**Bridgeport Public Schools Debate League**

**Handbook**

**2023 -2024**

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**INTRODUCTION**

The Bridgeport Public School Debate League (BPSDL) is a competitive association, founded in 2014 as a way to introduce students to the art of parliamentary debate, while fostering critical thinking and public speaking skills, nurture self-confidence, provide opportunities to engage in independent research and expose students to topics involving politics, education, government, the environment and other important current and historical events.

Participation is open to all Bridgeport public school students in grades 4-12. The League is divided into 3 divisions, elementary, middle school and high school. Each school in the respective divisions will debate each other at various tournaments throughout the year. Students in the Bridgeport Public Schools Debate League also have the opportunity to debate with students of the New Haven Urban Debate League (NHUDL).

It is understood that the Bridgeport Public Schools Debate League is a competitive organization. Everyone is expected to attend all practices and tournaments throughout the entire season. It is further understood that debaters are expected, to the best of their ability, to be prepared for each tournament, to ensure an exciting, competitive event for all participants.

The BPSDL works with Yale University’s Urban Debate League, who provide training and logistical support for all our students and coaches. Sponsorship for the League is made possible through the generous support of the Greater Bridgeport Bar Association and Pass the Gavel of New York.

**DEBATE**

**Principles:**

The BPSDL follows the traditional parliamentary debate format. A debate round has one Judge and two teams with two debaters each. One team represents the **Government**, while the other represents the **Opposition**. The Government team is composed of a Prime Minister, who speaks twice, and a Member of Government, who speaks once. The Opposition team is composed of a Leader of the Opposition, who speaks twice and a Member of the Opposition, who speaks once. The Government proposes a specific case statement (**resolution**), which the government team must demonstrate to be correct. The Opposition does not have to propose anything but must demonstrate that the case statement is not correct. The Judge decides at the end of the round, based on the arguments made in the round, whether the Government has proved its case or whether the Opposition has disproved it. The team that meets its burden more convincingly wins.

**Format:**

Middle School

The order for each speaker and time allotment is as follows:

1. Prime Minister - 4 minutes
2. Leader of Opposition - 5 minutes
3. Member of Government - 5 minutes
4. Member of Opposition - 5 minutes
5. Leader of Opposition Rebuttal - 2 minutes
6. Prime Minister Rebuttal - 3 minute

High School

The order for each speaker and time allotment is as follows:

1. Prime Minister - 6 minutes
2. Leader of Opposition - 7 minutes
3. Member of Government - 7 minutes
4. Member of Opposition - 7 minutes
5. Leader of Opposition Rebuttal - 4 minutes
6. Prime Minister Rebuttal - 5 minute

New arguments can be made at any time during the first four speeches. These speeches are called **constructives**. New arguments **cannot** be made during **rebuttals**, which are the last two speeches of the round. The Prime Minister can, however, respond to new opposition arguments that were made during the MOC. Therefore, the PMR may contain new responses, but **not** new arguments.

**Scoring**:

Points will be awarded (1-10) to each speaker based on the following four criteria:

Argument

Counter argument

Structure

Style

**Objectives:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Prime Minister Constructive**  **(PMC)** | Delivers opening arguments (generally three) in support of resolution. A good PMC can also define terms and burdens persuasively in a way that helps the Government. |
| **Leader of Opposition Constructive**  **(LOC)** | Delivers opening arguments (generally three) against resolution and rebuts PMC’s points. Can contest or accept PMC’s definitions and burdens and present alternative burdens if necessary |
| **Member of Gov’t Constructive**  **(MGC)** | Rebuts LOC’s points (called the off case), rebuilds PMC’s points, extends arguments and shows judge where Government is winning. |
| **Member the Opposition Constructive**  **(MOC)** | Rebuts MGC’s points, especially any new arguments and rebuilds off-case points, extending arguments, showing judge where Opposition is winning. Focusing on most crucial issues in the round so far. |
| **Leader of Opposition Rebuttal**  **(LOR)** | Usually, though not always, presents two or three “questions of crystallization” that summarize round and show the issues Opposition has won and why the Opposition wins the round. **No new arguments allowed.** |
| **Prime Minister Rebuttal**  **(PMR)** | A difficult speech to deliver effectively; often requires line-by-line rebuttal to MOC, as well as questions of crystallization to summarize round and show which issues Government has won and why Government wins round.  **No new arguments allowed.** |

**ARGUMENT**

**Structure:**

The most fundamental element of debate is the construction of solid arguments.

Arguments may take many forms, but successful arguments share these specific components:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Claim** | The main point of the argument; what the debater seeks to prove true. |
| **Warrant** | The logical justification for the claim; why the claim is true. |
| **Data/Evidence** | The information or evidence used to bolster the warrant. |
| **Impact** | The reason the argument should matter to the audience. |

Arguments should be clear, concise, and supported with sound reasoning. While there is no correct number of contentions for each argument, one is probably too few to support a resolution and five is probably too many to defend adequately. Three contentions are usually enough to support a claim.

**Signposting:**

Arguments should follow a logical order that is easy for the judge and audience to follow. Speeches should be signposted (for example, “my second contention is…” or “in response to the Government's third contention…”).

**Delivery:**

Debaters may direct their arguments to either the judge or their opponents. In either case, they should make eye contact and speak with conviction and should **not** read pre-written speeches. **Judges will not score arguments for those who read pre-written speeches.**

**Veracity:**

Debaters should be truthful and honest with respect to the arguments they make and the evidence and examples they cite. Debaters should not lie or fabricate evidence or examples or use evidence or examples that they know to be untrue.

**Conferencing:**

Team members may confer with each other during the debate, but they should do so quietly so as not to disrupt the speaker. However, team members may not confer with a teammate while that teammate is presenting their argument.

**Specialized Knowledge:**

Detailed facts or statistics about topics not considered common knowledge or are outside the range of a typical, well-read middle school/high school student **are prohibited** during parliamentary debate. It is assumed, however, that debaters will have a working knowledge of major issues of the topic being debated.

If such facts or statistics do present themselves during an argument, the opposing side can contest such use of specific knowledge and judges will take the use of such facts into consideration when scoring the debate.

**Rebuttal:**

No new arguments may be presented during rebuttal speeches. Speakers may support arguments and lines of reasoning already presented with new examples or illustrations, if the underlying argument is not new.

**QUESTIONS/CONCERNS DURING DEBATE**

During any speech, other than rebuttals, any team member can stand up and ask a question or voice a concern. There are several ways this can be done:

**Points of Order**One may rise to a point of order when a member of the other team has violated the rules for debating. There are few rules in parliamentary debate, so a point of order is usually called only when (1) an opponent has introduced a new argument in rebuttals or (2) an opponent has gone significantly overtime.

* Time is paused during points of order and a point of order is not debatable.
* The judge will rule the point "**Well Taken**" or "**Not Well Taken**." Well Taken means the speaker must conclude their speech or that the new point will not be considered. Not Well taken means the speaker should continue.
* **Points of Personal Privilege**A debater may rise to a point of personal privilege during an opponent's speech when the opposing speaker has seriously misstated his or her position or argument. A point of personal privilege is addressed to the Judge, who then rules upon it. A point of personal privilege is not debatable.

**Points of Information**

A point of information **(POI)** is a short interjection addressed to the debater who is speaking, by a member of the opposing team, normally consisting of a question or comment of around 15 seconds duration. POIs provide opposing teams with an opportunity to refute a point immediately without needing to wait for their turn to speak. A debater may request a POI at any time after the first minute and before the last minute of any constructive speech. Time is **not** paused during the point of information. The procedure is as follows:

1. The debater who wishes to ask a POI rises from his or her seat, places one hand on top of his or her head and extends his or her other arm to signal that he or she has a point.
2. **The debater who is speaking may choose to recognize the point or not**. If the debater does not want to recognize the point, he or she simply says, "No thank you," or waves the questioner off. The questioner then sits down. A debater may not simply interrupt if his or her point is not taken.
3. If the debater who is speaking recognizes the point, then he or she says, "On that point" and allows the questioner to give their point. At any time, the debater whose speech was interrupted, may stop the POI and tell the questioner to sit down, at which point the questioner must immediately cease and sit down.
4. No POIs can be requested during rebuttals.
5. Offering POIs aggressively or excessively to force a speaker to recognize you or to put them off their speech is **not allowed**.

**Points of Clarifications**

At the beginning of the Prime Minister constructive speech (PMC) the Opposition may ask for points of clarification (POC). Clarification means that a debater does not understand a particular argument or definition. If possible, the Prime Minister should try to answer the clarification to ensure a confusion-free debate round. Debaters should not abuse the idea of clarification by asking too many clarification questions or disguising arguments as clarification. Time is paused during POCs.

**Points of Order** and **Points of Personal Privilege** are rarely used and should be reserved for important violations of debate protocol. Points of information are a regular part of most parliamentary debates and are much more common than the other two.

**TOURNAMENT FORMAT**

**Topic:**

The topics for debate will be released approximately one month prior to the tournament date. Students, with the guidance of their coaches, should use this time to research and familiarize themselves, as much as possible, with the topic. It is between the students and the coach to decide which areas they will cover.

**Rounds:**

All tournaments, except specialty debates and championships, will have 3 rounds of debate with no prizes or awards conferred at the conclusion.

**Pairings:**

Every effort will be made to ensure students from the same school will not debate each other or that teams will not debate each other more than once. However, when circumstances dictate otherwise, we expect our students and coaches to accept the pairing without question or complaint.

**Mixed Pairings:**

In the event there are teams with an uneven number of debaters, every effort will be made to match those debaters with members from other schools who also have uneven numbers.

**Prep Period:**

At the beginning of each round, the resolution will be released, along with the side being argued and the room assignments. Debaters will then have 15 minutes to formulate their arguments.

All pairs must confer only with each other and may not confer with any other debaters during this 15-minute prep period.

Coaches may not assist their teams in any way during the 15-minute prep period and must leave the area where the preparation is taking place.

During the 15-minute prep period, students may use any notes they accumulated during the research month that preceded the tournament, but they may not bring those notes to the debate room. Only a copy of the U.S. Constitution and the notes developed during the 15-minute prep period are allowed in the debate room.

**Electronic Devices**

No electronic devices of any kind are allowed at any time during the tournament. Phones may be used, for the purpose of keeping time only, during the debate.

**TOURNAMENT PROTOCOLS AND BEHAVIOR**

**Students:**

Debaters should be always polite and respectful. They should be emphatic and enthusiastic, but never rude. Debaters are further expected to show good sportsmanship and be collegial to their competitors, shaking hands at the end of each round.

Under no circumstances are debaters to question or correct a judge's ruling. Any perceived discrepancies should be brought to their coach's attention immediately after the round. Any violation of this policy will result in the immediate expulsion from the tournament. A second violation will result in the debater being dismissed from the team.

**Coaches:**

Coaches are welcome to observe debates involving their team. However, they are to refrain from coaching students at **any time** during the tournament.

Under no circumstances are coaches to question or correct a judge's ruling or have any contact with the judges before, during or after the debate. Any perceived discrepancies should be brought to the tournament director immediately after the round.

Coaches should further refrain from making negative comments to or about judges, debaters, coaches or tournament staff.

Failure to adhere to this rule will result in immediate removal from the tournament and may lead to dismissal from the league**.**

**Parents and Guests:**

There is no audience allowed for our regular tournament debates. However, parents and friends are allowed to attend the various specialty debates we hold throughout the year.

Attendance at all BPSDT events is a privilege and not a right. Parents and guests are expected to exhibit the highest standards of behavior while attending all BPSDL events. They should refrain from speaking to their students during prep time and debates and must maintain complete silence while the debate is in progress. Furthermore, parents and guests should refrain from making negative comments to or about judges, debaters, coaches, or tournament staff. Failure to adhere to this policy will result in parent/guest being removed from the tournament and banned from attending further BPSDL events.

**No recording of any kind is allowed at BPSDL events.**

**TOURNAMENT POLICIES**

**Supervision:**

All debate teams must be accompanied by a coach. All coaches must possess the emergency contact information for their team members.

**Registration:**

Tournament registration begins at 8:30 and ends at 8:50. No team will be allowed to register after 8:50. Tournaments will begin promptly at 9:00

**Student Attire:**

Students are required to be in proper attire at all BPSDL events

**Males** - dress shirts, pants, ties and shoes. Jackets are preferable but not required

**Females** - appropriately attired in dresses, skirts, tops, and dress pants.

**T-shirts, jeans or sneakers are not acceptable attire for BPSDL events.**

**Food:**

**No food of any kind is allowed in the debate or prep areas.** Students may, however, bring water bottles to the debate.

Those who need a snack (i.e., health bars) during debate rounds may consume them in the lobby or outside the building.

**Violators of this policy will be asked to leave the debate.**