



 **NASSP**<sup>™</sup>  
National Association  
of Secondary School Principals

# NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY

## HANDBOOK



NHS is a program of NASSP.

# NHS Handbook

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Name corrections or changes of school address information should be emailed to [nhs@nationalhonorsociety.org](mailto:nhs@nationalhonorsociety.org). We rely on this support from chapters to see that the national chapter database remains accurate.

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# Chapter 1: Governance

The National Honor Society is a program of NASSP, the leading organization of and national voice for middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and all school leaders from across the United States and more than 80 countries around the world. The association, which is located in Reston, VA, provides research-based professional development and resources and networking and advocacy opportunities to build the capacity of middle level and high school leaders to continually improve student performance.

Reflecting its long-standing commitment to student leadership development, NASSP administers the National Honor Society (NHS), National Junior Honor Society (NJHS), National Elementary Honor Society (NEHS), and National Student Council (NSC). The NASSP Board of Directors is responsible for the operational control of NHS at the national level.

Three resources govern the operation of chapters, members, and their activities: The NHS National Constitution, this *NHS Handbook*, and local chapter bylaws.

## NHS CONSTITUTION

All chapters must adopt and follow the NHS National Constitution. This obligation is outlined in the chartering agreement signed by the founding principal of every chapter, and assumed by subsequent principals who maintain the chapter's affiliation with the national office. The constitution of the National Honor Society is the primary governing document for all NHS chapters. It has been approved by and can be amended only by recommendation of the national office staff and a vote of the NASSP Board of Directors.

All policies and procedures for NHS chapters are based on the provisions of the NHS National Constitution and this handbook. The following version of the NHS Constitution was approved for all chapters on July 8, 2016, by the NASSP Board of Directors.

## NHS National Constitution

### ARTICLE I: NAME AND PURPOSE

**Section 1.** The name of this organization shall be the National Honor Society (NHS).

**Section 2.** The purpose of this organization shall be to create enthusiasm for scholarship, to stimulate a desire to render service, to promote leadership, and to develop character in the students of secondary schools.

**Section 3.** NHS is a program of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), 1904 Association Dr., Reston, VA 20191-1537.

### ARTICLE II: THE NATIONAL OFFICE

**Section 1.** The control of this organization shall be vested in the NASSP Board of Directors.

**Section 2.** The daily administration of the National Honor Societies, and the interpretation and application of Honor Society policies, shall be the responsibility of NASSP staff.

**Section 3.** The policies found in this constitution and in the *NHS Handbook* are the national governing documents to which all chapters must adhere.

### ARTICLE III: STATE ASSOCIATIONS

**Section 1.** Local chapters may choose to organize state associations.

**Section 2.** Any state association of National Honor Society chapters shall conform to this constitution and shall work with NASSP in furthering the purposes of this organization.

**Section 3.** All state associations shall be affiliated with the National Honor Society and shall be subject to the approval of the chapter membership.

**Section 4.** Bylaws of the state associations must be approved by NASSP and must be consistent with the NHS Constitution and national policies.

### ARTICLE IV: LOCAL CHAPTERS

**Section 1.** Any secondary U.S. public school is eligible to establish a new chapter.

**Section 2.** Nonpublic secondary schools accredited or approved by state departments of education or by accrediting agencies approved by NASSP are eligible to apply for a charter.

**Section 3.** Each school shall have its own chapter except in cases where a school's size precludes the formation of a full faculty council. In such cases, a chapter can be shared between member schools as long as other constitutional requirements can be met.

**Section 4.** Each school with a chapter shall pay an annual affiliation fee approved by the NASSP Board of Directors.

**Section 5.** The annual individual member dues paid to a chapter or state affiliate, if any, shall not exceed \$20 inclusively. The exact amount shall be determined by the executive committee of the chapter and shall be subject to the approval of the chapter membership.

**Section 6.** Duly chartered local chapters shall conform to this constitution as set forth by the NASSP Board of Directors. Failure to do so may result in the revocation of the charter by NASSP.

## **ARTICLE V: THE PRINCIPAL**

**Section 1.** The principal shall reserve the right to approve all activities and decisions of the chapter.

**Section 2.** The principal shall annually appoint a member of the faculty as chapter adviser, who may serve consecutive terms. Co-advisers may be appointed where necessary.

**Section 3.** The principal shall annually appoint a faculty council composed of five members of the school's faculty who may serve consecutive terms.

**Section 4.** The principal shall receive appeals in cases of nonselection of candidates, and the disciplining or dismissal of members.

## **ARTICLE VI: THE CHAPTER ADVISER**

**Section 1.** The chapter adviser shall be a member of the faculty, appointed annually by the principal, and may serve consecutive terms.

**Section 2.** The chapter adviser shall be responsible for the direct, day-to-day supervision of the chapter and act as liaison between faculty, administration, students, and community.

**Section 3.** The chapter adviser shall maintain files on membership, chapter history, activities, and financial transactions. The chapter adviser shall complete the annual survey and submit it to the national office.

**Section 4.** The chapter adviser shall regularly review each member for compliance with Honor Society standards and obligations.

**Section 5.** The chapter adviser shall help the chapter officers understand and carry out their duties.

**Section 6.** The chapter adviser shall be an ex officio, nonvoting, sixth member of the faculty council and shall facilitate all meetings of the council.

## **ARTICLE VII: THE FACULTY COUNCIL**

**Section 1.** The faculty council shall consist of five (5) voting faculty members appointed annually by the principal. The chapter adviser shall be an ex officio, nonvoting, sixth member of the faculty. No principal or assistant principal may be included on the faculty council.

**Section 2.** No principal or assistant principal shall be present during meetings of the faculty council where deliberations and/or voting for selection or dismissal are taking place. No principal or assistant principal may be present during due process hearings.

**Section 3.** The term of the faculty council shall be one year. Members may be appointed to consecutive terms.

**Section 4.** The faculty council shall meet at least once a year to review the procedures of the chapter, select members, and to consider nonselection, dismissal, other disciplinary actions, and warning cases.

**Section 5.** The faculty council will develop and revise, when necessary, all chapter procedures for selection, discipline, and dismissal of members, all of which must remain in compliance with this constitution and NHS policies.

## **ARTICLE VIII: MEMBERSHIP**

**Section 1.** Membership in the local chapter is an honor bestowed upon a student. Selection for membership is by a faculty council and is based on outstanding scholarship, service, leadership, and character. Once selected, members have the responsibility to continue to demonstrate these qualities.

**Section 2.** Membership shall be known as active, honorary, and alumni. Active members shall become alumni members at graduation. Honorary and alumni members shall have no voice or vote in chapter affairs.

**Section 3.** The faculty council shall reserve the right to award honorary membership to students who warrant special consideration—including those who receive accommodations for a disability, or foreign exchange students—in recognition of achievement and/or outstanding service rendered to the school in keeping with the purposes of the National Honor Society. The faculty council might also award honorary membership to school officials, principals, teachers, NHS advisers, or other adults. Honorary membership grants recognition without the obligations and full privileges associated with active member status.

**Section 4.** Candidates become members when inducted at a special ceremony.

**Section 5.** Members who are seniors in good standing are eligible to apply and compete in the National Honor Society Scholarship program.

**Section 6.** An NHS member who transfers to another school and brings a letter from the principal or chapter adviser to the new school adviser shall be accepted automatically as a member in the new school's chapter. Transfer members must meet the new chapter's standards within one semester in order to retain membership.

**Section 7.** Members who resign or are dismissed are never again eligible for membership or its benefits.

## **ARTICLE IX: SELECTION OF MEMBERS**

**Section 1.** To be eligible for membership the candidate must be a member of those classes (sophomore, junior, senior) designated as eligible in the chapter bylaws. Freshmen (ninth graders) are not eligible. Candidates must have been in attendance at the school the equivalent of one semester.

**Section 2.** The national minimum standard for scholarship shall be a cumulative scholastic average of at least 85%, B, or 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale) or the equivalent standard of excellence. Candidates shall then be evaluated on the basis of service, leadership, and character.

**Section 3.** The selection of each member to the chapter shall be by a majority vote of the faculty council. Prior to notification of any candidates, the chapter adviser shall review with the principal the results of the faculty council's deliberations.

**Section 4.** A description of the selection procedure shall be published in an official school publication that is widely and regularly available in a timely fashion to all students and parents of the school. The selection procedure shall be determined by the faculty council and shall be consistent with the rules and regulations of NHS.

**Section 5.** NASSP shall not review the judgment of the faculty council regarding selection of individual members to local chapters.

## **ARTICLE X: DISCIPLINE AND DISMISSAL**

**Section 1.** The faculty council, in compliance with the rules and regulations of the National Honor Society, shall determine the procedure for dismissal. A written description of the dismissal procedure shall be available to interested parties.

**Section 2.** Members who fall below the standards that were the basis for their selection shall be promptly warned in writing by the chapter adviser and given a reasonable amount of time to correct the deficiency. In the case of flagrant violation of school rules or the law, a member does not have to be warned.

**Section 3.** The faculty council shall determine when an individual has exceeded a reasonable number of warnings.

**Section 4.** In all cases of pending dismissal, a member shall have a right to a hearing before the faculty council. (Note: This hearing is required and is considered "due process" for all members.)

**Section 5.** For purposes of dismissal, a majority vote of the faculty council is required.

**Section 6.** A member who has been dismissed may appeal the decision of the faculty council to the principal and thereafter under the same rules for disciplinary appeals in the school district.

**Section 7.** NASSP shall hear no appeals in dismissal cases.

## **ARTICLE XI: CHAPTER OFFICERS**

**Section 1.** The officers of the chapter, their duties, and the method of their election shall be determined by the members of the chapter, approved by the faculty council and the principal, and described in the chapter bylaws.

**Section 2.** New officers shall be installed at a special ceremony.

## **ARTICLE XII: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Section 1.** The executive committee shall consist of the officers of the chapter and the chapter adviser.

**Section 2.** The executive committee shall have general supervision of the affairs of the chapter between its business meetings, make recommendations to the chapter, and determine and perform such other duties as are specified in the chapter bylaws. All actions and recommendations of the executive committee shall be subject to the review of the chapter membership.

**Section 3.** The executive committee shall have the responsibility for ensuring that chapter activities and procedures follow school policy and regulations.

## **ARTICLE XIII: MEETINGS**

**Section 1.** Each chapter shall have regular meetings during the school year on days designated by the executive committee and in accordance with school policy and regulations.

**Section 2.** The regularity of the meetings (e.g., weekly, monthly, bimonthly) shall be designated in the chapter bylaws.

**Section 3.** The chapter president or other designated student leader may call special meetings approved by the executive committee.

**Section 4.** Chapters shall conduct meetings according to Robert's Rules of Order in all points not expressly provided for in this constitution or the chapter bylaws.

