences. Members of the Coaches Council will be elected at the Conference Championship of each school year and will be expected to serve their term through the subsequent school year. If a coach representative is not identified through the election process, CD will ask coaches to volunteer or appoint representatives. Preferentially, at least one nominee from each conference is a returning coach. All nominees must be employees of Chicago Public Schools or a Chicago-based Charter School. The Coaches Council nor any individual member has the authority to bind CD absent a specific delegation of authority given by CD through the Director of Programs, Executive Director, or the CD Board of Directors. To ensure coaches' opinions and perspectives are reaching CD leadership, one Coaches Council member will be appointed to serve on the CD Board of Directors each year in an Ex-Officio capacity during the duration of their term. Each Coaches Council representative is eligible to serve in the ex-officio board role; however, the final candidate will be appointed by the CD Board of Directors following a thorough review of their application. Members of the Coaches Council must be coaching an active CD debate team in order to be eligible to serve on the Coaches Council. Coaches Council members will be reimbursed for any travel expenses required to participate in in-person Coaches Council and/or Board meetings.

Neither the Coaches Council nor any Member has authority to bind the CD absent a specific delegation of authority by CD through the Director of Programs, Executive Director, or the CD Board of Directors.

1.3 Foundational Objective: Participation and Equity

Chicago Debates was founded on the belief that participation in a competitive and curricular policy debate league is inherently educational. The founding vision of CDMS also posits that most of the educational and social activist benefits of debating can be achieved within the boundaries of a local circuit. Its most basic objective has always been to involve as many Chicago Public School students in structured and rigorous debate activities as possible and sustainable. Certain policies have been established to lower the barrier to participation for beginning debaters and coaches: argument limitations are one example. In allocating its resources, the CDMS has favored equity and high levels of participation over concentrating resources in the most advanced debate teams.

1.4 Guiding Principle: Diverse Judge Pool

CD has a pedagogical commitment to maintain a judge pool that is diverse in important ways: academic debate experience, age, demographics, and professional background. This commitment includes support for the use of judges without extensive policy debate experience. CD debaters must become proficient at judge adaptation. This means understanding and articulating debate arguments to people who could have zero competitive debate history, or a limited understanding of debate norms and jargon. Debaters have the additional burden of explaining their arguments at a moderate speed and in terms of general language (rather than relying on debate jargon), as they may need to do in most “real world” situations. They practice the valuable skill of “reading their audience”. At the same time, CD is committed to including a segment of debate expert practitioners or professionals in its judge pool (high school debaters or coaches, primarily). These people help advance the debaters’ technical sophistication and advanced knowledge about debate practices and the topic area.

2. League Structure

2.1 Conferences

Chicago Debates is structured into two Conferences: “Grant Park,” and “Navy Pier”. These conferences are for CPS schools only, with the exception of certain “guest” schools from outside the city that (a) have debate programs with similar, comparable characteristics as Chicago Debates programs, (b) are approved by CD staff, and (c) pay a fee for their participation. Assignment to any conference is based on three factors: (a) numerical parity between Conferences, (b) past competitive performance, (c) school’s academic profile, and (d) geographic location.

2.3 Divisions

Chicago Debates middle school tournaments may include four Divisions: Rookie, Novice (N), Junior Varsity (JV), and Varsity (V). The Rookie division is for new schools whose debaters may need additional scaffolding at the beginning of the year. Students may only compete in two tournaments in the Rookie division, then must move to Novice. The Novice Division is for debaters in their first year of academic debate. The Junior Varsity Division is for debaters with at most one year of previous academic debate experience. If a student debates 9 or more Novice rounds (3 tournaments) in a previous academic year, they must be considered Junior Varsity and compete in the JV Division for their second academic year. The Varsity Divisions is for debaters with one or more years of previous academic debate experience. Debaters who have competed in 9 or more rounds for each of two previous academic years must be considered Varsity and compete in the Varsity Division for their third academic year. The JV and Varsity divisions will compete as a single division in the event that either pool is too small to warrant separate divisions (see section 3.8).

Novice debaters may enter the Junior Varsity or Varsity Division in a tournament for more rigorous debate without losing their Novice eligibility for the remainder of their first year of debate. The same is true for JV debaters debating in the Varsity division during their second year. However, a JV student in their second year of debate cannot ever compete in the Novice division, and a Varsity debater in their third year of debate can never compete in Novice or JV division.

CD reserves the right to move debaters and teams into their appropriate division if any of the above thresholds have been passed. For example, CD staff will move debaters registered in Rookie to Novice if those debaters have already completed two tournaments in Rookie.

If a middle school debater participates in 2 or more high school tournaments, even at the novice level, said debater is no longer eligible for middle school novice and must be placed in the middle school JV or varsity division.

Exceptions to division rules can be made at the discretion of the tournament director. Coaches should reach out to the tournament director if they would like an exception.

2.4 Student Participation

Schools must have a goal of conducting 60-120 minutes of debate practice after school per week. This meets the pacing of CD’s curriculum. The majority of learning occurs at tournaments. Coaches are expected to attend 2 of the 3-4 tournaments in the season. The full coaching stipend will be given to teams that meet this obligation. Absence from a tournament can generate meetings with the school’s program officer. All Students must complete the student application referenced in 2.7.

2.5 Coach Participation

At least one teacher-coach from each school must be present at each Tournament. We may allow community coaches to serve in place of the teacher-coach only if they are accompanied by a school-approved chaperone. All coaches must attend at least two tournaments.

If this standard or the student participation standard listed in 2.4 are not met, CD might move the school to a more appropriate conference and/or reduce the coach stipend, in addition to providing increased support.

2.6 School Participation

Schools participating in CDMS are required:

- (1) to assign 1-2 regular Coaches;
- (2) to promote the academic debate team within the school environment
- (3) to provide class coverage for Coaches if necessary
- (4) to equitably share Tournament hosting responsibilities; and
- (5) to cover required costs of participation in the CDMS.
- (6) Maintain attendance of practices (see 2.7)

2.7 Student Application and Roster

Each school is responsible for ensuring that every student who participates in debate (defined as attending at least one practice) completes the student application each year they participate. Debaters will be dropped (removed) from the tournament the Wednesday before it starts if they have not completed the application.

Each school must keep an accurate, updated roster of the students participating on its debate team on file with CD and update tabroom. Each school must keep an accurate, updated roster of the students participating on its debate team and attending practice on file (preferably on tabroom). Tabroom.com allows Chicago Debates to generate correlative data off student participation, which informs seasonal planning and how to meet students where they are at.

2.8 Transitioning Students or Schools

If a school in the CDMS discontinues participation, students from that school may debate for the CDMS school of their choice, until their school re-starts its own debate program. Likewise, students from a CDMS school who transfer to a non-CDMS school can continue to debate for their former school. However, in both the above instances, an adult chaperone must take responsibility for that student at all events.

Neither elements of this policy should be construed as endorsing a school's decision not to begin or maintain a debate program; rather, this Policy accommodates students' interest in debating until their school re-starts or develops a debate program.

2.9 Participation of Schools Outside Chicago Public Schools

Chicago Debates was developed to serve the students of the Chicago Public Schools. However, schools outside the CPS district can apply to participate. Non-CPS schools must obtain the approval of Chicago Debates. Non-CPS schools are responsible for covering their own operational costs, and will be required to pay an annual participation fee to Chicago Debates. This goes through the Director of Programs and is at their discretion.

3. Tournament Entry

3.1 Tournament Registration Procedure

Tournament registration is done by Tabroom only. Registration must be done by the Friday the week before the tournament (7-8 days before the tournament commences). Late registration cannot be accommodated. No additional team registrations will be accepted. Schools may change their registration, but only if the total number of students decreases or remains the same. For example, if a school registered Team AB and Team CD, the coach may swap partners resulting in Team AD and Team BC. Chicago Debates, at the discretion of the tournament director and volunteer manager, might be able to accommodate the addition of a student if another student from their school is dropping. Using the previous example, Team AB could become Team AE, if and only if debater "B" drops from the tournament, though this is not a guarantee.

