



Massachusetts Middle School Speech League

Spring Meeting
Saturday, June 6th, 2020, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Zoom Meeting

- I. Meeting called to order at 9:09 a.m. by Lis.
- II. Roll call: Craig Powers/Shrewsbury, Lis Venetiou/The Pike School, Vivian Powers/Shrewsbury Middle School, Ellen Eberly/Catholic Memorial, Jen Taschereau/Wellan Montessori School, Christina Manos/Sherwood Middle School, Yoshi Makishima/Milton Academy, Tim Brainerd/Wilson Natick, Kim Vanaman/Oak Hill Brown Newton
- III. MEETING MINUTES:
 - A. Approval of Fall 2019 meeting minutes.
 1. Approved by all present.
 - B. Sharing experiences about virtual meets (middle and high school), and online ballots.
 1. Online ballots: Concerns expressed regarding the need to prioritize not only training judges on ballots, but also training for evaluating Speech.
 - a) Craig Powers will revise his training video from the Spring 2020 virtual meet for more general use.
 2. Virtual tournament
 - a) Majority of members present in meeting participated.
 - b) Some coaches found entry process to be too complicated to sustain; relied on high school help for the first tournament
 - c) All agree that more flexibility is needed, because we'll need an accessible process for schools who might wish to host a virtual tournament in the event of a snow day.
 - (1) The 2020 Nationals put the onus on students to upload their entry. (The process of reviewing and uploading students' videos was very time consuming for coaches who participated in the MMSSL virtual meet.)
 - (2) Concerns expressed that some prospective participants did not like the idea of watching themselves on video.
 - (3) System differences across different schools and districts was discussed. CM is on Microsoft; Ellen does make students get Google accounts, but it takes a while to get going in the fall.
 - d) Craig shared details from the MSDL's virtual State Finals

- (1) League got a Zoom account (price unknown.) Jim Honeyman worked closely with Zoom.
 - (2) Each event has a Zoom room, then split into breakout rooms. Only error: one student sent to the wrong room, performed in the wrong place, but was able to have the opportunity to redo.
 - (a) Christina asked how long it took to sort students into breakout rooms. Craig said it took some time (the room he ran had about 30 students.)
 - (3) Set-up of schematic didn't quite work for virtual; needs to possibly be re-organized for virtual. Lots of double-checking required to make sure everyone got to the right place. Also: some students signed in with a different name than they were listed as, added another complication.
3. Lis requested research and further discussion; possible to have a Board discussion or subcommittee?
- a) Ellen express concern that going virtual will ward off any new, smaller member schools who may be intimidated by the more "elite" practices of the League.
 - (1) Kim noted that Lexington team was small, primarily run by motivated parents, and participated in the virtual meet. There does seem to be a lot of interest in public speaking right now; interest will probably outweigh any organizational intimidation.
 - (2) Yoshi added that in-person will always be ideal, virtual is only for when we don't have any other way to meet safely.
 - b) Vivian mentioned that there is growing pressure to attend Nationals; the fact that some schools attend makes many parents in the area eager to take advantage of the opportunity, regardless of whether the coach or the school has the ability or desire to make Nationals part of their program.
 - (1) Christina stated that the MMSSL's position is that coaches know what's right for their team, and our goal is that among our 16 member schools, we will be able to offer diverse experiences to give all of them an opportunity to participate.
 - c) CM would like to see more novice events, virtual or live.
 - (1) Lis explained that after Nashoba Brooks dropped out of the MMSSL, we were not able to find a replacement host for the January Novice meet they historically hosted. But, it is a goal going forward, and a host has already been secured for a January novice meet.
 - d) Kim asked if Novice Reading a possibility?
 - (1) Craig cited MSDL precedent. Their league does not have that event anymore.

4. MMSSL Board is interested in exploring live options for virtual meet going forward. Will gather info about different school's systems technologies and interest level.

a) Committee needs to be created

(1) Vivian encouraged the committee to make sure accessibility is a priority.

C. Definition of novice?

1. Ellen did not appreciate students who had been on a team the previous year being able to compete at the tournament she hosted.

a) Christina said that this question should be revisited at the Fall meeting.

