# Massachusetts Middle School Speech League

# Meeting Minutes

May 14, 2016

1. Call to order

**Spencer Harvey** called the meeting of the **Massachusetts Middle School Speech League** to order at **9:30 am** on **May 14, 2016** in **Room 213 Ware Hall at Milton Academy**.

1. Attendance

The following coaches and league administrators were in attendance:

* Deborah Simon, Milton Academy
* Spencer Harvey, R.J. Grey (Acton-Boxboro)
* Vivian Powers, Oak (Shrewsbury)
* Craig Powers, Oak (Shrewsbury)
* Christina Manos, Sherwood (Shrewsbury)
* Ellen Eberly, Catholic Memorial
* Dan Sapir, Sacred Heart
* Tim Brainerd, Wilson (Natick)
* Alex Helm, Nashoba Brooks
* Michelle Boyle, Jewish Community Day School
* Elisabeth Venetiou, Pike School
1. Election

**Tim Brainerd moved to clear the current slate of directors and elect new directors for a two-year term.** There was no debate. **The motion carried with no opposition.** A proposed slate of Deborah Simon as president, Craig Powers as vice president, Spencer Harvey as treasurer, and Kim Vanaman as clerk was offered for consideration. The floor was opened to additional nominations, and none were offered. Vivian asked about how the slate was chosen, and whether a nominating committee could be used going forward. Debbie replied that the current officers acted as the committee in this case, but a different committee could be used in the future. Tim asked about how the number of directors was set; Spencer replied that the number of directors is set in the league bylaws. **The slate of proposed directors was approved by a unanimous voice vote. Directors were installed in office for two years, until the spring meeting in 2018.**

Debbie asked for an official note of thanks to Bob Hutchings for his contributions to the league. There was general agreement.

1. Treasurer’s Report

Spencer distributed a ledger of revenue and expenses for the 2015-2016 fiscal year. The general ledger showed a checking account balance of $374.51. All schools that attended tournaments paid dues except for Democracy Prep, which was an invited guest at the Milton tournament. Bob Hutchings was reimbursed for personal payment of the filing fees of incorporation. Spencer asked Craig Powers to stand in as a second signer on the league bank accounts. Tim asked if the incorporation papers or the bylaws require a second signature on checks; Spencer replied that he would like to have another signer so that there is more than one person with access to the accounts in case anything happens.

1. Scheduled Business
2. Tournament Format: The following aspects of tournament format were debated:
3. Number of rounds and finals: There was a consensus in favor of three rounds. There was some discussion of finals, and a consensus in favor of having novice tournaments with no finals, and a final round in all other tournaments. There was a consensus in favor of eight finalists (nine when two contestants are tied) when a final round is used.
4. Double entry: There was a vote in favor of allowing double entry beginning in January. There would be no double entry in fall tournaments, and double entry at the host’s option beginning in January.
5. Number of judges: Ellen expressed interest in having two judges for more feedback. Debbie said she would inquire with Chris Palmer with the NSDA about the ability of Tabroom.com to support additional judges. Vivian and Christina expressed concern about being able to get more judges for their teams, as they have had difficulty getting enough judges to staff just one judge in a section. A final decision was postponed until more information was available from the NSDA about software support.
6. “Fling” events: Because of interest in limited-prep events that were done as a “fling” round at the Brown/Oak Hill tournament, Debbie tried adding two to the Foley Fiesta. Original literature was dropped for lack of interest, but Team Improv was a success. There was a question about whether there are technical issues with adding events, Craig replied that there is not a significant tech burden with extra events except for an additional final round to panel. There was a unanimous vote in favor of optional fling events after January 1 in addition to the regular sanctioned events.
7. Tournament format announcement: There was a consensus in favor of finalizing all tournament formats by the fall meeting.
8. Tournament registration and check-in: Registration will close at 9 pm on the Wednesday before the tournament. There will be no adds after registration closes. Coaches are to provide a final list of drops by 8:30 am on the morning of the tournament—any students who have not checked in with their team should be dropped at that point so that the rounds may be finalized. Room assignments will be posted for students, and judge assignments will be given to judges at the tournament. Tim asked how he should get contestant numbers for his students; the answer is that it’s available online. Vivian noted that her assistants who entered the registration e-mailed it to everyone on the team.
9. Imprompu: There was a consensus against pre-announcing Impromptu topics. Dan asked about aligning with the high school league for the category time limit; there was general agreement in matching with the high school for format, but it was noted that the six minute limit in the Massachusetts high school league is out of step with the national tournaments. Therefore, Dan was asked to advocate for increasing the time limit at the high school limit to seven minutes.
10. Phonetic info on students’ last names: Dan wanted to be sure that there was a place to enter this information. Craig said that there is a place in Tabroom.com where it can be entered, and some schools have done so. There was strong opposition to requiring phonetic info for names. The consensus was that it should remain optional.
11. Honorable mentions: Craig said that we have been doing honorable mentions at the host’s discretion as to how many are offered. There was a consensus in favor of continuing this practice.
12. Spring Fling: There was some discussion about what degree of difference from the standard format and standard set of sanctioned events would be allowed at the Spring Fling tournament. Ellen noted that this tournament was previously offered at the very end of the year, and wondered if it would make sense to do it later in May, but Debbie said that Kim wanted to have the tournament in April again. Spencer suggested that exceptions to the “standard” tournament format be voted at the fall meeting.

