### Middle School Committee Recommendations

#### Current Bylaws

1.10 CERTIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY

1.11 Students gain eligibility to practice or compete for the school in which they are enrolled after they have been certified by the principal of that school, after the eligibility forms have been processed by the GFCA executive board, and after the students have met the standards of:

(a) academic requirements

(b) age

(c) semesters in high school

(d) residence in the school’s service area

(e) transfer rules

1.12 The certification of eligibility shall be maintained by individual coaches and must be presented upon the request of the GFCA Executive Committee.

1.13 Academic Requirements -- To be eligible to participate and/or try-out for a forensics activity, a student must be enrolled full time in grades 9-12 inclusive at the school seeking eligibility for that student and academically in good standing.

(a) “Enrolled” is defined as follows:

(1) Fall Semester: when the student participates in practice or contest before classes begin, or the student attends classes.

(2) Spring Semester: when the student attends classes

(3) A student may be enrolled in only one (1) high school at a time.

(4) A school shall be defined as a member school under the Georgia Independent School Association and/or Georgia High School Association.

(5) Students enrolled in grade nine (9) in a middle school or junior high school which is a feeder school to a member high school may participate in interscholastic activities for the parent school.

(b) To be “academically in good standing”, a student is required to pass classes that count toward graduation the semester immediately preceding participation and must meet attendance requirements as designated by the student’s school and/or District.

(1) Passing for all member schools is a grade of seventy (70) on a one-hundred (100) point scale.

(2) Students must be passing in seventy-five percent (75%) of their classes that count toward graduation the semester immediately preceding participation.

(3)   First semester ninth grade students automatically receive eligibility.

1.14 Age -- To be eligible to participate in forensics activities, a student must not have reached her/his nineteenth (19th) birthday prior to May 1st, preceding her/his year of participation.

1.15 Semesters in High School -- A student has eight (8) consecutive semesters or four (4) consecutive years of eligibility for varsity competition from the date of entry into the ninth (9th) grade to be eligible to compete.

(a) A student is not considered to have entered the 9th grade when a 9th grade course is taken if the student is regularly enrolled in a member’s feeder school in a grade below the 9th, and the course is taken as an advanced course.

(b) Credits earned toward high school graduation which are taken below the ninth grade may be used when considering high school eligibility.

(c) Students who successfully complete summer school to maintain eligibility become eligible on the last day of summer school. Summer school credits earned in non-accredited home study programs or non-accredited private schools may not be used to gain eligibility. Accreditation is recognized from the Georgia Accrediting Commission (GAC) or a regional accreditation agency (i.e. SACS) or the Georgia Private School Accreditation Council (GAPSAC).

(d) A student enrolled in a joint-enrolled program between her/his parent school and a vocational-technical school, an alternative school, or a college, shall be eligible to represent the parent school in forensics activities provided s/he:

(1) is enrolled at the parent school and that school received state funds based on her/his enrollment. If in a private school, s/he must be a full tuition-paying student.

(2) must not compete in forensics activities in the vocational-technical school, alternative school, or college.

1.17 Sub-varsity competitors must meet all eligibility requirements with the exception of the migratory rule.

1.18 Students in grade nine (9) and higher may participate on both the varsity and sub-varsity teams in forensics activities.

(a) A student is no longer eligible for competition in any first-year/novice division once they have competed in any event in the previous school year.

1.19 Eighth (8th) grade students may participate on a sub-varsity team of a high school provided they attend a feeder school of that high school.

(a) Students in grade eight (8) are never eligible for a varsity event in any activity.

(b) Students in grade eight (8) who compete on a team must meet all middle school requirements as put forth by the student’s school, District and/or the bylaws set forth by the Georgia Forensic Coaches Association.

(c) Students in grade eight (8) who are declared ineligible at a middle school or retained for academic reasons is are considered ineligible for participation on a sub-varsity high school team.

(d) Participation in rookie, novice (first year) or junior varsity (second year) tournaments in grade eight (8) does not use a semester of eligibility provided all other requirements are met.

(e) Students below the eighth (8th) grade are not eligible to participate on any high school team.

(f) Students in grade eight (8) may participate in the open division of a tournament event.

#### Proposed New Bylaws (No 6th‐7th Grade Allowance, 8th Grade Feeder Schools, many deletions of unusued eligibility rules.)

**BY‐LAW 1.00 – STUDENT PARTICIPATION**

1.10 STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

1.11    Students are eligible compete for the GFCA member school in which they are enrolled if they meet academic and participation standards set by that member school.

