Orange County Department of Education
Educational and Student Services Division

Orange County Academic Decathlon

2026-2027 Fact Sheet

WHAT IS THE OCAD PROGRAM?

The Orange County Academic Decathlon (OCAD) is a highly spirited, rigorous academic competition that is uniquely designed to provide high school students of all achievement levels the opportunity to compete as team members in a series of ten (10) academic tests and demonstrations. All public and private high schools are eligible to compete.

Founded in 1968 by former County Superintendent of Schools Robert Peterson, Ed.D., OCAD serves as the model for all the prestigious Academic Decathlon events that now exist at the state and national levels.

2026-2027 Theme

Journeys of Transformation:
An Exploration of Travel and Transportation

Important Dates

(*Dates Subject to Change*)

Nov. 30 – Dec. 5, 2026 | Scrimmage Window
January 13, 2027 | Essay Test
January 23, 2027 | Speech & Interview Events
January 30, 2027 | Objective Tests & Super Quiz
February 5, 2027 | Awards Ceremony

WHY PARTICIPATE IN THE OCAD PROGRAM?

The program engages students of all achievement levels in a variety of challenging academic events. Under the guidance of an adult coach, OCAD challenges students to demonstrate a mastery of higher-order thinking skills, written aptitude, and communication skills in the following subjects: **art, economics, literature, math, music, science, social science, interview, speech, and essay.**

The mission of the Orange County Academic Decathlon is to inspire academic excellence and build 21st century skills that prepare students for college and careers.

OCAD contributes to a Multi-Tiered System of Support and Local Control and Accountability Plan priorities by building academic and social-emotional skills, engaging students, families and community members, and fostering school connectedness.

The competition culminates with an exciting Super Quiz relay, a team event where parents, faculty, and classmates cheer for their teams from the sidelines, championing academics much like the environment of a sporting event.

Students who participate report improvement in the areas of communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and character, and they report feeling a stronger sense of belonging at school.

Student Outcomes

Survey results from students who participated in the 2025-2026 Academic Decathlon:

- **95%** reported that the program improved skills in **critical thinking**
- **96%** reported that the program improved skills in **communication**
- **93%** reported that the program improved skills **in teamwork**
- **95%** reported the development of **stronger character traits**
- **95%** reported that the program helped them to **build relationships with their peers**
- **89%** reported that the program helped them **feel more connected to their school**

Academic Decathlon is sponsored by the
Orange County Academic Decathlon Association, a 501c3 non-profit organization,
and is administered by the Orange County Department of Education.

STEFAN BEAN, Ed.D.
County Superintendent of Schools

HOW DO SCHOOLS PARTICIPATE?

Each participating school must have a faculty representative to serve as a coach. As OCAD is a multidisciplinary program, having an assistant coach is beneficial. Students in grades 9-12 are eligible to participate in the Academic Decathlon.

Registration and Participation Fees

A school must have an Intent to Participate form on file with the Orange County Department of Education Academic Events office. All registration materials must be received by **November 12, 2026**. Participation fees for the 2026-2027 school year are **$695** for the first six to nine students and **$100** for each additional student beyond nine or for each student if registering less than six. Payment (check or purchase order) must be received by **December 10, 2026**.

Schools must purchase the curriculum materials separately from the United States Academic Decathlon's online store.

HOW ARE TEAMS FORMED?

Academic Decathlon teams consist of nine (9) student members, known as Decathletes. A team consists of three (3) Decathletes in each of the following Grade Point Average (GPA) categories:

Honors	***(GPA 4.00 – 3.85)***
Scholastic	***(GPA 3.84 – 3.50)***
Varsity	***(GPA 3.49 – 0.00)***

The OCAD guidelines for student eligibility and Grade Point Average (GPA) computation are defined by the United States Academic Decathlon. For competition purposes, the unweighted cumulative GPA listed on the student's high school transcript determines placement in the above GPA categories. Additional information regarding GPA requirements will be provided for participating coaches.

HOW ARE TEAMS RECOGNIZED?

Team Awards



A school competes in one of three competition divisions. Team awards are presented to the top five Super Quiz teams and top five overall teams in each division. The team awarded first place in the Orange County Academic Decathlon will represent the county at the California Academic Decathlon on March 18-21, 2027. Additional top-scoring teams may be invited to the state competition, depending on statewide overall team scores. Historically, Orange County has sent two to ten teams to the state competition.

Individual Awards

For each competition division, medals are presented to the top five Decathletes in each GPA category for each subject area. The highest overall individual scoring Decathletes also receive medals. Educational scholarships up to $1,000 are awarded to top overall individual winners.

WHO MAY I CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

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