



Texas Charter School Academic & Athletic League 2026-2027 Spelling Bee Competition Rules & Regulations

- **Age Grouping:**
 - The 2026-2027 Spelling Bee competitions will be available for 6th-8th Grade competition level only. Participants in lower age levels (4th Grade, 5th Grade, etc) are allowed to participate in the Spelling Bee competitions as well but they would be participating with the 6th-8th Grade participants. Participants will compete in a regional competition and top participants will advance to the state competition.
- **State Qualifiers:**
 - The top 10 finishers from each regional qualifier will advance to State. Individuals must participate in a qualifier to be eligible for State.
- **Fees:**
 - The entrance cost per school is \$30 per participant. There is no minimum number of participants and no maximum number of participants allowed for the competitions.
- **Rules:**

1. Eligibility: A speller participating in the TCSAAL Spelling Bee must be a student of a TCSAAL member school, and must participate in the 6th-8th Grade age grouping. The top 10 finishers from their respective Regional competitions will advance to the State competition. Participants below 6th-8th Grade may also participate in the bee, but there will NOT be a separate grouping (they will participate with the 6th-8th Grade grouping).

2. Format: The spelling bee is conducted in rounds. Each speller remaining in the spelling bee at the start of a round orally spells one word in each round. A speller may only provide a written response under the conditions of rules regarding "Special Needs" detailed below.

3. Procedure: Each round of the spelling bee will be conducted in the same manner in regards to procedure for each speller. First, the word is read via an audio clip by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. From then on, the pronouncer will repeat the word until they feel as though the speller has gained a full understanding of the pronunciation of the word, unless the speller requests to hear the audio clip again. The speller then will be able to make requests of the pronouncer, such as a definition, sentence, part of speech, language(s) of origin, and alternate pronunciation(s). Once the speller is prepared to spell the word, the speller must say the word, followed by the spelling of the word, finishing by repeating the word once again, to signify that their spelling of the word is complete. This will conclude the procedure that will be used for each speller. Spellers with special needs (as outlined below in *Sec. 5*) will have an amended procedure during the spelling bee that will be decided upon by the spelling bee judge and/or pronouncer.

4. Word List: All words on TCSAAL word lists are entries in Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary found at www.merriam-webster.com or Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Eleventh Edition), and any words from either of these dictionaries are eligible to be used. Word lists will primarily be made up from word lists provided on the TCSAAL website, www.texascharter.sportz.com, in the Spelling Bee section. The TCSAAL word list that will be available to the schools will be based on a four-tiered system, with the words increasing in difficulty as the tiers progress from the 1st Tier through the 4th Tier. Words will be chosen during the bee from each tier. As the bee progresses, the judge will progress to the next tier at their own discretion. Please keep in mind, however, that any word found at www.merriam-webster.com and/or

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Eleventh Edition) may be chosen at any time during the course of the spelling bee.

5. Special Needs: Spelling bee officials will strive to provide accommodation for spellers who have physical challenges. All requests for spelling bee officials to accommodate special needs involving sight, hearing, speech, or and/or movement should be directed to spelling bee officials well in advance of the spelling bee date. The judges have discretionary power to amend oral and/or written spelling requirements on a case-by-case basis for spellers with diagnosed medical conditions involving sight, hearing, speech, and/or movement.

6. Pronouncer/Judges' Role: The judge upholds the rules and determines whether or not words are spelled correctly. They also render final decisions on appeals in accordance with the rules detailed in the "Appeals" section below. They are in complete control of the competition, and their decision is final on all questions.

7. Pronunciation of Words: The judge or pronouncer will cue and play the pronunciation audio clips provided by Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary. The judge can interject if they determine that the quality of the audio clip or public address system compromises the integrity of the pronunciation or if the pronunciation is inconsistent with the diacritical marks provided in the entry (see "Speller's Requests" below for rules dealing with alternate pronunciations). For study purposes, if the online pronunciation has multiple pronunciations then TCSAAL will utilize the first pronunciation of the word.

8. Speller's Requests: The judge/pronouncer responds to the speller's requests for a definition, sentence, part of speech, language(s) of origin, and alternate pronunciation(s). When presented with requests for a definition, the judge will provide the first offered definition within the entry provided by Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary from words being taken from our word list. In the event that the judge pulls words not on our word list out of the dictionary during the competition then they will use the first definition provided in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Eleventh Edition). When presented with requests for alternate pronunciations, the judge checks for alternate pronunciations in Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary or in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Eleventh Edition), and will strive to pronounce any offered alternative in accordance with the diacritical marks provided. The judge does not entertain root word questions or requests for alternate definitions.

9. The use of "practice writing" or "air typing" is allowed for spellers during the course of the competition. This involves writing on the back of the speller's hand with their fingers.

10. Homophones: If a word has one or more homophones, the pronouncer indicates which word is to be spelled by defining the word.

11. Judge's Sense of Helpfulness: The judge may offer word information without the speller having requested the information if the judge senses that the information is helpful and the information is presented in the entry for the word in Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary or in the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Eleventh Edition).

12. Interaction with the Speller: Because seeing the speller's lip movements may be critical in detecting misunderstandings or misspellings, the judges encourage spellers to face them when pronouncing and spelling the word. If while spelling the word, the speller pauses and restarts the spelling, the judge will ask that the speller re-spell the word again to check for spelling accuracy. In the process of re-spelling the word, however, the speller may not change their original spelling.

13. Misunderstandings: The judge/pronouncer participate in the exchange of information between the speller and pronouncer if they feel that clarification is needed. Also, the judges listen carefully to the speller's pronunciation of the word; and, if they sense that the speller has misunderstood the word, the judges work with the speller until they are satisfied that reasonable attempts have been made to assist the speller in understanding the word. While the judge/pronouncer is responsible for attempting to detect a speller's misunderstanding, it is sometimes impossible to detect a misunderstanding until a spelling error has been made. In these cases, the judge/pronouncer is not responsible for the speller's misunderstanding.

14. Disqualifications for Reasons Other than Clear Misspelling: The judge will disqualify a speller (1) who refuses a request to start spelling; (2) who does not approach the microphone when it is time to receive the word; (3) who does not comply with the eligibility requirements; (4) who engages in unsportsmanlike conduct; (5) who, in the process of retracing a spelling, alters the letters or sequence of letters from those first uttered; or (6) who, in the process of spelling, utters unintelligible or nonsense sounds. A speller cannot be disqualified as a result of an appeal; a speller can only be reinstated into the bee.

15. Speller Activities that do not Merit Disqualification: The judges may not disqualify a speller (1) for failing to pronounce the word either before or after spelling it, (2) for asking a question, or (3) for noting or failing to note the capitalization of a word.

16. Speller's Role: The speller makes an effort to face the judge/pronouncer and pronounce the word for the judge before spelling it and after spelling it. The speller while facing the judge makes an effort to utter each letter distinctly and with sufficient volume to be understood by the judge. The speller may ask the judge to cue and play the audio clip again, define it, use it in a sentence, provide the part of speech, provide the language(s) of origin, and/or provide an alternate pronunciation or pronunciations.

17. Misunderstandings: The speller is responsible for any misunderstanding of the word unless (1) the judge never provided a correct pronunciation; (2) the judge provided incorrect information regarding the definition, part of speech, or language of origin; or (3) the speller correctly spelled a homophone of the word and the judge failed to either offer a definition or distinguish the homonyms.

18. Correction of a Misspelling: The pronouncer and judges will not ask the speller to correct another speller's misspelling, even in end-of-bee circumstances.

19. Misspelling: Upon incorrectly spelling a word, the speller immediately drops out of the competition, except as provided in the "End-of-Bee Procedure" detailed below.

20. End-of-bee procedure:

A. If all spellers in a round misspell: If none of the spellers remaining in the spelling bee at the start of a round spells a word correctly during that round, all from that round remain in the competition and a new round begins.

B. Ties: All spellers eliminated in the same round are tied for the same place. After the champion has been determined, spelling bee officials may opt to conduct tiebreakers (of their own design) if tiebreakers are necessary for the awarding of prizes or the determination of qualifying spellers for the next level of competition. At regionals, we will need to find the top 10 spellers. At state, we will need to find the top 3 spellers.

C. If only one speller in a round spells correctly: If only one speller spells correctly in a round, a new one-word round begins and the speller is given an opportunity to spell the next word on the list (anticipated championship word). If the speller succeeds in correctly spelling the anticipated championship word in this one-word round, the speller is declared the champion.

○ Example: In Round 12 there are four spellers. Spellers 1 and 2 misspell. Speller 3 spells correctly. Speller 4 misspells. So, Speller 3 is the only speller in the round to spell correctly. Speller 3 begins Round 13—a one-word round—and is offered the anticipated championship word. Speller 3 correctly spells the anticipated championship word and is declared champion.

○ Example: Two spellers spell in Round 10. Speller 1 misspells. Speller 2 spells correctly. Speller 2 begins Round 11—a one-word round—and is offered the anticipated championship word. Speller 2 correctly spells the anticipated championship word and is declared champion.

○ Example: Two spellers spell in Round 16. Speller 1 spells correctly. Speller 2 misspells. Speller 1 begins Round 17—a one-word round—and is offered the anticipated championship word. Speller 1 correctly spells the anticipated championship word and is declared champion.