1. “School” shall be defined as a member school under the Georgia Independent School Association and/or Georgia High School Association.
2. Students enrolled in grade nine (9) in a middle school or junior high school which is a feeder school to a member high school may participate in interscholastic activities for the parent school.
3. Students enrolled in grade eight (8) in a middle school or junior high school which is a feeder school to a member high school may participate in interscholastic activities for the parent school subject to the rules in 1.14.
4. A student that transfers into a member school during grades 9-12 becomes immediately eligible if they meet academic and participation standards at their current school. All transfer eligibility questions will refer to the Georgia High School Association manual.
5. Questions concerning eligibility should be addressed to the Chair of the Executive Committee who will serve as the chair for any transfer hardship process.

1.12    Students have ten (10) consecutive semesters or five (5) consecutive years of eligibility starting from the date of entry into their first high school speech or debate division.

1. Students may only compete in a “novice” or “first year” division in the school year in which they entered their first high school speech or debate division.
2. Students may only compete in a “second year” division in the school year in which they entered their first high school speech or debate division or the next year that they compete.
3. A student’s eligibility expires upon graduation from high school or after ten consecutive semesters, whichever comes first. Once a student is no longer eligible, they may not compete at GFCA state tournament events.

* 1. Students in Seventh Grade and Below

1. Students in seventh (7th) grade and below may not participate in a high school division at a high school speech and debate tournament.
2. Students in seventh (7th) grade and below may participate in a middle school division at a high school speech and debate tournament. These students should not be paired or judged against high school competitors.

1.14 Students in Eighth Grade

1. Eighth (8th) grade students may compete in high school speech and debate divisions provided they attend a feeder school of a member high school. They may also compete in middle school divisions at high school speech and debate tournaments.
2. Students in grade eight (8) may participate in “first year,” “novice,” “junior varsity” and/or “second year” divisions.
3. Students in grade eight (8) may participate in an “open” division of a tournament event if a novice or junior varsity division was not offered at that tournament. They may not participate in a “varsity” division if novice and/or JV divisions were offered.

#### Rationale and Response to Questions

**1. 8th Grade only or also allow 6th/7th to compete in high school divisions?**

The MS committee recommends leaving the rules at only 8th grade participation in high school events, while encouraging tournaments to offer MS divisions that would allow 6th and 7th graders to compete.

**2. Feeder schools only or all MS students?**

As of now, we have this set as feeder schools can compete in high school debate for simplicity. I don’t think anyone is strongly opposed to modifying this to allow non-feeder school students to compete as 8th graders, but we would need to determine how those schools count as “schools” in the rules, ex. Do they have to be members, etc? If there’s a push for non-feeder MS programs to be allowed to compete, we’d want to add guidelines for those programs. See #5 below.

**3. Do 8th graders in high school divisions count toward state bids in that division?**

*Ex. a GFCA high school hosts “Open” PF -- there are 12 entries, but two of the students are 8th graders. Do those two teams count towards the overall allocation of state bids for that event? (Under current rules, the students couldn’t attend varsity state even if they qualified -- this is just to assess the “denominator” so to speak, for the number of state bids at that tournament.)*

We recommend that 8th grade students in high school divisions **do** count toward the number of varsity state bids issued at that tournament, but they are not eligible to attend varsity state under current rules even if they did reach the level that would otherwise earn them a bid to state.

**4. Best Practices**

We recommend distributing a “MS speech and debate best practices” document to coaches of MS students. Maggie will write this up, but it will include the following. Please email [maggiekb@gmail.com](mailto:maggiekb@gmail.com) if you have recommendations for other additions:

* **Supervision** -- MS students require a higher level of supervision than high school students. An adult should be on-site and available at all times, and each student should have that adult’s cell phone number.
* **Length of Tournament** -- debate tournaments are very long. Coaches should make sure to explain this to MS students and parents so they are not taken unaware. Coaches should recommend that students bring snacks (and/or provide them) for late evenings and long days. Coaches should make sure that students understand that (barring illness) they are expected to compete in all rounds through the end of the tournament.

**5. What about MS-only divisions? What about GFCA State Tournaments?**

We recommend that invitational tournaments offer MS only divisions (with students not paired against high school students) as often as is feasible to allow students younger than 8th grade to compete and to give 8th graders the opportunity to compete against other MS students rather than being forced to move up in order to participate in speech and debate. There is a consensus that increased participation at the MS level is beneficial to the activity. Several members of the MS committee are willing to work on encouraging MS programs to come to GFCA hosted tournaments with MS divisions.

We also discussed offering MS divisions at GFCA First and Second Year State and creating explicit “GFCA Junior High” memberships — all committee members are in favor of continuing to explore this possibility.

**6. Other ByLaw Changes**

As you can see, we also recommend dramatically simplifying existing eligibility rules. We’ve removed a number of rules that we did not enforce (or that were not enforceable) and simplified a lot of complicated legalistic language with the goal of making it easier for coaches to understand if their students are allowed to debate. Thanks to Jeff Miller for doing most of this last fall -- we made some additional minor modifications, but he did the bulk of the work here.