## **ARTICLE XIV: ACTIVITIES**

**Section 1.** Each chapter shall determine one or more service projects for each year.

**Section 2.** All members shall regularly participate in these projects.

**Section 3.** These projects shall have the following characteristics: fulfill a need within the school or community; have the support of the administration and the faculty; be appropriate and educationally defensible; be well-planned, organized, and executed.

**Section 4.** Each member shall have the responsibility for choosing and participating in an individual service project that reflects their particular talents and interests. This is in addition to the chapter projects to which all members contribute.

**Section 5.** Each chapter shall publicize its projects in a positive manner.

## **ARTICLE XV: OFFICIAL INSIGNIA**

**Section 1.** This organization shall have an official emblem. The emblem shall be uniform and its distribution and rules for its use shall be determined by the NASSP Board of Directors.

**Section 2.** Each active, honorary, or alumni member in good standing with the chapter shall be entitled to wear this emblem.

**Section 3.** Any member who resigns or is dismissed shall return the emblem to the chapter adviser.

**Section 4.** All insignia must be procured from the national office of the National Honor Society, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA, 20191-1537. All insignia are registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Office and may not be copied by anyone without written permission of the NHS national office. (See also Logo Usage Guidelines at [nationalhonorsociety.org/logo](http://nationalhonorsociety.org/logo).)

**Section 5.** The motto of the National Honor Society shall be *Noblesse Oblige*.

**Section 6.** The official colors of the National Honor Society shall be blue and gold.

**Section 7.** An alumni member may purchase a replacement for a lost emblem by verifying membership to the national office.

## **ARTICLE XVI: CHAPTER BYLAWS**

**Section 1.** Each chapter shall write bylaws to amplify sections of this constitution and the *NHS Handbook*, and to clarify operating procedures of the chapter. Bylaws do not need the approval of NASSP but must be consistent with this constitution and the policies of this *NHS Handbook*.

**Section 2.** The chapter bylaws shall contain information concerning the election and duties of officers, the schedule of meetings, member obligations, dues, and the like.

## **ARTICLE XVII: AMENDMENTS**

This constitution may be amended by the NASSP Board of Directors based on the recommendations of NASSP staff.

## Chapter Bylaws

All NHS chapters operate under the NHS National Constitution and in compliance with the policies of the *NHS Handbook*. In addition, local chapters must adopt bylaws to establish local procedures, as noted in Article XVI. Bylaws exist as a written set of rules for a group, defining the limits of authority for the organization and giving a sense of order and purpose.

Chapter bylaws outline the local chapter's policies, procedures, and membership obligations. Chapter bylaws should include information about the chapter's selection requirements, disciplinary procedures, officer elections, and officer duties (which ones are required, what their duties are, how they are to be elected or removed from office), service requirements, and dues requirements. Chapters may add other information and procedures pertinent to the chapter. Chapter bylaws should be written in simple and direct terms and should include only essential items.

The chapter leadership should regularly review the bylaws and may amend them to meet local needs. Every set of bylaws should include a description of the procedures for amending the articles. Though the local bylaws are not approved by the national office, they must be consistent with the NHS National Constitution, *NHS Handbook* and the policies derived from them. Upon request, the policy staff of the national office can assist chapters with the writing or review of bylaws.

There are times when an outdated set of bylaws is a hindrance to a chapter, so the bylaws may occasionally have to be revised or completely rewritten. After a draft of the proposed changes has been prepared, the members of the chapter should be informed and given copies so that they can discuss the issues before they come to a final vote. Proposed amendments or revisions usually require a two-thirds vote of the chapter for adoption. (Note: Sections dealing with revisions to the procedures for selection, discipline, and dismissal of members can be changed only by the faculty council, though input from the chapter members is allowed.)

Some good reasons for amending bylaws:

- Statements no longer suit the chapter or school situation.
- Bylaws are arranged so poorly that essential information is hard to find (this often occurs when an old document has been added to over a period of years).

- Bylaws contain elements that have caused long-standing disagreement.
- Bylaws violate individual rights or do not conform to local or state policies or laws.
- Bylaws prevent the chapter from adapting to change.
- Bylaws contain policies that violate NHS national policies.

Once the bylaws have been accepted by a vote of the chapter and approved by the faculty council and the administration, they become the official policies of the organization.

## Chapter Obligations

The NHS National Constitution defines several obligations for chapters and the school personnel tasked with managing the chapter. When principals apply for a charter, they are asked to sign a statement affirming their intention to comply with NHS policies. Article IV of the NHS Constitution states, "Duly chartered local chapters shall conform to this constitution and the policies of the *NHS handbook* as set forth by the NASSP Board of Directors. Failure to do so may result in the loss of the charter." Chapters are responsible for developing local policies and executing practices that are fair, consistent, and in compliance with NHS national policies.

To that end, the national office has a process to report suspected violations of NHS policies. This process can be found on the NHS website in the Adviser Resource Center. Chapter advisers and principals are encouraged to familiarize themselves with this process and the stipulations for which a formal complaint can be filed. While the national office does not hear appeals or select or dismiss members, the national staff is responsible for reviewing allegations of noncompliance with national policies.

Affiliated schools are granted permission to operate, promote and maintain a local chapter, using the name and official logo/emblem, until such time as a decision has been made to revoke the charter due to noncompliance.

Additional annual obligations of each Honor Society chapter:

### 1. Annual Affiliation Renewal

The chapter membership year runs from July 1–June 30. In order to maintain active affiliation with the national office, and the right to operate a chapter of NHS on campus, schools must renew annually with the national office.

A renewal notice (invoice) is mailed in the spring (usually in mid-March) to the school principal seeking renewal of the chapter's affiliation. Email reminders will also be sent. Annual renewal reminders will be featured in *Honor Society News*.

## 2. Annual Survey Submission

Each spring, chapter advisers are asked to complete an online survey by June 30. The responses gathered provide essential input to the national staff that guides the development of programs, policies, and products.

## 3. Stay Up to Date

To see that your chapter stays informed about developments in the Honor Societies and remains in compliance with Honor Society policies, advisers should:

- Review each edition of *Honor Society News*, emailed to all advisers, then share relevant content with chapter leaders and faculty council members.
- Annually review and evaluate your chapter activities, policies, and procedures to ensure full compliance with all national, state, and local guidelines. Include the principal in these sessions to incorporate any school system policies.
- Maintain strong communication links with all chapter members, officers, faculty council members, and other relevant parties.
- Monitor your members on a regular basis to see that they continue to meet your standards and all obligations of membership.

## Preserving the Logo

When the National Honor Society was founded in 1921, the National Council authorized and approved an official emblem. This emblem can be issued by a National Honor Society chapter only to duly elected active or honorary members.

The emblem of the National Honor Society was first described by E. J. Eaton, a member of the first National Council:

"The emblem of this society is the keystone and the flaming torch. The keystone bears at its base the letters CSLS, which stand for the four cardinal principles of the organization: scholarship, service, leadership, and character. As the keystone is placed by the builder to hold

the perfect arch in perpetual stability, so the structure of our education must be held firm and true to the purposes of life by the virtues represented in this symbol. To bear forward the searching light of truth, to lead that others may follow in light, to keep burning in our school a high ambition for the enduring values of life, and to serve—these purposes are symbolized in the torch."

The distribution of official National Honor Society emblems is controlled by NASSP. Advisers and principals are given the authority to purchase official insignia from the national office. Consequently, orders can be placed only by the principal or chapter adviser.

All affiliated NHS chapters and state associations should be using the latest version of the NHS emblem for commercial vendors to produce and sell items bearing the official insignia of the organization and on chapter documents and correspondence. Indications of this license are expected to be included in all promotions produced and distributed by these licensees. Advisers who question the authenticity of any promotion bearing the name or insignia of the Honor Society should report their concerns to the staff of the national office. Look for the ® or "TM" as an indicator of the official emblem.

The National Honor Society emblem cannot be duplicated without permission of NASSP. The names "National Honor Society" and "NHS" and the insignia design are similarly protected.

Digital versions of the logo are available in the Adviser Resource Center of [nationalhonorsociety.org](http://nationalhonorsociety.org) for use by active chapters. Permission is granted to members of duly affiliated NHS chapters to copy pages from this handbook relating to chapter activities for free distribution. Similarly, chapters can utilize the NHS name and logo for official publications and activities per the guidelines that follow.

## NHS TRADEMARK POLICY AND LOGO USAGE GUIDELINES

All local and state advisers are responsible for helping to protect the use of all NHS trademark items. NASSP, as parent organization and owner of the rights to all Honor Society names and logos, expresses its policy concerning the use of trademark materials as follows:

Local NHS chapters and state associations are permitted to use trademark items without obtaining approval from the national office (NASSP) on printed materials, promotional pieces, and displays that are not sold. Approval must be obtained in writing from NASSP for any item that will

be sold by local or state NHS chapters or that is produced by a commercial vendor. Commercial vendors are not permitted to use NHS trademarks on any goods offered for sale or otherwise unless they have been authorized by NASSP. A Logo Usage Request Form has been developed to assist local chapters in obtaining permission for sales or when using commercial vendors. **The form is available at [nationalhonorsociety.org/logo](http://nationalhonorsociety.org/logo).**

**On the Web:** For internet/website development, local chapters may utilize the NHS logo for a period of three years as long as the following conditions are met:

- The “TM” or ® (trademark) sign should appear next to the name “National Honor Society” or initials “NHS” when it first appears on the page.
- A footnote is added to the page where the “TM” or ® appears stating: “National Honor Society and NHS are duly registered trademarks of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). Unauthorized copying or use of said trademarks is strictly prohibited.”
- A link to the site or email attachment of the usage described in this handbook is sent to the national office by email to [nhs@nationalhonorsociety.org](mailto:nhs@nationalhonorsociety.org). Note “Logo Usage” in the subject line.

**Website Logo Usage:** Local chapters may establish links to the national NHS site found at [nationalhonorsociety.org](http://nationalhonorsociety.org). Please inform the national office if your chapter has its own home page/website.

**Local Use of the Official Emblems:** The purchase of products bearing the official emblem is not an obligation of membership for any student or chapter.

These products are often purchased through the school activity fund on the same or similar source as athletic letters and presented to new members at the induction ceremony. In a school where no financial provision is made, individual members may purchase the emblem with assistance from the chapter adviser.

Regardless of who pays for the emblem, the title to the emblem remains with the chapter until the member has graduated. Each member should have a clear understanding of this stipulation. Members who are dismissed for any reason must surrender the emblem to the chapter adviser. If the dismissed member refuses, that individual should be reported through normal school disciplinary channels. If the emblem was paid for by the member, the chapter should reimburse the student for the original cost of the emblem.

The emblem and other insignia should always be worn with dignity and pride. Individual student members may not design their own clothing or jewelry featuring official NHS insignia.

In some schools, the National Honor Society pin is worn on the graduation gown. Other schools recognize Honor Society members by having them wear the official stole over the academic gown. In many instances, NHS members are so designated in the printed program. If chapters indicate through their local bylaws or guidelines that all members have a right to wear the pin, stole, honor cords, etc., then this right cannot be removed without first dismissing the member per the due process outlined in Article X of the NHS National Constitution. If, on the other hand, chapters indicate that such insignia are privileges of membership and will only be allowed among members in good standing, the chapter may revoke such privileges in the event the member is not in good standing.

Pins and charms may be engraved with the member’s initials, but the engraving is not available through the national office. Alumni members who lose emblems should contact the principal of the school where induction took place. If the principal (or current chapter adviser) certifies in writing to the national office that the individual was inducted into membership in that chapter, an order can be submitted for a replacement item.

**Commercial Requests:** The national office cautions principals, chapter advisers, and members to be wary of commercial groups that request lists of National Honor Society members for any reason or offer products bearing the NHS name or emblem. Such groups often operate fraudulently. In addition, all official correspondence from NHS, including all invoices for affiliation renewal, will bear the official logo and the Reston, VA, return address. Chapters suspecting misuse of the name or logo or the questionable request for member names can report this information to the national office.

## **OFFICIAL COLORS, MOTTO, AND FLOWER**

The official colors of the National Honor Society are blue and gold. Advisers can contact the national office for official Pantone color designations. The Honor Society’s motto is *Noblesse Oblige*, a French phrase meaning “nobility obligates” or “nobility is an obligation.” In broader terms, it signifies that those of high rank or ability (or birth, in its original context) have the obligation to behave honorably, generously, and responsibly to others. The official flower of the NHS is the yellow rose.

## Chapter 2: Chapter Organization

This section is designed to provide chapter advisers with the essential information needed to get their chapter up and running—or, for the experienced adviser, a thorough review of the key elements for every chapter. Chapter advisers and principals are also encouraged to review the New Adviser Checklist in the Adviser Resource Center.

### Chapter Name

Chapters may choose a name other than their school's name to reflect local culture or honor someone in the school or community. To avoid the impression that the Honor Society is a social fraternity or sorority, Greek names and/or lettering are not allowed.

### DUES FOR MEMBERS

Chapters determine and specify in their bylaws the amount of annual local chapter dues, if any, for their members. Dues are not to exceed \$20 a year per member.

If a school imposes fees for activities programs, candidates and their parents must be informed of the distinction between official chapter dues and other fees imposed upon the chapter. No student should be denied membership because they cannot pay extra fees, and chapters should allow exemptions for those who cannot pay.

### Personnel

In managing any chapter there are three key positions: principal, chapter adviser, and the faculty council.

#### PRINCIPAL

- Has the right to approve all activities and decisions of the chapter (see Article V), including selection and dismissal of members, and must ensure that the chapter's policies and procedures comply with the policies found in the constitution and the handbook.
- Cannot serve as chapter adviser and is not a member of the voting faculty council.
- Cannot attend meetings of the council where deliberations or voting on selection or dismissal is taking place.
- Receives appeals in cases of nonselection of candidates and the discipline or dismissal of members.

- Appoints and works closely with the chapter adviser and the faculty council to develop and follow fair selection and disciplinary procedures consistent with the constitution.
- The principal should be familiar with the handbook and stay abreast of the activities and procedures of the school's chapter.

#### CHAPTER ADVISER

- Must be a member of the faculty of the school where the chapter is located.
- Serves as a nonvoting, sixth member of the faculty council. (Note: Chapters may have more than one adviser. In all cases, the adviser is a nonvoting member of the council.)
- Neither principals nor assistant principals may serve as chapter advisers.
- Facilitates all meetings of the faculty council, ensures that the selection process and disciplinary procedures are conducted in compliance with NHS policies, and manages the daily activities of the chapter.
- Maintains chapter records, reviews members for compliance with chapter policies and obligations, and attends all meetings and functions of the chapter.
- Chapters may appoint co-advisers to run the chapter, particularly in cases involving very active chapters or those with large student memberships.

New advisers should contact the national office to confirm the correct adviser's name is on file to ensure accurate and timely correspondence.

#### FACULTY COUNCIL

- Consists of five voting faculty members at all times, appointed annually by the principal. If the principal delegates the power to make this appointment to the adviser, the list of faculty council members should be approved by the principal prior to the first meeting of the council.
- No principal or assistant principal may be on the faculty council, nor may they be present during the faculty council's deliberations or voting for selection or dismissal.

- Members of the faculty council should be from the professional staff on campus (generally those with professional education degrees or certification) and not from among the support staff on campus.
- Parents and students cannot serve as members of the faculty council.
- Responsible for drafting and approving chapter policies, selecting members, and the dismissal of members, where necessary.

The adviser and the faculty council cooperate in developing and periodically reviewing all chapter policies and procedures. It is important that all members of the faculty council recognize that they are working on behalf of the total faculty of the school. All judgments reached by members of the faculty council should, therefore, be both sound and professional. The faculty council members must be fully knowledgeable of the guidelines for their chapter and follow carefully all stated guidelines and procedures.

### **ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL REGARDING MEETINGS OF THE FACULTY COUNCIL**

The school principal has the right to approve all activities and decisions of the local chapter as stated in Article V of the constitution. Furthermore, the principal appoints the chapter adviser (Article V) and members of the faculty council (Article VII), although this latter responsibility can be delegated to an assistant principal or adviser as needed.

According to Article VII, section 1, “no principal or assistant principal may be included on the faculty council”—indicating that the administrator does not serve as a member of the group that selects, disciplines, or dismisses members. Article VII, section 2 further extends this prohibition to the principal attending selection meetings and dismissal hearings of the faculty council for the following reasons:

- Because the principal serves as the primary authority for appeals of nonselection or discipline (per Article V), a conflict of interest could arise if the principal was also part of the initial decision in these cases. By sitting in on the decision-making process, the objectivity of the principal is compromised in hearing an appeal, the result of which would necessitate passing the appeal on to the next higher level of the school system for consideration (supervisors, superintendents, school boards, etc.). This delay would be both time-consuming and frustrating for all involved.

- The principal has entrusted the adviser and members of the faculty council with authority over selection and discipline. To impose direct supervision of their function could be perceived as either micromanaging or a lack of trust in their professional capabilities, or as undue influence in the process. These perceptions could be damaging to the chapter in the school and community.

How can a principal provide direction and instruction to the faculty council if meeting attendance is prohibited? One way would be for the principal to provide guidance at an annual private meeting with the adviser and members of the faculty council. Such meetings could involve a review of the previous year’s events, and the professional standards of the local chapter could be reinforced in a manner that supports the integrity of the members of the faculty council. Principals may also meet with the council to inform them of administrative decisions regarding candidates and members for the council’s later consideration during their selection or dismissal deliberations.

### **ROLE OF THE CHAPTER ADVISER IN THE MEETINGS OF THE FACULTY COUNCIL**

Since the principal cannot serve as a member or even an observer of the faculty council’s deliberations, the chapter adviser takes on the responsibility of representing the administrative office of the school. In this role, the adviser serves in two capacities: the supervisor who ensures that proper procedures are being followed, and as the representative of the interests of the student(s).

As supervisor, the adviser first makes sure that both the national and local policies and procedures are being followed. In addition, a vital role of the faculty adviser is to see that the faculty council avoids gossip, hearsay, speculation, and rumors when considering the case of any individual student. To that end, the adviser serves as a facilitator of the discussions, keeping the council focused on objective data used to review each case.

The adviser also serves as a representative for students who are brought before the faculty council. Usually, the first step is to collect data or facts for consideration. A thorough accounting of all information being used is one of the primary responsibilities of the adviser. Whether for selection or disciplinary consideration, the faculty adviser serves to guarantee that each student receives a fair review.

Although the advisor is a member of the school's faculty, they must assume the role of the student's representative to guarantee that only relevant and valid information is brought under consideration by members of the faculty council.

## **SIZE OF THE FACULTY COUNCIL**

The number of faculty members serving as voting members of the faculty council is set at five. This number is a national requirement for all chapters, and there are no exceptions.

Local chapters can allow input from additional staff members when undertaking candidate review during the selection process. Local chapters may also seek input from the school counseling office. Administrators can also be asked to submit relevant commentary during the review of candidates, particularly information obtained through school disciplinary records.

However, when it comes time to vote, only the five appointed members of the faculty council should engage in the final deliberations and voting. The decisions reached are to be shared by the advisor with the principal and, thereafter, with the candidates under consideration.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE FACULTY COUNCIL**

The concern regarding the identity of members of the faculty council usually arises when parents of nonselected students wish to ask each of the council members why the student was not selected. Because the chapter adviser and principal are chiefly responsible for responding to parental (or other) concerns, the national office supports local chapter efforts to maintain the confidentiality of the faculty council during the selection process.

Some schools may wish to retain the names of the faculty council in complete secrecy in an effort to prevent candidates or parents from attempting to influence the outcome of the selection process.

However, complete secrecy or confidentiality of the faculty council cannot be maintained during the dismissal process. According to the constitution any member being considered for dismissal has a right to a hearing to allow a member to present their case to the council prior to its vote on dismissal.

The national office will support any principal or adviser who retains the confidentiality of the faculty council during the selection process. Efforts should be taken, however, to fully explain the selection process and respond to the inquiries in a professional manner.

## **ALTERNATES FOR FACULTY COUNCIL MEMBERS**

The constitution stipulates voting by five members of the faculty council. Because a member of the council may be sick, undertaking other professional responsibilities, or may have a conflict of interest when the council is called to meet, chapters should name one or more official alternate members to the faculty council. With approval by the principal, these individuals could receive the same orientation to chapter guidelines as the official five members but would be available for service in the event one of the five is not present. It is important to clarify the role of these individuals for the meeting in question, noting that after this meeting they will revert to alternate status. However, if any appeals emerge based on the decisions reached when the alternate was voting, then the alternate should be brought back in for any reconsideration of the case.

## **KEY CONTACTS FOR ADVISERS**

There are three essential contacts that each adviser should establish when forming or assuming responsibility for an Honor Society chapter on campus.

### **I. Principal**

- Responsible for payment of the annual affiliation renewal fee.
- Appoints the chapter adviser and the faculty council (five members).
- Consulted for general schedule considerations: When will the induction ceremony take place? Spring or fall or both?
- Sets priorities for your style of recognition: What type of recognition will the chapter provide to members both at induction and at graduation (e.g., pins, certificates, honor cords, medallions, stoles)?
- Coordinates funding for the chapter: How will chapter activities, including recognition, be financed? School budget allocation? Chapter dues (maximum allowed: \$20 per member per year)? Fundraising activities? Policies or limitations that exist on fundraising?

- Reviews the principal's authority regarding Honor Society activities per the guidelines found in the NHS National Constitution (Article V); the handbook; and all school, school district, or state guidelines or policies that affect the running of the Honor Society chapter.

## **II. Faculty Council**

- Is aware of all duties, including:
  - » Selection procedures for membership
  - » Discipline and dismissal of members
  - » Chapter bylaws development and approval
  - » Other duties/activities

## **III. Chapter Members and Officers: Governance, Activities, and Other Considerations**

- Who are your chapter officers and what are their duties as identified in the chapter bylaws?
- What are the member obligations and what types of fulfillment records are kept for those obligations?
- What is the committee structure for your chapter and their annual responsibilities?
- What are the chapter goals for the year (which also must be evaluated at some point)?
- When are the regular chapter meetings and what are the major chapter activities for the year; is there a master calendar?

## Chapter 3: Selection and Induction Policies

Selection to NHS is a privilege bestowed upon students by the faculty of the school, and not considered a right inherent to any student. Technically, students do not apply for membership. Instead, they await a request or invitation to provide information to be used by the faculty council to support their candidacy for membership. Membership is granted to those students selected by the faculty council in each school on the condition of their having met the standards for selection established at the local level and based on the provisions of the constitution and *NHS Handbook*.

NHS is more than an honor roll. Each member must demonstrate not only good grades, but also strength in each of the remaining three criteria. Membership is not an election nor is it automatically conveyed simply because a student has achieved a specified level of academic performance. The extent to which local chapters emphasize the other components of the selection process should be carefully considered and included in the local selection process guidelines.

**A description of the selection procedure must be published and available to parents, students, and faculty, as noted in Article IX.** Appropriate publications include the school website, student handbook, the school newspaper, parent newsletters, or other school publications that are widely and regularly available to students and parents. Many chapters also include this information at orientation programs for new students. Proper dissemination of information about the chapter will help prevent problems with students or parents who may wish to question the process.

At a minimum, this description needs to include the following:

- The time of year the selection process takes place
- The grade levels eligible for membership in the chapter
- The chapter's cumulative GPA requirement which establishes candidacy

### Membership Overview

Membership in the National Honor Society is both an honor and a responsibility. Students selected for membership are expected to continue to demonstrate the qualities of scholarship, service, leadership, and character that were the basis for their selection. Membership is divided into three categories: active, alumni, and honorary.

### ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP

A candidate for membership must first be selected by the faculty council and then inducted at a special ceremony to become an active member of the chapter. Active members have a voice and vote in chapter affairs, and they are expected to maintain the standards of the Honor Society by which they were selected. Membership obligations (e.g., dues, meeting attendance, chapter service participation) cannot be imposed until a student has been formally inducted into membership.

### ALUMNI MEMBERSHIP

Active members become alumni members upon graduation. Alumni members have no voice or vote in chapter activities. Similarly, because alumni members are no longer within the jurisdiction of the chapter's faculty council, they cannot be dismissed once graduated.

### HONORARY MEMBERSHIP

As identified in the constitution, honorary membership may be granted to certain individuals, such as students with special needs, foreign exchange students, or adults, who have extended outstanding service to the school or community in keeping with the purposes of the National Honor Society. Faculty councils are urged to use discretion in conferring honorary memberships. Other students at the school who fall outside of these two categories are not eligible for honorary membership.

The faculty council may also honor an outstanding student with special needs who is unable to fully meet the requirements for membership. Other students who attend the school are not eligible for honorary membership, with the exception of foreign exchange students who are unable to meet the requirements in full (particularly those of attendance), but who, in the opinion of the faculty council, deserve the recognition. Put simply, honorary membership grants recognition without the obligations and full privileges associated with active member status.

The usual membership card or certificate may be given to honorary members with the word "honorary" typed on it. Honorary members are permitted to wear the official insignia.

## TRANSFERRING AN ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP

As Article VIII of the constitution clearly indicates, a student's membership transfers automatically when a member moves from one school to the next. Differing standards and procedures among chapters can cause difficulty for students who transfer. Although the constitution states that transfer members must be automatically accepted into the NHS chapter of the new school, the transferee may be unable to meet the new chapter's standards within one semester. For example, if a junior transferred to a school that accepted only seniors into NHS, the junior could not meet the requirements of the new chapter within one semester. In such or similar cases, the transfer student may have their NHS membership declared temporarily inactive, until they are able to meet the new chapter's standards. In other cases where the cumulative GPA standard of the new school is higher than that of the old school (e.g., 3.5 at the new school, but 3.0 at the member's old school), then the transferee is granted membership and given a reasonable amount of time (e.g., a semester) to raise the GPA to the new standard. In all transfer cases, the local faculty council is charged with making a sound, professional judgment regarding the membership status of the individual. If an NHS member transfers to a school without an NHS chapter, their membership is inactive.

When transferring to a new school, it is the obligation of the student member to promptly notify the new school's chapter adviser of their membership and provide proof of their induction and current membership. Membership can be verified through a formal letter or email from the previous adviser or principal and can include official designation on the school transcript.

There is no deadline set by the national office for a transfer member to transfer their membership to the new chapter, but each chapter can set reasonable deadlines for this process and outline that process in their chapter bylaws.

To facilitate informing the new school's chapter adviser of the transfer, the former chapter adviser can provide the transferring member with a letter that confirms that the member was in good standing when leaving. A sample transfer letter is provided online in the Adviser Resource Center of [nationalhonorsociety.org](http://nationalhonorsociety.org).

## HOMESCHOOLED STUDENTS

As a rule, students who are homeschooled full time and not enrolled at a school where an NHS chapter is present are not eligible for consideration as members. However, homeschooled students who are enrolled part-time at a member school, based on existing local and state policies, may be eligible for consideration. Advisers should consult with their principal in all such cases. If selection of part-time homeschooled students takes place, it is important for chapter advisers to outline all chapter obligations to ensure continued active membership.

Any limitations on eligibility based on enrollment status (i.e., full-time vs part-time enrollment) need to be defined in the chapter bylaws and published selection procedure description.

## NONTRADITIONAL ENROLLMENT

Questions arise for NHS chapters regarding whether students enrolled in dual-enrollment or nontraditional programs are eligible for membership consideration, and if selected, what level of expectation exists for the fulfillment of chapter obligations. For all such programs, two essential questions exist: Where is the student enrolled and who has administrative authority over the student? In many cases, students and their parents sign off on a letter of agreement regarding their nontraditional status. Advisers should consult such agreements for answers to the questions of enrollment and authority.

If the student is technically enrolled in your school and your principal has administrative authority during their enrollment, that student may be eligible for membership and, if selected, can be counseled regarding all member obligations. Chapters are not expected to make exceptions for such students but may be expected per local or state policies, to develop reasonable accommodations, particularly if selected as members of the chapter.

The school that grants the high school diploma is another factor to consider. If the student is enrolled part time at your school but receives the diploma from the alternative education program, and the campus does not maintain a chapter, there is no formal obligation for your chapter to consider the student for membership.

If any nontraditional opportunities exist in your school system, such as remote learning, it is suggested that the chapter adviser and principal, and perhaps a representative of the school system's administrative staff, formulate policy statements for inclusion in the local student handbook regarding eligibility and authority where Honor Society candidacy and membership are concerned.

## **STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

Students who have received accommodations for their disability raise some unique questions where selection to NHS is concerned. For these cases, several relevant points should be considered. First and foremost: Any student who is judged by the faculty council to meet the selection criteria (scholarship, service, leadership, and character) for membership should be selected. Chapter advisers and principals may consult a candidate's IEP or 504 Plan to make reasonable accommodations for candidates where deadlines, completion of documents, and other applicable aspects of the selection process are concerned.

Should it be judged that a student does not meet all of the selection criteria, the faculty council may consider bestowing honorary membership upon a student with a documented disability. Put simply, honorary membership grants recognition to students with special needs without the obligations and full privileges associated with active member status.

## **NONDISCRIMINATION**

Included in the sample bylaws provided by the national office is a statement regarding nondiscrimination policies for chapters. Such policies are often incorporated into school system policies and guidelines, particularly in public school settings, and are suggested here for use by all chapters for inclusion in the selection process guidelines as well as operating bylaws for the chapter.

Our chapter of NHS maintains policies and practices that are designed to prevent discrimination against any qualified candidate or member on the basis of race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and disability. This policy of non-discrimination applies to all practices, including the chapter administration and the selection, discipline, and dismissal of members.

While the inclusion of such statements is advised, it is not required. Interested chapter advisers should first confer with the principal and/or school system representatives

regarding the inclusion of this language to be certain it conforms to existing local and state policies.

## **MEMBERSHIP ROSTERS**

In order to create a national record of the chapter's membership, NHS chapter rosters can be created on the NASSP website and updated by chapter advisers. NHS members create a student account on the website, which is verified by the NHS adviser. Once a student account is verified, the student is added to the online roster. Additional steps in the process are outlined on the NHS website.

A formal list of all chapter members is to be maintained by the chapter adviser. This list is updated following each round of selection and induction, as well as anytime a member is dismissed from the chapter.

## **Prerequisites and Criteria**

**Enrollment.** According to the constitution, only those students who have attended the school for the equivalent of one semester may be considered for membership. This period is necessary for students to establish themselves academically and involve themselves in various service and leadership activities, and for the faculty to get to know them and the quality of their character.

Some candidates may be ineligible for induction because of the semester ruling. Many students, including students of military parents, are required to move with their family when parents or guardians have been transferred to new locations. In those cases, the school principal or adviser should seek a recommendation from the previous school's staff (principal, adviser, counselor, etc.) pursuant to the candidate's selection. Based on the recommendation of the previous school's staff, the faculty council may waive the semester regulation.

A candidate's future enrollment plans are not a factor in their eligibility for consideration in selection. A member who enrolls at another school the next academic year may transfer membership to another chapter.

**Grade level.** Membership may be open to qualified sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The faculty council may decide to choose only one or a combination of these classes, according to local needs, conditions, or traditions.

Chapters should carefully consider the timing of their selection and induction and aim to select and induct new members within the same academic year, ideally within the same semester. This helps to ensure that candidates still

meet the criteria for membership when they are inducted. For example, if candidates are selected in the spring but not inducted until the start of the next academic year, there is a possibility that the student no longer meets the scholarship criteria and cannot be inducted. A student who transfers to a new school over the summer cannot transfer their membership if they haven't been inducted yet. For these reasons, chapters should plan the selection process and induction ceremony as close together as possible.

Schools with a 9–12 structure may not have a separate, ninth grade-only chapter of NHS on their high school campus. Related to this concern, schools with a K–12, 6–12, or other multi-level structure (i.e., those with at least two years of middle level students) can establish two chapters at their single school, one NJHS and one NHS.

**Common GPA standard.** Whatever grade levels are eligible in each school, academic requirements must be the same for all candidates in all grades. For example, you may not have a different GPA requirement for sophomores than you have for juniors and seniors. (The exception to this policy is when the chapter is phasing out a current cumulative GPA with a graduating class.)

**No quotas or percentages.** Similarly, there can be no specific quota or percentage of members per class or student body. All students who meet the criteria for selection should be inducted regardless of the size of the candidate pool or class rank.

**Freshman eligibility.** Freshmen/ninth graders are never eligible for consideration, selection, or induction into NHS at any time, even at the end of freshman year. All candidates must be, at a minimum, a member of those grades identified as eligible in Article IX of the NHS Constitution. However, when considering candidates for selection, it is appropriate to begin the cumulative GPA calculation with grades earned in freshman year, and the faculty council may consider activities undertaken during that year.

**Prescreening.** Can the chapter adviser prescreen academically eligible candidates to eliminate some from the pool of candidates? The answer to this question is “no.” The constitution grants authority only to the faculty council to eliminate any student who is an eligible candidate. That elimination—the nonselection vote—must be by majority vote of the council following their evaluation of a candidate's qualifications.

However, the adviser can check candidate submissions received before the deadline to ensure they are complete. The purpose is not to select members or remove candidates from consideration, but rather to check the forms for completeness and to see that the candidates have followed instructions.

Forms can be reviewed for the following:

- Filling in responses for all required components of the form
- Required signatures
- Completion of the assigned essay
- Essay is within the limits for length (e.g., 250 words)
- Form is completed neatly and legibly

If time allows, the adviser may return incomplete forms to candidates annotating which section(s) requires attention. This is not required, as it is the candidate's (and parent/guardian's) responsibility to ensure that all sections are complete and ready for review. Revised forms should be submitted by the published deadline. After resubmission, all documents are then reviewed by the faculty council to determine which candidates are to be selected for membership.

**Eliminating names.** Advisers and principals may not eliminate any candidate from consideration or make any selection decisions during the candidacy stage of the selection process. The constitution reserves the authority for selection only to the faculty council and ultimately to the principal following the reporting of the results of the faculty council's voting.

The existence of a disciplinary record cannot automatically disqualify any student from consideration. Care should be taken to confirm the nature of the offense, to determine whether the case is still under appeal, or whether there were any legitimate extenuating circumstances that should be brought into the discussion, usually with input from the administration. Established guilt for violation of school rules or the law can serve as reason for nonselection following careful review of the details by the faculty council. A majority vote is required for selection/nonselection.

For chapters that use a candidate form in the process, if a candidate chooses not to submit a form or meet the chapter's deadline, the faculty council may not be able to substantiate the candidate's leadership or service involvement. As such, they may vote not to select the candidate. The essential point to remember is that the constitution

assigns the authority for selecting members to the faculty council followed by the school principal's approval.

## **THE CRITERIA**

With all of the prerequisite conditions considered, it is now time to examine all candidates regarding the full set of criteria used for membership selection. The faculty council of the chapter selects students who demonstrate outstanding performance in the remaining three criteria: service, leadership, and character. Schools that select members solely on the basis of scholarship are violating the constitution and placing their charters in jeopardy.

## **SCHOLARSHIP**

Cumulative GPA. The scholarship requirement identified in the constitution is based on a student's cumulative GPA. The phrase "cumulative GPA" refers to the total academic performance as demonstrated by student's grades while in attendance at the school where the chapter is found. For example, in a high school containing grades 9 through 12, even when students are selected during their junior year, grades from the ninth grade on should be used to compute the cumulative scholastic average.

The minimum cumulative GPA allowable is 85%, B, 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale), or the equivalent standard of excellence. (Note: These three values are not necessarily equivalents but are presented here to reflect the three standard grading systems in use in schools.) The faculty council may raise the required cumulative GPA above the national minimum level, but the Scholarship criteria must remain based on a cumulative standard.

The faculty council may also choose to use weighted grades in recognition of the varying degrees of difficulty of courses of study. This weighting should be done in accordance with the grading systems currently in place at the school. In addition, if a faculty council chooses to use weighted grades, this weighting should be applied to grades prior to the determination of the cumulative GPA to identify all students who have met the scholastic criterion prior to consideration of their service, leadership, and character.

The faculty council also has the option of specifying a prerequisite number of academic courses needed to be identified as a candidate. In all cases involving weighting of grades or the identification of prerequisite academic courses, the faculty council must: 1) confer initially with the administration and/or school system representatives to

be assured that such additional guidelines do not conflict with existing local, state, or federal policies; 2) provide to the administration, students, and parents the professional rationale for these additional guidelines or procedures; and 3) publicize these requirements effectively. Several other scenarios involving the scholarship criterion warrant mention as chapters consider this standard.

## **LOW AND FAILING GRADES**

Individual course grades may not be used as a reason for nonselection (or later for possible dismissal.) Rules such as "no grade below 'B'" are not acceptable. This type of rule runs contrary to the use of a cumulative GPA for all candidates.

Similarly, a failing grade ("F" or other mark used to indicate performance that is below the lowest acceptable grade) is not an acceptable reason to automatically eliminate a student's candidacy (or to dismiss a member later.)

If a student meets or exceeds the cumulative GPA requirement, they are a candidate for membership and must be considered for membership accordingly.

## **EQUIVALENT STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE**

Schools with grading practices that include such matters as individualized instruction, independent study, nongraded courses, or pass-fail markings share in the requirements to select the top students for membership. The faculty council in these schools has the responsibility to determine ways to identify appropriately those students who meet the scholarship requirement based on a cumulative standard. In addition, school systems that allow middle level students to earn high school credit for courses taken at the middle level school should address whether such courses are included in the high school GPA. The information on this policy should be relayed to the middle level students and their parents, as well as the high school counseling office when signing up for such courses or calculating cumulative averages. In these situations (i.e., alternative grading practices and middle level course credits) the faculty council must provide a rationale for these determinations and include it in the written description of the selection process.

## **REVISITING SCHOLARSHIP**

Once it has been determined that a student has met the scholarship criterion, the faculty council may not further evaluate scholarship, course rigor, or add points for a

higher cumulative GPA. It would be considered "revisiting" the scholarship criterion for the faculty council to bring up the "quality" of a student's grades or evaluate the degree of difficulty of the courses after the GPA has been determined, and this is not allowed. Similarly, teacher recommendation/input forms that include a space for rating the student's scholarship are also prohibited.

In all cases, the Scholarship criterion must be based on a cumulative standard. Schools that rate the level of the students' GPAs for their point system in the selection process are similarly revisiting scholarship (e.g., 97-100 = 4 points; 94-96 = 3 points). In the case of a school using a rubric or point system, points should only be applied to those candidates who have already met the scholastic criteria and now need to be rated on the remaining three criteria.

## USING STATE OR STANDARDIZED TESTS

Some chapters have considered including a requirement that all candidates must have passing scores or scores of a defined level on state-based tests for competency or skill or standardized tests such as the SAT or ACT. However, the cumulative GPA is an indicator of ongoing assessment of student scholarship rather than performance judged from an instrument administered on a single day. While such state-administered or private tests may offer some valuable assessment of student learning, their use in the NHS selection process is not allowed and cannot be used as a reason for nonselection or to later remove a student from membership.

## CHANGING THE GPA REQUIREMENT

In cases where a school wishes to change the GPA requirement by raising or lowering the GPA (but not beneath the 3.0 national minimum) there are a few key points to keep in mind:

- Changes in the selection procedure should be made by the faculty council with the principal's approval. The origin of the request for changes may be the administration, the faculty adviser, or even current chapter members. In all cases, however, the faculty council and principal must provide formal approval.
- As with all aspects of the selection procedure, the change(s) and all information related to the change should be published in a timely fashion and be available for easy dissemination to the public.

- When considering the timing for implementing proposed changes, the best recommendation from the national office is to implement such changes with a class entering the school, e.g., with the new freshman class entering the 9-12 school. While in this case a four-year transition will be needed to fully implement the change, this process would appear to be the fairest for those affected by the change.
- If a shorter timeline is called for, a local chapter needs to announce increases to the GPA **at least one academic year prior** to implementation of the new cumulative GPA requirement. This timeline allows students to set new goals for their scholastic performance (the higher GPA) and sufficient time to achieve them. It also allows the chapter to publish the new guidelines and to update the faculty and parents of all prospective members.

Under all circumstances, advisers and members of the faculty council are reminded that continued membership in the chapter is based upon students maintaining the standards under which they were admitted as members. Consequently, a member admitted with a 3.0 GPA would be expected to maintain that average as a member, even if the new standard of 3.25 were approved for membership selected for later induction. In cases involving new scholastic standards, this may mean that given chapter members operate under different standards for a period of years while the new criteria are being installed.

## LEADERSHIP

The leadership criterion is considered highly important for membership selection. Chapters may set an objective or subjective set of requirements for this criterion. Objective standards could include a specific number of leadership experiences required for all candidates or other indicators of leadership experience. Leadership can be quantified by the candidate through a candidate information form; the quality or effectiveness of those leadership experiences can be assessed using teacher recommendations or faculty input forms submitted with professional comments by the staff of the school.

An example of such an objective standard could read, "To meet the leadership criterion for NHS, a student must name three (3) leadership roles at school or in the community achieved since the ninth grade [in a 9-12 school] and indicate the roles and the name of the adult who supervised each of these activities on the candidate information form. More than three roles may be listed, but there must be three verifiable listings to be selected to our chapter."

If a faculty council decides upon such an objective standard, it will prove helpful to have available the professional rationale used in developing the standard, particularly when introducing the standard to the principal for review. The rationale for this or any other aspect of the selection process should be available upon request to any individual.

Chapters can consider the following descriptors as they develop their local definition and standard for leadership, particularly when using a subjective standard such as evaluating leadership traits, characteristics, or behaviors, as opposed to an objective number of appointed or elected roles. This list is for consideration and should not be thought of as a checklist for this criterion.

A student who exercises leadership:

- Is resourceful in proposing new problems, applying principles, and making suggestions
- Demonstrates initiative in promoting school activities
- Exercises positive influence on peers in upholding school ideals and spirit
- Contributes ideas that improve the civic life of the school
- Is able to delegate responsibilities
- Inspires positive behavior in others
- Demonstrates academic initiative
- Successfully holds school offices or positions of responsibility; conducts business effectively and efficiently; demonstrates reliability and dependability
- Is a leader in the classroom, at work, or in other school or community activities

## SERVICE

Service is generally considered to be those actions undertaken by the student that are done with or on behalf of others without any direct financial or material compensation. In considering service, the contributions each candidate has made to their school and/or community can be reviewed.

All chapters are strongly encouraged to develop and use an objective standard for service based on either a specific number of projects or a specific quantity of hours. For example, "To be selected as a member of our chapter, a candidate must demonstrate on their candidate information form the completion of 10 hours of service undertaken at school and/or in the community since the start of ninth grade [in a 9-12 school]." A quantity of service, as noted in the selection process description developed by

the faculty council, should be determined as a fair and reasonable quantity of service to require. All such service references by candidates should include verification by an adult supervisor of the activity under consideration. It is advantageous both for the faculty council and for students considering membership to have such an objective standard in place for the chapter.

Chapters can consider the following descriptors as they develop their local definition and standard for service. This list is for consideration only and should not be thought of as a checklist for this criterion.

The student who serves:

- Volunteers and provides dependable and well-organized assistance, and is willing to make sacrifices to offer assistance
- Works well with others and is willing to take on difficult or inconspicuous responsibilities
- Enthusiastically renders any requested service to the school
- Is willing to represent the class or school in interclass and interscholastic competition
- Does committee and staff work without complaint
- Participates in some activity outside of school, for example, Girl Scouts; Boy Scouts; religious groups; volunteer services for the elderly, poor, or disadvantaged.
- Mentors in the community or students at other schools
- Shows courtesy by assisting visitors, teachers, and students

## CHARACTER

The faculty council should consider the positive as well as the negative aspects of each candidate's character. All judgments in this and other selection criteria should be free of speculation, rumor, or hearsay.

**Documenting Character.** In considering the standards set for the local character criterion, a candidate will be able to demonstrate an outstanding record of conduct and behavior with regard to school and community rules, guidelines, and policies, or be able to demonstrate sufficient growth and improvement to compensate for previous inadequacies. It is left to the discretion of the local principal, faculty adviser, and/or faculty council as to how much of this information is to be shared with the candidate not selected for membership (or their parents).

**Disciplinary and Criminal Records.** Students who have been arrested and found guilty of civil offenses or who have a record of breaking school rules cannot be automatically excluded from consideration for membership. As with the scholarship criterion where a cumulative GPA is used, it is advisable to consider the whole child and their cumulative behavior while in high school. A proper regard for adolescent growth and behavior improvement is essential. The faculty council, following their evaluation of the remaining three criteria, may conclude that the candidate does not meet the requirements for leadership and character. A nonselection vote may be the outcome of this evaluation.

**Pregnancy.** Under provisions of federal law, pregnancy—whether within or without wedlock—cannot be the basis for denial of the right to participate in any public school activity including membership in NHS. (Similarly, pregnancy is not grounds for dismissal from membership under any of the four pillars of NHS membership.) Many state laws and district policies echo this policy as well.

Chapters can consider the following descriptors as they develop their local definition and standard for character. This list is for consideration purposes only and should not be thought of as a checklist for this criterion.

The student of character:

- Cooperates by complying with all school policies and regulations and codes of student conduct
- Demonstrates the highest standards of honesty, academic integrity, and reliability
- Regularly exhibits courtesy, concern, and respect for others
- Complies with instructions and rules, and displays personal responsibility

## THE SELECTION PROCESS

This section outlines the essential procedures for all chapters to follow when selecting new members. Local variations can be accommodated as long as they are not contrary to the policies found in the constitution and this handbook.

1. **Procedure development.** The selection procedure must be developed by the local faculty council (the five-member selection committee facilitated by the chapter adviser), approved by the principal, and a description must be published and widely and regularly available for review by students, faculty, and parents.

2. **Academic eligibility.** As the first step in the process, students' academic records are reviewed to determine those individuals who are scholastically eligible for membership, i.e., those persons who meet the required cumulative GPA standard. The GPA used at the local level cannot be set below the national minimum standard outlined in the constitution, and once set, must be applied fairly and consistently to all candidates including any candidates with disabilities.

3. **Candidate notification and forms.** Chapters are responsible for identifying eligible candidates and notifying each eligible candidate of their candidacy. Chapters are responsible for ensuring that no eligible candidate is overlooked in the selection process. Students who are eligible scholastically (i.e., candidates) should be notified and informed that for further consideration for selection to the chapter, they are to complete the candidate information form (or similar method of collecting information from candidates.) This form outlines the candidate's accomplishments in the areas of service and leadership. Many chapters offer help sessions for candidates to receive assistance in properly filling out the candidate forms.

4. **Additional faculty input.** If additional faculty input would be beneficial, all faculty members can be invited to make comments on candidates, most often done on a faculty input form. The actual selection of members must be made by the five appointed members of the faculty council. Consequently, point totals or averages of faculty ratings are not to be considered as "votes" or the sole determinants of membership, but should, instead, be reported to the faculty council to add to their information when considering selections. Faculty members should consider their evaluative input in the most professional manner and be able to substantiate claims with professional actions—particularly for low ratings. All input from faculty must be signed. Anonymous faculty evaluations are not allowed in the NHS selection process.

5. **Review, deliberate, and vote.** The candidate form (or alternative self-reporting method) should be reviewed by the faculty council, along with any other verifiable information about the candidate relevant to their candidacy, including whether candidates are officially noted as having a disability that could affect their consideration. The leadership, service, and character of all candidates should be reviewed carefully. Faculty council members are encouraged to deliberate in order to guarantee that their decisions are based on accurate and complete

understandings of all information presented for review. With the vote on each candidate, those candidates receiving a majority vote of the faculty council should be invited to be inducted into the chapter.

6. **Report results to the principal.** Prior to notification of any candidates, the adviser must report to the principal the results of the faculty council's deliberations for approval. Lists of selected and nonselected students as well as reasons for nonselection are to be incorporated into this report. This reporting will ensure the support of the administration prior to any student notification.
7. **Notification.** Chapters should initiate formal notification of all selected candidates and their parents to inform them in writing about selection and the timing of the induction ceremony. All candidates identified and listed as "not selected" (i.e., those who do not receive the majority vote of the faculty council) should also be notified. Schools should also consider how students who are not selected are properly informed about their nonselection to see that this method is both timely and considerate of the student's well-being. To this end, the public notification of nonselected candidates, such as "tapping," may not be used in this process.
8. **Verification and induction.** To finalize the plans for the induction ceremony, a plan should be devised for verification of membership and acceptance of the invitation for membership as well as attendance at the induction.

## Implementing the NHS Selection Process

Once the four criteria are defined and a description of the selection procedure is published, academically eligible students are notified of their candidacy, and the chapter is directed to gather information about each candidate using a variety of forms. Consider these specific items to develop and include in your local candidate materials.

### CANDIDATE INFORMATION FORMS

To ascertain the degree to which a student candidate meets the selection criteria, the local faculty council creates and distributes a candidate information form for all academically eligible students (i.e., candidates). Such forms are generally used to obtain information directly from the student regarding leadership and service activities and to elaborate on the student's perspectives concerning the Honor Society and its values.

Because each candidate is considered separately and new members are selected based on their having demonstrated sufficient service, leadership, and character to verify that they meet chapter standards, the use of forms to obtain information directly from the students/candidates is vital to the chapter's efforts to run a fair and respectable selection process. It is unreasonable to expect that the faculty council, even in a small school, would be fully knowledgeable regarding any student's involvement in these areas, particularly where involvement in community activities is concerned. The best source for accurate information regarding a candidate's experience is the individual candidate.

**Parental signatures.** Providing the opportunity for parents or guardians to sign off on these forms can better ensure the accuracy and completeness of all submissions, improves the validity of the forms submitted, and serves as a model for maintaining good communications between school and home—and sometimes provides an additional motivational push for an undecided candidate to participate in the selection process. Other adult signatures may also be requested to verify participation in leadership or service activities.

**Terminology.** The candidate information forms should not be identified as "applications" for membership. The candidate forms exist to support the student's candidacy by providing relevant information for use by the faculty council. The use on any form of the term "apply" implies that students with an interest in membership independently determine that they are eligible and are, therefore, requesting consideration. Honor Society membership is not a right, and a student cannot independently request consideration. On the contrary, based on several legal rulings over the years, membership is a privilege bestowed by the school upon those students who are found to meet the criteria for selection. Only those who have established their academic eligibility by meeting the cumulative GPA standard are asked to submit information for this consideration. By avoiding the use of the terms "apply" or "application" the chapter encourages a correct interpretation of this fundamental principle of the Honor Society.

## FACULTY INPUT FORMS AND TEACHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Selection for membership is always made by a majority vote of the faculty council. However, in addition to the candidate forms, the faculty may obtain additional information through faculty evaluations or recommendations to assist them in making their decision. Such additional faculty input cannot be used as votes or used to disqualify or remove candidates from the Honor Society.

Faculty input forms may be used to supplement the candidate forms. Faculty input may be used to support the strength of a student's candidacy in the areas of service, leadership, and character. Input from faculty brings information to the attention of the faculty council that may not otherwise be represented on the candidate forms. Upon reviewing the faculty input and verifying its accuracy, the faculty council is still required to undertake a vote on each candidate, selecting each student who receives a majority vote.

To avoid questionable entries on faculty input forms, all forms must be signed, and each faculty member should be prepared to support any below-average rating with substantiating data based on sound professional judgment and action. Anonymous faculty input forms may not be used.

Alternatively, some chapters only seek the signature of support from a prerequisite number of staff members to verify the character of a candidate. In either case, please review with the school's faculty what is expected of them and the timetable for submission of all materials in support of an individual student's candidacy.

Recommendations or input forms are not a national requirement, but if they are used for the local selection process, advisers should allow enough time for staff members to complete and submit the forms as well as the time needed by the faculty council to review them.

## TEACHER RECOMMENDATIONS

As with faculty input forms, teacher recommendations are not required for any chapter's selection procedures; however, nothing prevents a chapter from incorporating recommendations to supplement the data provided to the faculty council. When looking at including recommendations for your chapter's new member selection, consider the following:

- **Add procedures.** If teacher recommendations are to be incorporated into the local selection process, be sure to seek review and approval from both the faculty council and the principal, and then amend the published version of the local selection procedures.
- **Develop reasonable timelines.** Teacher recommendations take time—for both the candidates and the teachers. Give candidates sufficient time to contact teachers; give teachers enough time to write and turn in the forms. Always take into consideration other events on the school calendar when creating your timetable.
- **Create local forms.** Develop a standardized form for all recommendations. Include a title bearing the Honor Society logo (or your chapter name); space for the candidate's name to be written at the top; clear indication regarding when the forms are due; and space for the recommender's signature and date at the bottom. Unsigned (anonymous) recommendations should not be accepted or allowed. Instructions indicating the type of feedback being requested should be clear, as well as the deadline for returning these forms.
- **Determine how many recommendations are required.** Is one recommendation sufficient; are 10 forms too many? Don't ask for more than the faculty council is willing and able to read. Some chapters will ask for three, but will consider this component of candidacy complete if at least two forms are turned in. Another key question: Will recommendations be required from both the school and the community? Asking for nonschool recommendations requires more time for turning in the forms. Having a nonschool recommendation also requires that the form clearly identifies in what capacity the recommender knows the candidate.
- **List invited recommenders on the candidate forms.** Have your candidates identify the individuals to whom they have given recommendation forms on their candidate forms for cross-referencing.
- **Understand policy implications.** Most schools will prohibit a recommendation from a relative (or immediate family member) of the candidate. Remind candidates of this policy at the time your forms are distributed. What if recommendation forms are not turned in or not turned in on time? Should a candidate be responsible for an adult not turning in their forms? Care should be taken not to automatically exclude any candidate whose recommenders didn't respond or didn't respond on time.