D. Financial Report from Treasurer (Christina Manos)

1. Christina cited having a bit of trouble with online banking and getting access to the branch due to COVID-19.

2. Board given current balance, including and not including Big Questions grant (which is a dedicated fund.)

3. One school did not respond regarding missing dues. Christina will circle back with Clerk (Yoshi.)

4. Financial report approved.

E. Discussion of donation from Lumos (Kim Vanaman)

1. Kim: Lumos rep was open to the idea of a \$500 grant for a newer or smaller school hosting a tournament, though we might amend our proposal to use toward making virtual tournaments more accessible.

2. Board will edit the document created in the winter, submit it as a proposal.

F. Clarifying our policy on 5th grade competitors.

1. Vivian was against it, in part because of space concerns.

2. Kim cited experience inviting 5th graders in the past; 5th graders tend to be less developmentally prepared, intimidated by middle school students. Historically, participation in the Fifth Grade Foray has been low.

3. Craig offered context, explaining that the issue came up because Al Hamra has a big group of interested 5th graders, and they co-hosted the December tournament.

4. Christina: against fifth graders joining because it would overwhelm the Shrewsbury team.

5. Kim: incentive to host tournament? If you're a host, you can allow your own fifth graders to compete.

a) Yoshi: If space is the only issue, why not let the school decide?

b) Christina: would still be a space issue - especially if guest schools were asked to limit their numbers so a host could add fifth graders.

6. Lis: Include 5th graders in novice meet?

a) Ellen pointed out that it could set a bad precedent to put concessions like this forward.

7. Lis moves to reaffirm the league is 6-8 grades; motion passes.

- G. Accommodation for students with learning disabilities in Impromptu. Should it be included in the judge briefing that topic options can be read aloud to students in the hallway?
1. Yoshi offered context that this item was added to the agenda due to a student with a learning disability on Milton's team. Milton's Learning Specialist recommended a read-aloud.
 2. Craig: Is it necessary to add to judge training?
 - a) Yoshi: at least one judge was not amenable to the student's request at the last tournament.
 3. Kim: the MMSSL needs to emphasize more sensitivity toward students with invisible challenges. She cited a case in which a Netwon student on the spectrum got negative comments relating to his behavior in a round.
 - a) Ellen: if students have a documented issue, should be communicated to the judge.
 - (1) Yoshi: legal issue with disclosing potentially confidential issues about a student to unknown adults.
 - (2) Craig: probably not a good way to communicate such information to judges via Tabroom website anyways. Their "accessibility" marker doesn't actually work.
 - b) Lis: precedent from gender-neutral bathroom, to normalize a group we want to support. Shouldn't be up to the students to advocate for their own support.
 - (1) Proposed Language to include in invitations about coaches advocating for their students to tournament hosts.
 - (2) Parents are not trained educators; should probably not make it an expectation for judges to know how to handle the range of students we see.
 - c) Kim: possible to ask tournament hosts to create extra prompts, so they don't need to get re-used in the hallway?
 - (1) Yoshi: can be a burden on a host to have to generate lots of prompts.
 - (2) Craig: would probably only need a few extras.
 - (3) Lis: need for a general, accessible MMSSL prompt "bank," to support tournament hosts. Vivian: does this make students with disabilities too visible? Better to read aloud for everyone, or no one.
 - d) Lis: make part of the procedure, judge openly offers to read prompt to students?
 - (1) Christina: making it an open offer levels the playing field. Lots of kids from Shrewsbury are ESL, could be an equalizer for those students as well.
 - e) Lis pointed out that the creation of a judging "cheat sheet" for Impromptu needs to be created, generally, due to challenges many judges have with Impromptu.

- (1) Christina suggested that tournament hosts add a procedural checklist to the Impromptu prompt envelope.