The following was the final format offered:

* Three rounds
* Optional finals
* Eight contestants in finals (nine in the event of a two-way tie)
* Double entry optional after January 1
* Fling events optional after January 1 in addition to sanctioned events
* All tournament options to be set no later than the fall meeting
* Registration and check-in procedure: registration closes at 9 pm on the Wednesday before, no adds, drops ASAP, rosters set at 8:30 am
* Tournaments open at 8 am
* Judges will receive a print-out with their assignment. Contestant room assignments will be posted.
* Impromptu topics will not be pre-announced.
* Awards: Recognition for 1st place in a section at novice tournaments; 1st through 8th (or 9th where applicable) plus honorable mentions at host’s discretion at standard tournaments
* Exceptions to be approved by a majority vote of attendees at the fall meeting

**Tim Brainerd moved that the tournament format be accepted as written.** There was no additional debate. **The motion carried with no opposition.**

1. Tournament Calendar for 2016-2017: After some discussion, there was a consensus in favor of the following tentative calendar, to be finalized at the fall meeting:
* Sunday, October 30, 8 am to 2:30 pm: Catholic Memorial, novice tournament
* Sunday, November 20, Wilson, standard tournament
* Sunday, December 11, R.J. Grey, standard tournament (Dec. 18 snow date)
* Sunday, January 8, Nashoba Brooks, novice tournament (Feb. 5 snow date)
* Sunday, January 22, Sherwood, standard tournament (Jan. 29 snow date)
* Sunday, February 12 (or Feb. 5), JCDS, small standard tournament
* Sunday, March 5, Pike, standard tournament
* Saturday, April 1, Brown/Oak Hill, format TBD
* Sunday, May 7, Milton, standard tournament
1. Miscellaneous Rule Changes and Event Questions:
	1. Impromptu: Dan asked for instructions to judges to explicitly state that contestants must stay in touch with the topic. Tim suggested “keep continuous linkage with the topic.” Debbie said that she would propose an updated ballot at the fall meeting.
	2. Christina asked that the ballot include 8th or 9th rank to allow for the additional contestants in finals, so judges are not confused by it.
	3. Demonstration: Vivian asked about dropping the category; there was strong opposition from the novice-focused teams. An issue was noted with the rubric on the ballot, which suggests that visual aids are “if applicable,” but the rules elsewhere state that an aid is required. Tim asked for clarification on whether just a single prop is allowed, or if contestants may use multiple props.
	4. Storytelling: Spencer expressed concern about contestants memorizing a Children’s Literature piece for this category, rather than doing something based on myth/legend/oral tradition. Debbie suggested that eliminating the theme would help with that, and she will add language to the ballot to make it clear that it should not be a memorized Children’s Literature piece. Tim suggested stressing in the description that this should be sourced from an oral tradition.
	5. Dramatic Performance: Although DP is currently limited to plays for the source material, Debbie thought that the allowable source should be expanded to prose. DP in other venues includes prose as an allowed source material. This would also allow a student to advance from a binder category (Prose or Children’s Literature) to DP. Ellen asked if we are still allowing binders in DP, the answer is that we do allow them. Debbie thought it would be helpful to clarify which events require a manuscript, as compared to the events where it is optional. Christina asked about a clarification that students are encouraged to work their way off of a script; Debbie intends to add language to the ballot to clarify that students should not be penalized for using a script in the memorized categories (DP and Duo).
	6. Prose: Ellen was concerned about one of her students who was dropped to 5th in a round for doing Prose without a manuscript. Several coaches noted that a manuscript is required by rule in the category. Tim expressed concern as to whether this is adequately covered in the ballot language. Debbie agreed to revisit in the fall.
2. Judge Training: Spencer asked for ideas for improving performance of judges, especially considering that typically around half of our judges are novice judges. Ellen said that she gives all of her parents packets which include sample ballots and the speech glossary five days before each tournament. They find that material very helpful. She thinks it would be helpful to have a training video and samples. The video might be just the standard judge briefing given before the start of the tournament. Debbie said that she and Kim have discussed putting a training video together. They are planning to make a training video this summer and write up a sample ballot for every event. The ballots would be brought before the fall meeting for approval. In Debbie’s experience, it is difficult for judges to figure out *what to write*. They need ideas specifically for how to write constructive comments without being inappropriately critical. Any material that is produced will be put on the league website. Debbie also noted that if you join the NSDA (no need to pay for membership for kids) you can get access to their material. Debbie thinks the fee is $200. The team would then get one shared code and could see videos of national finalists as well as webinars on how to do pieces. It’s the “educational package.” Michelle asked for “sentence starters” for judges, both positive and negative. She also noted that her students are concerned about judges who fail to make eye contact with the contestants. The students are trying to make eye contact as they expect it to be something on which they are judged, and they find it frustrating when the judge never makes the connection. Debbie replied that she always tells judges in the briefing before the tournament that they should make eye contact, smile, etc., but it’s tough for judges because they have a lot of things to keep straight. Alex observed that having two judges could help, because they could split duties. Ellen discussed her pair judge system that she uses at Catholic Memorial. Lis expressed concern about parents who are reluctant to pick one kid over another, and also with parents who are not native English speakers. Spencer observed that that with non-native speakers, the issue tends to be confidence rather than ability. Debbie suggested leaning more on the rubric. For example, they can circle something in the rubric and say, “Needs to focus here.” Ellen suggested emphasizing words in the glossary, giving a checklist with the ballot, and including explicit organization for positive/needs improvement comments. In regard to organization, Debbie said that this had been abolished because kids paid close attention to where on the paper comments were being written.
3. Other Business
	* 1. Material produced before the fall meeting: Ellen asked if tentative training materials could be distributed before the fall meeting; Debbie replied that they could. Ellen asked about school data cards; Spencer agreed to look into that for the fall meeting.
4. Set Place and Time for the Next Meeting

The next league meeting was set to be held on September 10th at 9:30 am at Milton Academy.

1. Adjournment

**Spencer Harvey** adjourned the meeting at **12:00 pm**.

Minutes submitted by: Craig Powers

Minutes approved by: