

For Student Debaters, Coaches and Tournament Directors

An Overview of Student Congress

Student Congress was added as a new debate event in 2003 in order to establish a real-world debate experience modeled after a state or national legislature, although the program is not an exact replica of the United States Congress or the Virginia House of Delegates or Virginia Senate. Student Congress was promoted as a somewhat less demanding debate format that would be an attractive introductory event for students, coaches and judges and easier to administer than other debate events.

The hope is that Student Congress will build participation in debate, with the belief that once involved many students would go on to other debate events.

Preparing for Competition

1. Six weeks out: Interest meeting with general discussion of Student Congress topics to be provided by VHSL. Different topics will be used for regional and state tournaments.
2. Five weeks out: Bring articles to this meeting, share them, then create resolutions.
3. Four weeks out: Bring resolutions and articles for discussion, write authorship speeches. For state competition, begin submitting three bills/resolutions to the Clerk of Congress for posting on the Student Congress website at <http://www.nflva.org/vhslcongress>.
4. Three weeks out: Bring everything, write a likely second or third speech; create "talking points" for other topic areas.
5. Two weeks out: Practice delivering all speeches, followed by two minutes of question and answer.
6. One week out: Practice Congress, professional attire (church, with style), authorship speeches, followed by questioning, negative speeches, affirmative speeches, votes and parliamentary procedure.
7. For regionals, make 30 copies of all resolutions; copy talking points for team members.
8. Compete, learn and get ready to do it all again!

Key Dates: Deadline for Regionals, March 25
 State Finals, April 21-22
 Topics for state will be available by Jan. 30

The following format is used for Student Congress:

Note: It includes some procedural expansion on rules in the VHSL Handbook.

- (a) Parliamentarian will call the chamber to order and determine or identify committee chairs. Each delegate/senator will turn in a copy of his/her legislation to the appropriate committee chair. Committee chairs will determine the docket (the order in which legislation will be debated) by selecting one bill or resolution from each committee and proceeding until all bills or resolutions have been assigned. They will present this packet to the parliamentarian who will then post it on a chalkboard/whiteboard/easel. As the parliamentarian calls out the number or author of each piece of legislation, that student will provide one copy of his or her legislation to the parliamentarian, presiding officer, each judge and each delegate or senator in the chamber.

If presiding officers have not already been assigned by the tournament director, the parliamentarian will ask for volunteers to serve as presiding officers for the first session. Each person may give a one-minute speech to the chamber explaining his/her qualifications and reasons for being presiding officer. The Chamber will then vote by secret ballot to select the first presiding officer. Students not elected may run again at the start of the second, third or fourth session. A student may not serve as a presiding officer more than once during the regional tournament and once during the state finals. The presiding officer will be evaluated by the parliamentarian. This score will be doubled and counted as one speech given by the student.

- (b) The presiding officer will make a brief opening speech in which he/she sets his/her expectations. This will be the first speech of the session. This speech will be followed by a call for a main motion, then a call for a three-minute authorship speech followed by two minutes of questioning.
- (c) Call for a three-minute negative speech; time not used by the speaker may be used for questioning. The speaker has the right to refuse to answer questions.
- (d) Repeat b and c until an appropriate motion is made (motion to table or to call the previous question, etc.).
- (e) Exact precedence for speaking order and approximate precedence questioning order will be kept by the parliamentarian and the presiding officers. In the event of a conflict, the parliamentarian's tally is final.
- (f) Once action has been taken on a bill or resolution, the next legislative item on the docket will be considered.
- (g) Each session may last between one and three hours, as determined in advance by the tournament director and the participating schools.

Student Congress Rules and Regulations

Each school entering Student Congress may send up to six representatives to the regional tournament. A list of topic areas will be presented at least six weeks before the tournament; students should be able to speak on all topic areas. Each student representative must write either a bill or a resolution to be discussed and bring 30 copies of that legislation.

For both the regional and state tournaments, the Clerk of Congress will choose two domestic topics, two international topics, two economic topics and two statewide topics that provide a breadth and depth of topic areas without presenting an overwhelming research burden. To provide debate on a wide variety of subjects, schools are encouraged to have no more than one bill or resolution per topic area. A tournament official may scan all legislation prior to the posting deadline to eliminate duplicate legislation, non-topical legislation or inappropriate material. The tournament official will notify students and coaches of any problems or concerns, but will not edit or revise student-produced legislation. Once the legislation has been approved, it is up to the students to determine the order of the docket. Legislation must alternate (domestic, international, economic and statewide) among the topic areas.

Each school may enter a maximum of six students to the region; each region may qualify a maximum of 12 representatives to the state final. Up to three call-ups from the regional to the state tournament are permitted. At the regional level, student competitors shall be called "representatives," and at the state tournament they shall be called "senators." There will be no difference in the rules of procedure. Regional and state tournaments in Student Congress may be held in conjunction with the regional and state tournaments in debate.

The number of representatives or senators participating determines whether the meet is divided into multiple chambers. In general, 24 representatives or senators per chamber is ideal. If there is to be more than one chamber, schools and regions should be split equally between or among chambers. Each chamber should meet between two and four sessions, as determined by the tournament director. The time of each legislative session will be determined by the tournament director.

A parliamentarian will be chosen by the tournament director to preside over all sessions and will fill out an evaluation of each student. Two judges will evaluate each speaker using ballots provided by the League. The judges will change for each legislative session, with no judge being used more than twice. Students may elect presiding officers for each session or presiding officers may be assigned at the discretion of the tournament director.

Judging Requirements and Bases for Judges' Decision-Each school participating in Student Congress debate at the state meet must provide at least one qualified judge to evaluate Student Congress competition in a group other than the one represented by the school. The coach may serve as the school's required judge. Penalty for violation is a \$50 fine. Criteria used by judges will include all aspects of general effectiveness in debate. Most important will be clear and persuasive speaking, documentation of sources, clarity, organization and responding to previous arguments.

Speaker's Precedence-The presiding officer and parliamentarian will number student speeches, with the presiding officer's opening comments considered the first speech of the session. Speaker order will be determined by precedence, meaning the presiding officer will select first the representatives/senators (R/S) who have given no speeches, then R/S's who have given one speech and so on. In the event that two or more R/S's who have the same number of speeches wish to speak, the presiding officer will recognize the one who spoke least recently. Numbering speeches will facilitate determining who has precedence to speak.

Determining Winners-Each representative or senator may speak up to six times. His or her best two speeches will be added to the parliamentarian's score. The highest score will place first, the next highest second and so on. In the case of a tie, drop the parliamentarian's score. If scores are still tied, refer to the third best speech and continue until ties are broken. If there is a Super Session, the representative or senator's best two Super Session speech scores are added to the parliamentarian's score and the preliminary score, consisting of two preliminary speeches plus the preliminary parliamentarian score, to obtain a final score. In the case of a tie, drop the Super Session parliamentarian score. If scores are still tied, drop the preliminary parliamentarian score.

Structure of Sessions-117-9-3 The number of representatives or senators participating determines whether the meet is divided into multiple chambers. In general, 24 representatives or senators per chamber is ideal, with chambers ranging in size from 15 to 30 members. If there is to be more than one chamber, schools and regions should be split equally between or among chambers. Each chamber should meet between two and four sessions, as determined by the Clerk of Congress. At state, each chamber will meet in three sessions, with a fourth Super Session set for any group split between two chambers. The Super Session will include all students placing in the top half of the two split chambers. Each school qualifying for the state tournament in a group with split chambers will provide one bill or resolution to be considered for the Super Session docket, and that bill or resolution must be submitted electronically to the Clerk of Congress to be posted on the Student Congress website at least one week in advance of the state tournament. The time of each legislative session will be determined by the Clerk of Congress.

NOTE: Martha Carr, at W. T. Woodson High School, will direct Student Congress at the State Debate Tournament. Questions should be addressed to her: Sch. email: Martha.Carr@fcps.edu / Ph: 703-503-4600 (office), 703-503-4697 (fax)