The Tournament Director reserves the right to disallow any team reconfigurations or swaps on the day of the tournament.

3.2 Judge Obligation

Each school is responsible for registering one judge for every two teams it registers at a CDMS Tournament. If a school cannot locate the requisite number of judges they should perform either of the following options: (1) contact the Chicago Debates staff, who will assist in recruiting and registering judges, (2) contact parents to ask them to volunteer, and/or (3) contact the nearest high school debate program and ask high school students to judge at the tournament.

Judges cannot be registered unless they have attended and completed the judge training or will do so before the tournament starts. Judges are exempt from this requirement only if they are a regular Coach at one of the participating schools. All judges, regardless of judging or coaching experience, must also participate in a brief judge meeting and check-in process prior to the beginning of the first round of every tournament.

Depending on the school's level of experience, CD will allow 4, 6, or 8 teams before requiring the school to bring their own judges. The program officer or associate manager will inform the school of their specific judge obligation.

3.3 High School Student Judges

Novice high school debaters are prohibited from serving as judges at any CDMS tournament unless they have participated in at least two tournaments. Varsity and junior varsity high school debaters may serve as judges by participating in the judge training outlined in section 3.2.

3.4 College Student Judges

College students are permitted to judge by participating in the judge training outlined in section 3.2.

3.6 Maverick Teams

Single-person teams in policy debate are called "Maverick" teams; policy and public forum debate are designed for two-person teams. Schools should minimize its number of Maverick entries. Schools may register Maverick teams at Tournaments 1-3, but any team that is Maverick for more than two preliminary rounds during a tournament is ineligible to debate in any elimination rounds of that Tournament, or to win team awards (mavericks are eligible for speaker awards). Maverick teams are disallowed to be registered at the City Championship.

3.7 Hybrid Teams

Hybrid teams are disallowed in the CDMS: debaters from different schools that have debate teams cannot debate with each other on one team at CDMS tournaments. However, hybrid partnerships are allowed if and only if there are no other debaters from the same school to form a partnership.

3.8 Combining Divisions

At Conference Tournaments, if there are fewer than 10 teams entered in either the JV or Varsity Division, the Divisions are combined for the Preliminary Rounds. For the purposes of awarding teams, speakers, and elimination rounds, the JV and Varsity Divisions are once again separated, unless tournament logistics make that impossible. See Section 6.4 for the relevant argument limit policy in Inter-Division debate rounds.

4. Tournament Round Procedure

4.1 Punctuality

All rounds must begin within 15 minutes of their scheduled starting time, or a forfeit will be charged against the team that is unready to begin. Double forfeits are possible. Judges have the authority to, and should, insist that the round begin earlier than this limit, if both teams are present. Judges are asked to begin debates as soon as possible after announced start times, so that the tournament can adhere to its schedule.

Schools that arrive late to tournaments, regardless of the reason (including communicated bus pickup or transportation issues), will be subject to forfeit rules unless the tournament schedule or competition structure has been changed by decision of the tournament director.

4.2 Observers

Observers are allowed in in-person debate rounds. Observers must remain silent during all speeches and must keep a distance from debaters; violators will be asked to leave the debate. At the conclusion of a debate round, especially an elimination round, it is essential that the room be silent until the judges have made their decisions. Coaches, teammates, and observers may not talk to or signal debaters after the debate round starts, inside or outside the room or via electronic communication – this will be investigated as cheating and will result in a forfeit if it is determined to be an attempt to aid the debaters during the course of a debate.

Observers, particularly parents, are not allowed in the zoom for virtual debate tournaments unless they have completed the CPS background check process for volunteers.

4.3 Use of Electronic Devices and Tech Time

Laptop computers are allowed to be used for flowing, reading pre-prepared evidence, and typing out speeches but no electronic devices (including cell phones) may be used at any time during rounds to access the Internet for data retrieval, card cutting, or communications purposes (such as e-mailing, instant messaging, texting). The exception is that debaters may use electronic devices to communicate to their partner during the debate. Use of such devices between rounds are allowed.

If debaters are participating in a tournament virtually, they are allowed 10 minutes of tech time to resolve any technological issue that may arise, including but not limited to internet connectivity, zoom problems, word documents crashing, etc. After 10 minutes have elapsed, the team either forfeits, or if possible, one debater may continue as a maverick.

Tech time is not to be used as prep time. If it is found that a team is deceptively using tech time as prep time, they are at risk of receiving a forfeit for that debate.

4.4 In-Round Evidence Sharing

Teams are required to “share” with their opponents any evidence that is read, upon request – i.e., they must provide their opponents a copy of the evidence. Debaters can hold an opponent’s evidence during their own speech and prep time, but must return the evidence when it is their opponent’s speech and prep time.

It is the responsibility of the team reading “paperless” evidence off of their computer to share it in full compliance of this rule, regardless of how many laptop computers the “paperless” team has. If the “paperless” team has only one computer, it must share the evidence read on that computer with the opponent as requested for their prep time. Many students do not have personal laptops, so “paperless” teams should be prepared with a viewing computer to share with their opponents; merely providing a flash drive is insufficient unless the opposing team also has a laptop computer and can access evidence in this way.

4.5 Unethical Use of Evidence

Evidence read into the debate that has intentionally missing or added text that distorts the meaning of the author, or evidence that is intentionally inauthentic or fictitiously cited, places the offending debater in violation of the activity's basic academic integrity. As such, unethical use of evidence shall result in round forfeit and disqualification from the tournament at which the violation occurs.

Judges are not authorized to enforce this guideline, and should judge a debate in which the issue is raised as if no violation has occurred. If a team believes that an opponent has used evidence unethically in a round, that team should see the tournament director who will enforce a forfeit and disqualification if necessary.

4.6 Tag Team Cross Examination

“Tag Team” cross examination refers to the practice of opening each cross examination period to questions and answers from any of the four debaters, rather than the two assigned to ask and answer questions. In middle school debate, Chicago Debates disallows “Tag Team” questions, but allows a debater to receive assistance from their partner in answering questions, though the judge can consider an inability to answer questions (or inappropriate assistance offered to a partner not in need of it) when assigning speaker points at the end of the round.

4.7 Prompting

“Prompting” occurs when a speaker is helped by the speaker's partner, through oral or written suggestions, during a speech. CDMS allows “prompting,” though judges may consider prompting as having marred the stylistic impact of a speech (and therefore as having a negative influence on the assignment of speaker points). Judges are not to flow what is said by the “prompting” partner, only the words spoken by the assigned speaker – that is, a “prompted” argument is not made or flowed unless it is spoken by the debater giving the speech. A judge has the discretion to penalize a team's speaker points because of prompting.

Students are not allowed to take over their partner's speech - judges should flow only what is said by the assigned speaker for that speech. Each debater on a two-person team should deliver two speeches and a cross examination (one constructive, one rebuttal, ask questions and answer questions) as assigned.

4.8 Forfeit Conditions

The tournament staff can give a team a forfeit for the following reasons, though this is not an exhaustive list.. (1) Being more than 15 minutes late for a debate round, (2) using electronic devices to communicate with coaches and other debaters during the round, and (3) “Card Clipping” which is unethically claiming to have read more underlined words than were actually read in a card or intentionally misrepresenting evidence or authors from which arguments are extracted.

If a team uses arguments which are not allowed in the argument limits, or introduces evidence for new off-case arguments in the second negative constructive (or negative rebuttal) speech the judge should “strike” these arguments from the flow. In other words, the judge should not consider these arguments when adjudicating a decision and should ignore them and focus only on the arguments within the assigned limits. If a team *only* presents arguments that are outside the argument limits, they will receive an automatic forfeit upon investigation by the tournament staff.