D. VERY IMPORTANT: If a speller misspells the anticipated championship word in a one-word round: A new round begins with ALL the spellers who spelled (correctly and incorrectly) in the previous round. These spellers spell in their original order.

- Example: In Round 8 there are three spellers. Speller 12 spells correctly and Spellers 23 and 37 misspell. Round 9—a one-word round—begins, and Speller 12 is offered the anticipated championship word. Speller 12 misspells the anticipated championship word. Round 10 begins and includes Spellers 12, 23, and 37. The rules prescribe that spellers 12, 23, and 37 spell in their original order; so Speller 12 gets the next word on the list even though Speller 12 misspelled the previous word on the list. Round 10 is not complete until all three spellers have spelled.

- Tip: Spelling bee officials may find it helpful to designate a record keeper or judge to track the progress of spellers throughout the rounds. The record keeper's information will be helpful in preventing end-of-bee confusion.

21. Appeals: Only the designated coach may appeal to the judges for the speller's reinstatement provided that the appeal is in compliance with the appeal protocol. The judge renders a final decision on the appeal in accordance with the reinstatement protocol.

A. Appeal Protocol

- A written appeal must be hand delivered to the judge. The deadline for delivering an appeal is before the speller affected would have received their next word had they stayed in the spelling bee; however, to minimize disruptions to the spelling bee, every effort should be made to deliver an appeal by the end of the round in which the speller was eliminated. When five or fewer spellers remain, the written appeal requirement is suspended, and an oral appeal must be made directly to the judge before the speller would have received their next word had they stayed in the spelling bee. A written appeal must provide the speller's name, the word in question, and the reason the speller should be reinstated.

- While the competition is in session, individuals who have filed appeals may not directly approach the judges unless explicit permission to approach the judges has been given. The judges will contact the speller if they decide to reinstate the speller. To minimize disruption to the pace of the spelling bee and the concentration of the spellers, the judges are under no obligation to stop the spelling bee in order to discuss with the speller's designated coach a denied appeal. The judges' decisions are final and are subject neither to review nor to reversal by TCSAAL Administration.

- Appeals in reference to a speller not being eliminated will not be accepted. Appeals are only allowed if it results in a speller being reinstated in the bee.

B. Reinstatement Protocol

- Mispronunciation: An appeal claiming that a speller's elimination from the spelling bee was due to pronunciation error should be denied unless the judge determines there was never a correct pronunciation offered.

- Alternate pronunciations: An appeal claiming that the judge did not offer alternate pronunciations should be denied unless it is determined that the speller requested alternate pronunciations and the judge did not accommodate the speller's request for alternate pronunciations and it appears that the speller's spelling almost matches the correct spelling.

- Speller's misunderstanding: An appeal claiming that the speller's elimination from the spelling bee was due to the speller's not understanding the word [its pronunciation(s) and/or other information about the word] should be denied. It is the speller's responsibility to understand the word.

- Speller offered correct spelling, as indicated in a dictionary other than Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary or Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Eleventh Edition): An appeal claiming that the speller spelled the word correctly according to a dictionary other than Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary or Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Eleventh Edition), ... should be denied.

- Homophone: An appeal claiming that the speller's elimination was unfair because the speller's word is a homophone should be denied unless the judge failed to define the word and the speller correctly spelled a homophone of the word.

- Incorrect or unsolicited information: An appeal claiming that the speller's elimination was unfair because the judge offered incorrect or unsolicited information about the word should be denied unless it is determined that the judge indeed gave factually incorrect information and it

appears that the speller's spelling would have been correct if not for the incorrect or unsolicited information provided.

- Bee officials failed to correct a misunderstanding: An appeal claiming that the speller misspelled because the judges and/or pronouncer failed to correct the speller's mispronunciation of the word should be denied. It is sometimes impossible to detect a speller's mispronunciation or misunderstanding, and ultimately it is the responsibility of the speller to understand and correctly pronounce the word.

C. Disqualification request: An appeal seeking to dislodge another speller from the spelling bee should be denied.

- **Awards:**

- The top 10 participants from each Regional competition will receive a certificate of recognition and advance to the State competition.
- The top 3 participants at the State competition will receive medals for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Place.
- School awards will also be given to the top 3 participants at the State competition in the form of plaques.

- Rules amended from the Scripps National Spelling Bee rules for local spelling bees.
- Websites to visit for study help:
 - www.merriam-webster.com to review Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary
 - www.texascharter.org to view primary spelling words
 - www.spellingbee.com the Scripps National Spelling Bee site offers many study guides