



Texas Charter School Academic & Athletic League

2026-2027 Chess Tournament Rules

I. Format

- A. State Qualifiers
 - 1. The top 4 teams from each regional qualifier will advance to State.
 - 2. Schools are able to change their team roster for the State Tournament as necessary for teams that have advanced from the Regional Tournament to the State Tournament.
- B. Fees
 - 1. The entrance cost per school is \$200 per team. Teams are made up of 4 participants. There is no limit on the number of teams a school can enter in an age grouping.
- C. Groupings
 - 1. We will have 3 age levels of competition: 4th – 6th Grade, 6th - 8th Grade, and High School (Varsity). Students can play up in grade level, but not down. 4th – 6th will not advance to state. 4th – 6th Grade will only compete regionally. 4th – 6th Grade will earn trophies at regionals.
 - a. In some cases, regional tournaments may be conducted in a virtual format as deemed necessary by TCSAAL. Winners of the virtual regional tournaments will move on to compete in the State Tournament in traditional format.

II. Tournament Rules

- A. Tournaments consist of a four-round chess tournament at regionals and a five-round chess tournament at state.
- B. At most, games will last 30 minutes. Varsity tournaments will use clocks. Each Varsity player will have 15 minutes on their clock. 6th-8th Grade and 4th-6th Grade will not use clocks. Time for sub-Varsity will be kept by tournament administrator(s) with a maximum time limit of 30 minutes per game. Players in a sub-Varsity game must not stall. If an opponent feels a player is stalling, then they should call over a tournament staffer. That staffer will give the opponent 30 seconds to make their next move. If no winner is determined when time is up in a sub-Varsity game, we will use the point system by adding up the point value of pieces on the board. Varsity players lose if they run out of time on their clock. Exception: The game is ruled a draw if the player still with time on their clock has no possibility of checkmate due to not having sufficient pieces (see Impossibility of checkmate in Section 8 below).
- C. A team is made up of 4 individuals.
- D. If you are assigned to play a teammate, please let the Tournament Director (TD) know before you start the game. In some cases we may make you play a teammate, but check with us first.
- E. The tournament will be conducted in the Swiss style method, meaning the results of each round will determine who you play in the following round. For example, winners from the first round will be scheduled to play other first round winners, while first round losers will play other first round losers. This system allows for the most balanced of opponents and for most players to be able to walk away with a victory. While at the same time having the better players play each other in order to determine the best overall player.
- F. A win is worth 1 point, a draw is worth 1/2 point, and a loss is worth 0 points.

- G. Although we expect everyone to play with proper etiquette, TCSAAL does not enforce the “touch rule.”
- H. Scenarios for a Draw:
1. Stalemate - if the player in turn has no legal move but is not in check, this is a stalemate and the game is automatically a draw.
 2. Threefold repetition - if an identical position has just occurred three times with the same player to move, or will occur after the player in turn makes his move, the player on move may claim a draw (to the arbiter). In such a case, the draw is not automatic - a player must claim it if they want the draw. When the position occurs for the third time after the player's intended next move, they write the move on their scoresheet but do not make the move on the board and claim the draw. Article 9.2 states that a position is considered identical to another if the same player is on move, the same types of pieces of the same colors occupy the same squares, and the same moves are available to each player. In particular, each player has the same castling and *en passant* capturing rights. A player may lose their right to castle; and an *en passant* capture is available only at the first opportunity. If the claim is not made on the move in which the repetition occurs, the player forfeits the right to make the claim. Of course, the opportunity may present itself again.
 3. Impossibility of checkmate - if a position arises in which neither player could possibly give checkmate by a series of legal moves, the game is a draw. This is usually because there is insufficient material left, but it is possible in other positions too. Combinations with insufficient material to checkmate are:
 - a. king versus king
 - b. king and bishop versus king
 - c. king and knight versus king
 - d. king and bishop versus king and bishop with the bishops on the same color (any number of additional bishops of either color on the same color of square due to underpromotion do not affect the situation)
 4. Mutual agreement - a player may offer a draw to their opponent at any stage of a game, ostensibly with the understanding that an eventual draw by other means is the likely result. If the opponent accepts, the game is a draw.
- I. TCSAAL does not enforce the “50-move” rule

III. Awards

A. Team Competition

1. The team winner will be determined by cumulating the scores of the teams' top 4 finishers. If there is a tie, we will look at head-to-head between the tied teams. Whichever team won the most games head-to-head during the tournament will be crowned the winner. If the teams are tied in head-to-head games, then we will have the top players based on score from each team play a tie breaker game. If a team has two students tied as the top finisher, then the coach will choose who will represent their school or by a coin flip to be determined by the coach.
2. Tie-Breaker games will have a maximum of 14 minutes (Varsity clocks will be set to 7 minutes each). In a Varsity tie-breaker, a winner is crowned by winning or by their opponent running out of time. Exception: the game is ruled a draw if the player still with time on their clock has no possibility of checkmate due to not having sufficient pieces (see Impossibility of checkmate in section 8 above). In sub-Varsity, if a winner has not been determined at the end of their time then the winner will be determined via the points system (determined by pieces left on the board). If sub-Varsity games are still tied, we will add 4 minutes and re-score as necessary until a winner is determined by victory or points system. If Varsity games end in a draw we will play another game with the next highest ranked players.