If an argument limits violation has been alleged to occur, judges should not stop the round at any time, but rather allow the debate to continue. Students can still have the educational benefit of debate participation even if they cannot win the round. As such, the judge should continue flowing and being attentive during the round. Coaches and students should instead raise the issue with the tournament staff after the round for investigation.

4.9 Decision Reversals

The tournament director reserves the right to reverse a judge's decision at any time during the tournament if the judge's decision does not fall in line with established debate practices or the CDMS Rules and Guidelines. The tournament director's decision should be considered final, and can only be overruled in very rare circumstances by the Director of Programs of Chicago Debates.

5. Judging Procedure

5.1 Interruption of a Debate Round

Judges should not terminate a debate before the completion of the Second Affirmative Rebuttal (2AR) speech, even if the decision is certain. Nor should judges interrupt the time schedule of the debate for any reason except to maintain debating protocol. Judges are expected to remain attentive throughout the debate round.

Judges should not offer their opinions or comments on arguments during the round – these should only be offered after the round during the oral critique. Judge comments should be limited solely to matters of debate procedure, and the judge should not comment in any way on the appearance of debaters.

5.2 Independent Decisions

The judge must decide solely based on his or her best individual effort to resolve the substantive claims of the debate and should not, at any time, ask anyone else for help with their decision. Judges on elimination round panels should NEVER discuss how they decide or disclose their decision until all judges have independently signed their ballots without discussion. Coaches and observers are not to ask or pressure judges to change their decision during post-round discussion once it has been made – this can be grounds for having speaker points reduced for poor conduct.

5.3 Judge Disclosure and Critique

Judges should not reveal their decisions in novice debate rounds. Varsity have the option of receiving a decision from their judge. Judges must write out full ballots explaining their reactions to the debates. Judges are encouraged to give an oral critique to the debaters following a round, but should do so without revealing the decision. Decisions for elimination rounds, however, will be disclosed at the end of the round.

5.4 Debater-Judge Communication

After a round, debaters can ask questions of the judge, respectfully, about how the judge resolved specific issues. Debaters and coaches who engage in a dialogue with a judge after a round should maintain a respectful demeanor. Discussions should focus on understanding the decision/comments of the judge and improving the debater's performances in future rounds, not complaining or convincing a judge of an alternative decision. Judges have the authority to lower a debater's speaker points for an infraction of proper decorum, even after the ballot has already been turned in to the Tab Room. Judges may not email students after a round. Judges may not send 1-to-1 emails directly to competitors.

5.5 Speaker Points

Judges award speaker points to each debater as part of the decision process at the end of each round. By Chicago Debates custom, speaker points are awarded in the range of 25 to 30. Points below 27 should be given infrequently except for unusually poor performance or conduct, and points over 29.5 should be given sparingly and should only be given for near flawless speaking skills. Judges may award Speaker Points less than 26 in the case that a debater acts in a way that violates the spirit and customs of debating. Judges may assign a "low point win" where the winning debater may have won the round but were less compelling speakers. The rare circumstances for such low points are overt rudeness to the judge, debaters, or other participants, or unethical speech or behavior, such as intentionally misrepresenting evidence. Speaker points reward debaters for their ethos, pathos, and logos. Points should not be decided based on how fast someone is able to spread (speed reading), tone, appearance, accent, background, or familiarity with the English language. Refer to our volunteer judge guidelines for more thorough discussion on how to assign speaker points.

6. Argument Limits

6.1 Core Files

At the start of each season, Chicago Debates creates the Core Files, including Affirmative Cases, Case Negatives, Disadvantages, Topicality, and a Counterplan. The Core Files provide a starter set of evidence that allows schools and debaters to compete even if they are unable to complete their own original research.

