Manchester Essex Regional School District

Speech & Debate Program — Overnight Travel Tournament Briefing

Prepared for School Committee Consideration — September 15, 2026

Submitted by:

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Purpose

This briefing supports the School Committee's consideration of an overnight, out-of-state field trip for the MERHS Speech & Debate program to compete at the 34th Annual Yale Invitational High School Tournament. The trip has received Principal approval. This document summarizes the educational purpose, logistics, supervision plan, budget, and safety planning for the Committee's review.

1. Trip Summary

- Event: 34th Annual Yale Invitational High School Tournament
- Location: Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut
- Dates: Friday, October 2 – Sunday, October 4, 2026
- Educational purpose: competitive academic debate and speech competition (Public Forum, Lincoln-Douglas, and Extemporaneous Speech), providing students experience at a nationally-recognized collegiate-hosted tournament
- Grade levels: 10–12

2. Approval Status

- Principal approval: received (MERSD Field Trip Request Form, Step 1)
- Superintendent notification: in process per district field trip procedure
- School Committee approval: requested at the September 15, 2026 meeting

Per district policy, this trip is subject to cancellation at any time, including after this approval, should a safety or security concern arise.

3. Student Entries

- 6 students confirmed in JV Public Forum (3 teams): Stella Langille, Abby Bogerson, Lily Berkowitz, Grace Burgess, Rosie Renehan, Youssef Ghatas
- 1 JV Lincoln-Douglas entry: Claire Yukins
- 1 Extemporaneous Speech entry waitlisted: Simone Argento
- Nearly all program entries have cleared the tournament's waitlist as of this writing; any remaining waitlisted entries will be confirmed before departure

4. Chaperones & Supervision

- Trip Leader: Sally Berkowitz, Debate Director (CORI cleared)
- 1 additional parent chaperone is needed to accompany the team; candidate not yet finalized
- All chaperones will complete a CORI background check through the district prior to the trip
- Supervision ratio: approximately 1 adult per 3–4 students
- Housing: female students will room together with teammates, with a chaperone room on the same floor. Youssef Ghatas, the program's one male student on this trip, will have his own single room directly adjacent to a chaperone's room for supervision and nightly checks
- Both accompanying adults are qualified debate judges, which fully covers the tournament's judging obligation for the program's entries (see Section 8)

5. Transportation

- Students will travel to and from New Haven in a school-provided 15-passenger van
- Sally Berkowitz will drive; the accompanying parent chaperone is also licensed and available to drive if needed

6. Accommodations

- Courtyard by Marriott New Haven Orange/Milford — (203) 799-2200
- 6 rooms held, 2 queen beds per room; approx. 15 minutes from the tournament venue

7. Itinerary

- Friday, Oct 2: Depart MERHS immediately after school by school-provided van; drive to New Haven; check into hotel; compete in Friday evening preliminary rounds on campus; return to hotel
- Saturday, Oct 3: Full day of debate on campus; team dinner; return to hotel
- Sunday, Oct 4: Debate on campus until the team is eliminated from the bracket; check out of hotel; return home by school van

8. Tournament Judging Obligation

The tournament requires each participating school to supply qualified judges based on its number of entries. With the program's current entries, MERHS is obligated to provide approximately 2 qualified judges through the elimination rounds in which its entries remain active. This obligation is fully covered by Sally Berkowitz and the accompanying parent chaperone, both qualified judges; no additional parent volunteers are required for judging.

9. Budget & Funding Source

- Registration: $130 per team — approx. $800 total
- Hotel: approx. $239/night — approx. $3,500 total
- Team dinners: approx. $500 total
- Estimated program cost: approx. $4,800
- Funding source: this cost is fully covered by the Speech & Debate program's own fundraising and program funds (the program raised $10,312 in its most recent fundraising campaign). No district funds or family payments are being requested for registration, lodging, or team meals.
- Family responsibility: each student's own breakfast and lunch during the trip, estimated at approx. $20/day per student

10. Safety, Health & Cancellation

- Trip Leader reachable at all times during the trip: 518-796-2155
- Families will provide emergency contact and medical information for each student via the district's field trip consent form
- As with any district trip, this trip is subject to cancellation at any time if a safety or security concern arises; families would be notified immediately and the district and tournament organizers would be engaged regarding any applicable refunds

11. Required Forms & Compliance Timeline

- MERSD District Field Trip Consent Form — one per student, collected by Trip Leader prior to departure
- Yale Debate Association Participant Supervision Agreement — one per school, completed by Sally Berkowitz as authorized school official — due Monday, September 28, 11:59 PM ET
- Yale Debate Association Parent/Guardian Waiver — one per competing student — due Monday, September 28, 11:59 PM ET
- Tournament registration fee payment — due Thursday, October 1, 11:59 PM ET

- CORI background check — required for any additional chaperone prior to travel

12. Anticipated Questions

Is this trip fully funded outside the district budget?
Yes. All program-side costs (registration, hotel, team dinners) are covered by the Speech & Debate program's fundraising and existing program funds. The only cost to families is each student's own breakfast and lunch.

Does the program meet its judging obligation to the tournament?
Yes. Both accompanying adults are qualified judges, fully covering the program's judging requirement without needing outside volunteers or paid judges.

How is the program's one male student supervised given the rest of the roster is female?
The male student will have his own single room, placed directly adjacent to a chaperone's room, with the same curfew and nightly room-check structure applied to all students on the trip.

What happens if the trip needs to be cancelled after Committee approval?
As with any district trip, the Trip Leader retains authority to cancel at any time for a safety or security concern. Families would be notified immediately, and the Trip Leader would coordinate with the district and tournament organizers on any applicable refunds; registration and hotel refund policies are set by those vendors.

What is the adult-to-student supervision ratio?
Approximately 1 adult per 3–4 students, with both adults reachable at all times and CORI-cleared prior to travel.

Is the tournament registration confirmed?
Nearly all program entries have cleared the tournament's waitlist as of this writing; the Trip Leader will confirm any remaining entries before departure.

Prepared September 3, 2026 by Sally Berkowitz, Debate Director, MERHS