B. Awards will be issued as follows for the top finishers:

1. Regional competitions:
 - a. 4th-6th Grade – top 3 teams will receive trophies for the school and individuals from the teams will receive certificates of recognition. We will also award certificates to the top individuals based on overall points from the tournament in 3 stages: Primary Honors, Secondary Honors, & Tertiary Honors.
 - b. 6th-8th Grade - top 3 teams will receive trophies for the school and individuals from the teams will receive certificates of recognition. These teams will also advance to the State Tournament. The fourth place team will receive team certificates and advance to the state tournament (no trophy for the school). We will also award certificates to the top individuals based on overall points from the tournament in 3 stages: Primary Honors, Secondary Honors, & Tertiary Honors.
 - c. Varsity - top 3 teams will receive trophies for the school and individuals from the teams will receive certificates of recognition. These teams will also advance to the State Tournament. The fourth place team will receive team certificates and advance to the state tournament (no trophy for the school). We will also award certificates to the top individuals based on overall points from the tournament in 3 stages: Primary Honors, Secondary Honors, & Tertiary Honors.
2. State Tournament:
 - a. 6th-8th Grade - top 3 teams will receive trophies for the school and individuals from the teams will receive medals. We will also award certificates to the top individuals based on overall points from the tournament in 3 stages: Primary Honors, Secondary Honors, & Tertiary Honors.
 - b. Varsity - top 3 teams will receive trophies for the school and individuals from the teams will receive medals. We will also award certificates to the top individuals based on overall points from the tournament in 3 stages: Primary Honors, Secondary Honors, & Tertiary Honors.

IV. Important Reminders for Players

- A. You have the right to appeal a decision of a floor Tournament Director (TD). If you wish to see the chief TD, tell the floor TD right away. DO NOT wait until after the game is over to make this complaint.
- B. TCSAAL suggests that all students take the time and effort to notate games (it is suggested that you write the moves of both players). The reason for this is so that students do not risk losing the ability to make many claims (i.e. draw by three-fold repetition).
- C. When finished with the game, raise your hand to signal for a tournament staffer before you reset the board. They will check the board before you reset it to confirm the finish. Then shake hands, reset the chessboard, and leave the playing area.
- D. The playing area must remain quiet while games are in progress.
- E. Please clean your area before leaving.
- F. Parents and coaches are spectators. Your help is very important to us, but you may not interfere with the chess games or help.
- G. Absolutely no running or horseplay will be tolerated! You may be asked to leave.
- H. Coaches are responsible for controlling their students and spectators.

V. Player & Coach Expectations:

- A. All players must be able to do the following:
 1. Properly move all of the chess pieces.
 2. Understand pawn promotion.
 3. Understand rules for “advanced” moves: (i.e. castling and *en passant* capture). Note: *en passant* is tough to teach, but please present it to your players so all players are exposed to this move prior to the tournament.

4. Understand Check and the ways to get out of Check (move, block, capture). Can you move out of the way of the check? Can you take the piece putting you in check? Can you block a check by putting a piece in the way?
5. Understand Checkmate.

VI. Players should also:

- A. Understand the relative value of the pieces (Q=9, R=5, B=3, Kn=3, P=1) The point system is used to determine tie-breakers when time is up. We add up the pieces left on the board.
- B. Know how to achieve and stop “Scholar’s Mate” (the “four-move mate”).
- C. Be able to solve “mate-in-one” chess puzzles.
- D. Have a sense of how to checkmate with only a King and Queen.
- E. Varsity players should be familiar with using chess clocks.

VII. Players should also (but not required):

- A. Have a basic understanding of chess strategy including opening play.
- B. Be able to solve “mate-in-two” chess puzzles.
- C. Be able to mate with only a King and Queen.
- D. Have a sense of how to mate with a King and Rook or a King and 2 Bishops.
- E. Know how to record the moves of a chess game.

VIII. Accessibility:

TCSAAL is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Directors should notify TCSAAL of any accessibility needs at least 1 week prior to the competition.