Allow sufficient time for recommendations and avoid making the submission deadline the same day your faculty council is going to meet. Some newly enrolled students who have just completed one semester at the school (thus meeting the minimum enrollment requirement) may not yet have established contacts to provide a recommendation. Consider making reasonable exceptions for these students if asked to do so.

- **Review the process.** If you are using teacher recommendations for the first time this year, take time before your next round of selection to review your policies regarding their use. Look at any problem scenarios that arose because of these forms.
- **Retain documents.** As with any documents collected for selecting new members, verify with your principal or school system managers what the law or policies require regarding the retention of these documents. Some states maintain very specific document retention policies that apply to all Honor Society chapters, so advisers should seek assurances before eliminating any documents from their files.

Teacher recommendations can be a valuable addition to your local selection process. As with the candidate information forms, faculty input and teacher recommendations are considered by the national office as working documents to assist the faculty council in making sound decisions regarding membership. These documents are expected to be used only by the faculty council, the adviser, and the principal, and should be considered confidential unless local or state policies dictate to the contrary.

## USING RUBRICS AND POINT SYSTEMS

The constitution makes no reference to rubrics or point systems when selecting new members. Furthermore, the national office does not sanction or approve such systems. This does not preclude a local chapter from developing an effective selection procedure using a rubric or points for service, leadership, and character as long as the result retains compliance with all national guidelines. The faculty council may use rubrics or point systems to aid them in reaching their final decisions prior to their vote. As stated in the NHS Constitution, a majority vote of the council is required for selection/nonselection.

## ESSAYS

There is no reference to an essay requirement in the selection policies or the NHS Constitution. However, this does not preclude a faculty council from including an essay in the local selection process as a self-reporting tool. Guidance on using essays in the selection process can be found in the Recommendations and Best Practices section of this handbook.

## BLIND REVIEW OF CANDIDATES

Some chapters wish to evaluate candidates for selection in a fully anonymous manner by removing their names and other identifying information from their candidate forms otherwise known as “a blind review.” This practice may not be used in the NHS selection process for the following reason:

For students who are engaged in very public positions (e.g., class president, captain of a sports team), their identities will be discernable by virtue of their activities. This could provide an unfair advantage to some students when compared to other students whose qualities are just as strong, but who have chosen to become involved in less public activities. To avoid this advantage (which translates into an unfair disadvantage for some), all candidate names must be included on their forms.

Chapters may initially review the student information sheets without names attached during a preliminary review, but names should be revealed prior to the final vote of the faculty council. This assists the council in determining whether any legitimate extenuating circumstances may need to be considered for this student.

## DEADLINES

Can missing deadlines in the selection process be a reason for nonselection? Yes. The ability to meet deadlines can be viewed as a reflection of a student’s level of responsibility, an aspect of both character and leadership. Each chapter has the authority to establish and enforce deadlines in their selection process.

Such enforcement should be reasonable, fairly applied, and open to considering extenuating circumstances. To that end, it is important that the chapter’s deadlines are:

- **Published.** Deadlines are clearly identified in writing for all candidates. Other deadlines for chapter members regarding service hours submission, completion of forms, etc., must also be available in writing, preferably in the list of member obligations or in the chapter bylaws.

- **Reasonable in nature and length** based on school calendar considerations (any conflicting events?) and student schedules (e.g., does the deadline fall in the middle of exams or testing?). Deadlines that require 24- or 48-hours turnaround time for information are unreasonable.
- **Conclusive.** The consequence of not meeting the deadline is clearly expressed and consistently applied (avoiding arbitrary enforcement of the rule).
- **Reasonably Enforced.** Consider what provisions have been developed for students who are absent when forms are disseminated or for those who have legitimate extenuating circumstances.
- **Consistent.** A final factor is to look at the methods of application for your policy on deadlines. Make sure you have been consistent in applying reasonable deadlines.

If a student turns in the form late, and the faculty council has not yet met to evaluate and vote on candidates, advisers should accept the student's information, submit it to the faculty council with the annotation that it was turned in late (forms timed and dated), and let the faculty council determine by vote whether the reasons for late submission were excusable. This process works under the policy assumption that no adviser can disqualify a previously identified candidate without the vote of the faculty council.

## VOTING PROCEDURES FOR THE FACULTY COUNCIL

The constitution notes that candidates are selected when they receive a majority vote of the faculty council (Article IX). The only other reference to voting in the faculty council is in Article X where the same majority vote is needed to dismiss members from the chapter. While these provisions speak to the outcome of the vote, national policies don't prescribe or recommend techniques for taking the vote in meetings of the council.

Three options for voting arise from traditional considerations of this process: voice vote, show of hands, and balloted voting. Each chapter determines the voting method, and the adviser then reports the vote to the principal.

In none of these three methods of voting is it necessary for the record to reflect how individual members of the council voted on any candidate. The only pertinent information is whether the candidate received a majority vote for selection.

Chapters should not incorporate absentee or vote by proxy methods. Advisers should plan carefully for their meetings of the faculty council to ensure that all five voting members can be present and remain for the full duration of the meeting. Absentee or proxy votes would not provide for a careful review and deliberation of each candidate's information within the council meeting and are not in the best interest of the candidates under consideration.

## REPORTING RESULTS TO THE PRINCIPAL

By providing the result of the vote to the principal prior to notifying students or parents, the principal can fully utilize the authority granted in Article V of the constitution wherein the principal is given final authority on all actions and decisions of the chapter including those relating to selection. While principals are cautioned against overturning the decisions of the faculty council without having a rationale available to explain such actions, the power remains in the principal's hands to use if deemed appropriate.

## INITIATION, BLACKBALLING, AND HAZING

These actions, or any actions resembling them, are expressly prohibited as part of the selection process for any NHS activity. Any chapter found in violation of this regulation risks losing its charter. This prohibition has been included in every NHS handbook since 1921.

For this reason, and to be consistent with the language used in this handbook and the constitution, chapters should ensure that the phrase "induction ceremony" is used instead of initiation when referring to the formal presentation of new members to the school and community.

## REAPPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the National Honor Society is permanent unless a member's performance falls below the standards by which they were selected. Chapters may not ask students to reapply on a yearly basis. This does not preclude a chapter's faculty council from requesting that students verify each year that they are still meeting the criteria for selection by updating their candidate information forms or by submitting report cards for verifying their academic performance. However, this process must not be interpreted as a formal return to the selection process with the student's continuing membership in doubt. Only if a student is dismissed (using the process outlined in Article X) or resigns is the student's continuing membership in the Honor Society ever to be curtailed.

## NONSELECTION

Not selecting a student who has already been identified as being academically eligible can present a difficult situation for the principal, chapter adviser, and faculty council. The constitution requires that a description of the selection procedure be published in an official school publication widely available to all students and their parents (Article IX). This description should be well written and thorough in its portrayal of the selection process for the nonselected student to be assured that their case was handled in an appropriate manner.

## APPEALS IN CASES OF NONSELECTION

All chapter advisers are required to report the results of the faculty council voting to the principal before notification. Within that report the criteria-based reason(s) for nonselection should be included. Local chapters can create their own appeals process for handling cases of nonselection. If this is done, the chapter should incorporate a statute of limitations regarding when they will accept such appeals, for example, "Appeals must be registered with the chapter adviser within 10 school days [or some alternative and reasonable time period] of notification of nonselection."

Under normal circumstances, in the absence of any formal appeals process, the adviser is best prepared to provide immediate feedback when questions arise regarding nonselection. Should students or parents still not be satisfied, the next level of discussion should take place with the principal. Principals have the authority to hear appeals per Article V and can approve selection decisions. The principal should listen to the concerns of students not selected, or from the parents of such students. Following such discussions, if the principal believes that some kind of technical or procedural mistake has been made, the principal may issue a ruling directly or ask the faculty to reconsider their decision. Technical or procedural errors might include the inadvertent omission of a student's name from the list of those qualified for induction, the erroneous averaging of grades, or the chapter's failure to follow prescribed procedures, or violations of national policies governing selection.

Parents and students must understand that no student has a right to be selected for membership in a chapter of the National Honor Society. If nonselected students or their parents wish to challenge or appeal the principal's decision, they should follow the local school system complaint procedures.

**The national office staff and NASSP have no authority to review or overturn the judgment of the faculty council regarding selection of individual members to local chapters, but the national office does reserve the right to investigate violations of Honor Society policies through our formal complaint process.**

## DOCUMENT RETENTION

No formal document retention policy exists in the national guidelines for NHS chapters. However, local chapter advisers in New York and Texas have state laws that address documentation for public schools in these states.

Advisers and principals in all chapters should verify whether document retention policies exist and to what extent they apply to Honor Society files. Chapters that wish to remove paperwork from their files, notably forms used in the selection process each year, can consider creating a local statute of limitations of reasonable duration for asking questions for filing appeals after which all materials will be destroyed.

## The Induction Ceremony

"Candidates become members when inducted at a special ceremony."

—Article VIII, Section 4 of the NHS National Constitution

Each chapter is obligated to hold an induction ceremony. Prospective members, i.e., successfully selected candidates, are not full and active members until they have been properly inducted, preferably soon after selection. Delaying induction until the next school year or even the following semester can result in a qualified candidate missing out on becoming a member due to transferring schools.

Induction of new members into the National Honor Society is an important event for the student, the chapter, the school, and the community. The ceremony, whether public or private, provides an excellent opportunity to dramatize the purposes of the chapter as found in Article I of the NHS National Constitution. Because membership in the National Honor Society represents high levels of achievement, the induction ceremony itself should also reflect high standards.

The most common practice for the induction ceremony is for it to be conducted by the officers and members of the local chapter. In the case of the chapter's first induction, chapter members of a nearby school or faculty members

may also participate. There is no requirement regarding the timing or the style of the ceremony other than the provision from Article VIII cited at the opening of this chapter. The national office has received suggestions that one special induction ceremony be developed and used by all chapters. However, the national office firmly believes that schools should create their own ceremonies and procedures. The only stipulation the national office has made regarding induction ceremonies is that they be "appropriate and impressive."

As a result, there could be as many different ceremonies as there are chapters. The best advice comes from the constitution: Make it special for all involved. Although the format of each chapter's induction program will vary with local traditions and procedures, each chapter should include in their script an emphasis on the national criteria, namely scholarship, service, leadership, and character. A complete script, studied and rehearsed, is helpful to all participants.

While attendance at the ceremony is required for a selected candidate to become a member, chapters can take extenuating circumstances into account, such as illness or personal emergency, scheduling conflict or other legitimate reason for absence, and induct the candidate individually at a later date. This individual induction can take place at the next chapter meeting, in the principal's office, or other appropriate location and time that is convenient for the candidate. Some chapters may also choose to conduct this individual induction virtually.

# Chapter 4: Discipline and Dismissal Policies

**There is no automatic dismissal from the National Honor Society. All members are entitled to due process.** Chapter advisers may find that members occasionally fall below the standards by which they were selected. To preserve the integrity of the chapter, it may become necessary to discipline members. The NHS National Constitution (Article X) and the local chapter bylaws are the key resources for these efforts.

