



## Education and Leadership for a Lifetime

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2100 Freeway Boulevard, Brooklyn Center, Minnesota 55430-1735 | (763) 560-2262, FAX (763) 569-0499 | [www.mshsl.org](http://www.mshsl.org)

Summer 2026

Dear Head of School and Board Members,

The League is excited to invite you to continue your membership in the Minnesota State High School League or join our League for the first time. The athletic programs and fine arts activities, along with the presenting partnerships we offer, are incredibly important to so many, and we look forward to partnering with your school in maintaining outstanding opportunities for students. Please read on to learn more about what it means to approve your Resolution for Membership.

This past year, the League made one of the most monumental changes in its history in expanding programming to all 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and programs. Throughout the year, our Member Schools did great work in implementing this new requirement and expanding the reach of our programming. In confirming your membership, your school leadership commits to full implementation and compliance with all bylaws, policies and rules. You also commit to the primary principle that all activities are to be fully education-based. This means that the purpose of the activities is to educate and develop students above all else and to have all who participate in the programs be full-time students. As a result, your students, coaches, directors and community members enjoy the opportunity to participate with over 600 other Member Schools in as many as 51 different programs.

In preparation for approval and completion of your Resolution for Membership, please take a few minutes to review the League's founding purposes, mission and beliefs, as these are the glue that holds all Member Schools together. Please see the attached document that has been a standard in the League for many years. These important pillars are more than just words on a page; they drive the actions of all members of the League and provide the foundation for the decisions and the leadership choices the League makes every year.

The Minnesota State High School League is focused on support and leadership for our Member Schools. Beyond our state tournaments and fine arts festivals and competitions, this past year the League provided education to over 25,000 coaches and fine arts directors and certified eligibility for over 8,000 officials and fine arts judges. At the same time, the League continues to provide leadership in establishing new and updated bylaws, policies and rules with the support of its membership. Together, our membership remains strong and is a supportive network to all Member Schools. The appetite in our communities for education-based activities continues to be incredible and reinforces the fact that the ultimate goal of providing opportunities for as many students as possible is the right path.

This past year has been filled with incredible excitement in all League programs. The spotlight on Debate as it celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> Annual Debate State Tournament highlights the lengthy traditions that are part of the League. We also expanded the wrestling tournament by an additional half day to grow the number of girls participants and provide full wrestlebacks for our qualifiers. Highlighting 50 years of girls basketball is another marker in the growing traditions of many of our girls sports. With a robust and equitable offering of programs, girls in our schools have more choices than they ever have.

As we prepare for the coming year, it's important to know that the League has a strong foundational financial base and yet, it should be no surprise to our schools that the rising costs in many areas create additional challenges in meeting budgets. The League aggressively negotiates with our excellent venue partners to have access to great facilities at the most affordable price. The cost of insurance is also growing significantly and given that the League provides catastrophic accident, postseason medical and concussion insurance to all participants, this is also significant in our budget.

Through the work of an excellent financial committee, the League established a clear model for identifying the membership support required of our Member Schools. Within that plan, the League credits membership dues when revenues exceed expenses. Through this plan the League has been able to reduce membership dues, each of the last four years. With attendance at our state tournaments being slightly less than the recent record-setting numbers, the increasing cost of venues, insurance and operations are having an impact. While we again expect a membership credit, it is projected to be less than last few years' amount. At the same time, we see the majority of our administrative regions providing financial support back to schools at year end, which is also helpful to Member Schools.

The League recognizes the changing landscape in education, as the number of educational models for students across the state continues to grow. We actively study and establish governance for these education approaches, regardless of the model. Recent work in this space indicates that a change is scheduled for the 2027-2028 school year with enrolled online students in public districts being eligible in their district of enrollment.

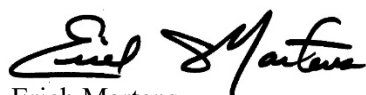
The leadership that the League provides also extends to our students as we look forward to our fifth year of statewide leadership and character events titled "Together We Make a Difference." Thanks to the committed partnership of our state associations; MSBA, MASA, MASSP, MNIAAAA, and MSHSCA we have provided behavioral expectations for students and schools and energized student and staff leaders in making these a reality in our events. These highly engaging, student-energized conferences are designed to bring students together and establish safe, respectful and inclusive contests and events for all participants. In addition, we expect these current and future leaders to bring the concepts and approaches back to their school and community and improve the culture in their school, also expect that these current and future leaders will bring the concepts and approaches back to their school and community and improve the culture in their school, at their contests and within their programs.

We truly appreciate all of our Member Schools and recognize that, even as some schools are consolidating or encountering challenges, our membership now exceeds 600 Member Schools annually. This signals the strength of our League and the quality of the experiences that our students have. We greatly appreciate all those in your school who make these opportunities for your students a reality. We appreciate our longtime members and our newest members equally and welcome all to the Minnesota State High School League, a statewide community that shares the same beliefs, responsibilities and opportunities and also moves us forward.

As you prepare to declare your commitment to membership and provide access to over 50 available fine arts and sports through the Minnesota State High School League, we ask each Member School and board to more clearly understand the depth of the League and recognize your role in leading within your school, your community, your conference and your section as we prepare for an outstanding 2026–2027 school year. Should you have any questions related to participation in the Minnesota State High School League, please reach out to our League Office or to me personally and we will do our best to serve our members. Thank you for all you have done to make the 2025-2026 school year a great one and the League is looking forward to beginning our new school year with the first day of practice on August 17.

Have an outstanding year!

Sincerely,



Erich Martens  
Executive Director



## **FOUNDING PURPOSES**

The Minnesota State High School League is organized for the following educational purposes:

1. To provide, promote, extend, manage and administer a program of activities for youth of the schools of the state on subsection, section and state levels in the fields of athletics, speech, music and dramatics on a competitive basis, as well as such other curricular and extracurricular activities as may from time to time be sponsored by the schools of Minnesota.
2. To establish uniform and equitable rules for youth in inter-school activities.
3. To elevate standards of sportsmanship and to encourage the growth of responsible citizenship among the students, member schools and their personnel.
4. To protect youth, member schools and their personnel from exploitation by special interest groups.
5. To provide mutual benefit and relief plans for the assistance of school students injured in athletic events or supervised school activities in meeting medical and hospital expenses incurred by reason of such injuries.
6. To serve the best interests of member schools and their students by providing a medium of cooperation and coordination in educational fields of endeavor and a series of related activities on a state-wide basis, which they individually could not achieve or accomplish for their students and which aid and assist the schools in maintaining a constantly improved program.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Minnesota State High School League provides educational opportunities for students through interscholastic athletic and fine arts programs and provides leadership and support for member schools.

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## **BELIEFS**

**We believe that...**

- Participation in school activity programs is a privilege and not a right.
- Sportsmanship needs to have a constant presence in all school-based activity programs.
- Students should have an equal opportunity to participate in all activities offered by their school.
- Ethical behavior, dignity and respect are non-negotiable.
- Student participants who choose to be chemically free must be supported.
- Collaborative relationships with parents enhance a school's opportunity to positively impact student success.
- Academic priorities must come before participation in athletic or fine arts activities.
- Positive role models and an active involvement in a student's life by parents and others are critical to student success.
- High school activity programs are designed for student participants, and adults must serve in a supportive role.
- The success of the team is more important than individual honors.
- Compliance with school, community and League rules is essential for all activity participants.
- Participation in school-sponsored activities must be inclusive, not exclusive.
- Ethical behavior, fairness, and embracing diversity best serve students and school communities.