The Core Files is a floor, not a ceiling. They are always runnable if in accordance with the argument limits set at the start of the season. CD debaters in novice, JV, and varsity division can reorder Core Files evidence/arguments, and they can run any subset or portion of Core Files arguments. Debaters can re-label or “re-tag” arguments, or replace Core Files evidence with their own researched evidence, as long as they do not change the argument being made in the original evidence, and as long as they do not violate the specific Argument Limits for that tournament as outlined in 6.3. Debaters can also always choose to re-organize or highlight down the Core Files to focus on fewer arguments within them.

6.2 Affirmative Case Previewing

A Case is considered new, and therefore requires previewing, if any of the following conditions are met.

1. The Plan text is changed in any way from what is already runnable (i.e., at the start of the season, the Core Files Plan texts).
2. The Case contains a Harm scenario (advantage) that is different from what is already runnable.
3. The Case contains a Solvency mechanism that is different from is already runnable.

Previewing must be done using the preview folder and disclosure sheet sent out before the tournament, respecting the due dates, which will be approximately two-four weeks prior to the next tournament at which they are runnable. Previews must include the entirety of the new evidence as well as the plan text if it's a new case/IAC.

Previews are reviewed for completeness by CDMS administration. Incomplete or insufficient previews will be rejected by the League administration, after which the submitting school will have up to two days to complete the preview and re-submit.

Previewing restricts the IAC/INC evidence and positions, but not later speeches, in which the Affirmative/Negative can make any arguments.

The previews must be resubmitted to the preview folder for each tournament, or it will not be allowed to be read. For example, if a team submits the previewed case for the first time to the T1 previews folder, they must submit the case again to the T2 previews folder, even if no changes have been, for the case to be read at the second tournament.

Once a new Affirmative case has been previewed, it may be used in any CDMS tournament by any team in the previewed Conference and Division.

6.3 Argument Limits

Argument Limits at each tournament will be enforceable using the CDMS Argument Limits document produced at the beginning of each academic year specific to that year's Core Files and available on the CDL website.

Updated evidence, if allowed in the argument limits, must replace evidence in the core files that makes the same argument. It cannot, for example, be a new impact. As a brightline, consider if a team would have to research

evidence outside of the core files to respond. If they would, that evidence is likely not updated but instead new evidence that is allowed.

6.4 Style Recommendation on Number and Introduction of Negative Issues

Chicago Debates recommends that Negative teams limit their position to four or less off-case issues, particularly for JV or novice debaters. Each Topicality violation, each Disadvantage, each Counterplan, is its own off case position.

Negative teams cannot read new off-case positions in the 2nd constructive speech or negative rebuttals. It is considered an argument that limits violation and will be adjudicated in accordance with section 4.8.

7. Public Forum Additions

All previous guidelines, including previews, apply to public forum unless explicitly stated otherwise.

7.1 Foundational Objective

CD recognizes that while policy debate has many benefits, there are instances in which a more accessible form of debate is desirable. The goal of public forum at CD is to provide a form of debate that focuses on persuasive communication and de-emphasizes jargon, off-case positions, and large quantities of evidence. CD PF will be primarily offered to new middle schools joining the league, with limited exceptions. CD reserves the right to move schools in or out of the PF conference.

7.2 Topic

CD will determine 1-2 topics per school year for Public Forum (PF). The topic selection will be based on relevance to students, accessibility, and debatability. CD will solicit input from coaches but will make the final decision. The topic for CD PF will not intentionally align with the national PF topic.

7.3 Speech Times and Structure

Speech times for CD PF will follow the original format of PF as opposed to the recent national lengthening of the summary speech. The constructive and rebuttal (first 4 speeches) will be 4 minutes. The summary will be 3 minutes and the final focus will be two minutes.

The pro team will speak first and each round will flip for sides.

The rest of the structure of CD PF aligns with national PF rules.

7.4 Research Packet

Similar to the core files, CD staff will create and distribute a research packet containing example cases for the pro and con, additional evidence, and citations.

7.5 Argument Limits

It is always allowed to read cases and evidence from outside the research packet.