H. Tentative schedule for 2020-2021 season

1. Christina: Shrewsbury is not allowing use of community space.
 - a) Lis: identify target dates; locations can be figured out later.
2. Tentative Calendar:
 - a) October 24th - Pike Novice meet, virtual. 3 rounds, no finals.
 - (1) Possible to move to 31st (though Kim noted that might discourage novices from attending, if it meant rescheduling on Halloween.)
 - b) November 15th - Turkey Talk, virtual. 3 rounds, no finals.
 - c) December 6th (snow date: 12/15) - Wilson/Al Hamra co-hosted meet, in-person. 3 rounds, with finals.
 - d) January 10th - RJ Grey Novice meet, in-person. 3 rounds, with finals.
 - (1) Might include Big Questions Debate
 - (a) Lis: resources included on NSDA website.
 - (b) Kim requested that we add Big Questions resources to the Fling portion of the MMSSL website, or in any place that would be obvious and available to participants.
 - (2) Lis mentioned that RJ Grey is interested in making Big Questions a full-fledged event with 3 rounds.
 - (a) Vivian pointed out that the Big Questions might lead to some space issues (e.g. a whole room for 4 competitors.)
 - e) January 24th or 31st - Shrewsbury, in-person. 3 rounds, with finals, double-entry allowed.
 - f) February 28th (or 3/28) - Pike, in-person. 3 rounds, with finals, double-entry allowed.
 - g) April 10th (snow date 5/15) - Spring Fling, in-person. 3 rounds, with finals, double-entry allowed, Fling events.
 - (1) The building historically used for this event is always rented on Sundays; this event will need to be held on a Saturday.
 - (2) Craig and Kim: Conflict with States will probably not be an issue.
 - h) May 2nd - Milton Foley, in-person. 3 rounds, with finals, double-entry allowed, 2 Fling events.

I. Next website project: Update from Kim.

1. Next judge training video will go up on the website soon.
2. Judging FAQ document needs additional materials from other league coaches.
3. Online ballot resources also needed.
4. Website usability generally in question.
 - a) Kim: planning on clearing out Fling Materials from our remote Fling challenges, along with more obsolete material.

- (1) Ellen suggested we use some of that material to supplement the existing Fling event pages.
- b) Kim: glossary needed for newer members.
- J. To move or not to move: discussion of conventions versus rules regarding moving during “reading” events.
1. Craig cited MSDL general practice: many students in Playreading style their performance after DP competitors. May not be possible or necessary to codify the distinction.
 2. Christina: students are getting uneven feedback because judges have different expectations.
 3. Kim: in the interest of keeping student’s development moving forward, a kid who is ready for more blocking should be in a more blocking-heavy event. We should be communicating with coaches that their students should be placed in the event they are ready for.
 - a) Lis: what about students whose events (like Poetry) don’t transfer to DP?
 - b) Craig: style of event and skill should both be considered. In a reading event, the emphasis should be on vocal skills, not on miming or physical acting.
 - c) Christina asked if it would be possible to add more specifics to the event descriptions, to explain not just the rules but the style of the event?
 - (1) Kim will add language - not as a rule, but as a statement of values: to describe that certain events should emphasize certain skills.
 - (a) Ellen mentioned it would be helpful to have those in August, to train incoming speech students.
- K. Streamlined protocol for double entering (e.g. instructing double-entered students to compete in one room then in another.)
1. Several coaches cited uneven practices at various tournaments; sometimes students are told to check in to their second events before performing in their first; sometimes told to go to rooms one after the other.
 2. Lis suggested making it uniform practice for students going to rooms in order they perform their events; Craig seconded.
 - a) Vivian stressed the importance of communicating to judges that they can’t leave until the end of the round, so no student delayed by double entry is left without a judge.
- L. Going ahead: some school boards may not be amenable to speech continuing. Language needed to explain that speech can be done successfully and safely virtually.
1. Lis: the MMSSL can point to precedent of middle school virtual meet, and MSDL’s virtual State Finals.
 - a) Tim: Wilson is expecting some administrative barriers; school only allowed students to use Zoom for classroom activities, but may be rolling back their requirements.

- b) Lis: one-on-one Zooms not allowed at Pike without explicit parental permission.
- 2. Christina: we need to mentally prepare for a world where some schools will be able to participate in in-person events, and some will not.
- 3. Craig & Kim: we need to err on the side of caution - too much time spent in a virtual space is better than going back to normal too soon.

Meeting adjourned at 11:25am.