As in the case of selection, all discipline and dismissal procedures must be clearly described in writing. This description, usually incorporated into the local chapter bylaws, must be available to anyone who requests it. The faculty council is responsible for developing all discipline and dismissal procedures (Article VII) and these must be consistent with the constitution and handbook. Chapters can indicate in the chapter bylaws that certain violations will lead to immediate consideration of dismissal by the faculty council, but they can never describe such violations as warranting automatic dismissal under any conditions.

## WARNINGS AND ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

A member can never be dismissed automatically for failing to maintain standards, not meeting member obligations, or even being found guilty of violating school rules or the law. It is the responsibility of the chapter adviser to periodically review the standing of members for compliance with Honor Society standards and for fulfillment of chapter obligations as described in the chapter bylaws. When a member falls below any of the standards by which they were selected or fails to fulfill chapter obligations, the adviser should issue a written warning, outlining the time period given for improvement, and of the possible consequences of not improving, i.e., consideration of dismissal or additional disciplinary measures. Warnings may not be issued verbally, and mass notices to the chapter membership do not satisfy this requirement. The written warning must be a direct communication from the adviser to the member. Sample text for the warning letter is provided in the Adviser Resource Center on the NHS website. If deemed appropriate, the letter may be followed by a conference between the member and the NHS adviser. If the student does not improve in the specified time, that student is subject to whatever disciplinary measures are considered appropriate by the faculty council, up to and including dismissal.

In the case of possible dismissal, either as the result of a warning period, or violations of school rules or the law, a written notification and hearing are called for in Article X of the constitution, and the hearing must be conducted by the faculty council to dismiss a member. The adviser must be present, and parents can attend as well. Principals and assistant principals may not be present for the hearing.

In lieu of dismissal, faculty councils can discipline a member by placing them on warning, during which time they are considered "not in good standing" with the chapter, although the student still retains membership. Disciplinary measures other than dismissal are acceptable for minor disciplinary offenses. For example, the faculty council may suspend certain chapter privileges, remove the student from chapter office, request that the student perform additional school or community service activities, or receive special counseling.

Such warning periods are for a specific duration of time after which regular membership is restored. Article XV notes that only members who are in good standing will be allowed to wear the society's emblem, unless the local chapter bylaws indicate to the contrary. Chapter advisers are encouraged to remind senior members of the chapter of this condition throughout the members' senior year and include it in the written list of chapter member obligations.

Members can be informed that they are allowed limited warnings during their membership and that in the case of a flagrant violation of school rules or the law, a warning is not required for consideration of dismissal, but a hearing will still be held. The hearing is identified in the constitution as a right of membership; is guaranteed as due process; and requires the chapter to notify the member of the action being contemplated, the reasons for the action, the date and time of the hearing, and the opportunity for the member to respond either in writing or orally. As stated in Article VIII, a student who is dismissed or who resigns is never again eligible for membership in NHS (see [nationalhonorsociety.org/constitutions](http://nationalhonorsociety.org/constitutions).)

## DISMISSAL PROCEDURES OVERVIEW

Faculty councils should use dismissal sparingly. Prior to any vote on dismissal, the faculty council should investigate thoroughly before any action is taken. If the council determines that the facts warrant consideration of dismissal, the member must be notified in writing of

the violation, the possibility of dismissal, and the need to attend a scheduled hearing with the faculty council. (See sample letters in the Adviser Resource Center.) The member should appear before the faculty council and explain their view of the circumstances. A parent/guardian may be present with the member; however, it should be noted that the primary purpose and focus of the hearing is to allow the member to present their case. The member also has the right to submit a written statement for the council's consideration in lieu of appearing in person. This is an option available to the student, but the chapter cannot mandate the submission of a written statement and deny the member the right to appear before the council, as guaranteed by Article X of the constitution.

In all matters of dismissal, local chapter advisers should first review the constitution and the handbook. The most relevant section of the constitution for these matters is the full text of Article X.

Next, a review of the existing guidelines for the local chapter should be undertaken. It is important that all local guidelines conform to those found in the constitution. Questions regarding conformance can be directed to the national office.

To avoid confusion, always use the term "dismissal" regarding removal of a member from the chapter and not "expulsion." Expulsion is a term that bears legal connotations in some states when it is used to refer to the removal of a student from the school.

The following points should also be taken care of in all dismissal cases:

1. Procedures for dismissal are to be determined by the local school's NHS faculty council (with review by the principal, superintendent, school board, school system attorney, etc., when necessary).
2. Chapters must have a written description of the discipline and dismissal procedures, and it should be reviewed with your chapter members and/or officers. Student handbooks can include the procedures. In addition, chapter members should be reminded regularly of the standards that they are expected to maintain.
3. A member can be considered for disciplinary action when performance falls below the acceptable levels of any of the standards by which the member was selected,

when the member fails to fulfill chapter obligations, or when the member is found guilty of violating school rules or the law.

4. In accordance with Article X of the NHS Constitution, a student must be warned in writing whenever they fall below any standard or fail to fulfill membership obligations (except in cases of flagrant violations of school rules or the law). Copies of this correspondence should be sent to the parents and a copy of the letter or email, including the date it was sent, should be maintained by the adviser. Some schools prefer the presentation of written warnings in person; others are utilizing registered mail to guarantee receipt of the letters at home. This is a matter of local precedent and worth checking on with the principal. A sample warning letter is found in the Chapter Management Tools section of this handbook.
5. The faculty council determines when an individual has exceeded a reasonable number of warnings, thus warranting consideration of dismissal.
6. In all cases of pending dismissal, a chapter member has a right to be notified in writing of the offenses and to a hearing before the faculty council. This is the due process guaranteed to all chapter members under the constitution (Article X). Please note that this hearing is always prior to any vote or decision on dismissal. **Under no circumstances is there automatic dismissal from the Honor Society.**
7. Appeals of dismissal are to be handled first by the school principal and, thereafter, in the same way as disciplinary appeals in the student's school district. If a member is dismissed, written notice of the decision should be sent to the member, with copies recommended for the student's parents and the principal. The member must then surrender the NHS emblem and membership card to the chapter adviser. If the member is unwilling to do this, the matter is to be treated as a school disciplinary matter.

## APPEALS OF DISMISSAL CASES

The dismissed member may appeal the decision of the faculty council first to the principal and then as indicated under the local school district's policies governing disciplinary appeals in the school district, following the normal channels for an appeals process. If the faculty council acts professionally with due care and fairness, then there should be few occasions for such appeals.

In the case of dismissal appeals, the principal is generally the first recipient of the appeal. The national guidelines provide no formal structure for appeals; consequently, the best advice is for principals to follow the local district appeals procedures as a model. Decisions should be based on adequacy and fairness of the faculty council procedures. In the rare instance in which dismissal cases are successfully appealed by a member, the principal is encouraged to share the rationale for reversing the initial decision, and the faculty council is requested to accept and implement the decision.

NASSP does not have the authority to hear or make any decisions regarding appeals in dismissal cases but maintains the authority to investigate cases of improper dismissal which violate NHS policies. Chapters in violation of these policies may be required to reinstate the improperly dismissed member and afford the member the required due process or risk losing their charter. (See Article X.)

## **RESIGNATION**

A member who resigns from the National Honor Society will never again be eligible for membership or its benefits. Resignation from the Honor Society should involve the submission of a written statement by the resigning member that is dated and signed by both the student and parent(s). Verbal resignations are insufficient to end membership. Students contemplating resignation should be informed of the consequences and permanent nature of their resignation as stated at the beginning of this chapter.

Members cannot be forced to resign. This would be interpreted as a dismissal order for which the process, as outlined in Article X of the constitution, must be followed.

As a formality, advisers may present the resignation letter to the faculty council for a vote to approve the resignation and follow up by informing the principal of this action and notifying the student that the resignation has been approved.

## **CHAPTER DISCIPLINARY RECORDS**

Once a student has been dismissed or has resigned, the chapter adviser should annotate the official chapter roster. The date of the disciplinary action is probably the most relevant information to insert in the record next to the former member's name. It is advisable to retain the resignation letter or a copy of the dismissal notification letter in the adviser's confidential files until such time as the student graduates or leaves the school. This will prove helpful in particular if the student transfers to another school and attempts to become an active member at the new school. Advisers are discouraged from conveying to any new school personnel the confidential information behind any cases of dismissal or resignation. But they can readily indicate that the student was removed from membership, and—per Article VIII—can never again be a member.

As a reminder, students who may be dismissed from NJHS while in their middle grades do not carry over to high school the prohibition from membership. Such students are provided a clean slate upon enrolling in high school and can be considered for NHS membership based on their experiences beginning in ninth grade (if that is a part of the high school grade structure). Questions arise when senior members of a chapter are dismissed and have already been accepted for enrollment at a college or university in the fall. It is not recommended that any chapter adviser, faculty council member, or principal initiate communication with the postsecondary institution regarding the change in status of a dismissed member. On the other hand, if the institution contacts the school and requests an update on the student's status and presuming that NHS membership is included on the official transcript or was incorporated in the college application, the chapter can consider updating the record with a factual annotation of the disciplinary actions taken. Advisers are encouraged to consult with the school counselor and/or the school principal before unilaterally providing such statements.

The inclusion of NHS membership on the official school transcript—or pertinent to this handbook chapter, indication of dismissal—is not a process mandated by the national guidelines and generally falls under local and/or state jurisdiction. Advisers should consult with the principal or central office regarding whether this information can or should be included in the student's permanent file.



# Chapter 5: Chapter Officers and Elections

Chapter officers are the core student leaders who help advisers run the chapter. Chapters aren't required to have officers, and there is no national policy mandating how many officers a chapter must have. If a chapter does choose to have officers, Article XI of the constitution states that the officers, their roles, and the method of election shall be described in the chapter bylaws. Further, these roles, duties, and the method of election must first be determined by the chapter members. To that end, no changes may be made to the chapter's election process or officer duties without the approval of the chapter members. The faculty council and principal then grant final approval. Sample descriptions of officer roles can be found in the Adviser Resource Center of the NHS website.

Some chapters forego formal officer roles in lieu of a committee structure. This approach is acceptable as long as it is first approved by the membership.

## VOTING PROCEDURES AND CONSIDERATIONS

There is no national policy regarding election procedures. Some chapters implement a simple democratic vote where the candidate receiving the most votes for the position is elected. Other chapters use a combination of an application process where the faculty council selects the candidates for the ballot and the members then cast their votes. Regardless of what method of election your chapter settles on, democratic principles of operation should be used, with an emphasis on fairness in conducting all procedures.

Prior to the election, the adviser or current officers should ensure that all members of the chapter have a copy of the election guidelines (i.e., a copy of the chapter bylaws). They should also review the process and timeline with the membership. Ensure that every member, including those who are absent, receives a copy and that some time is given for answering questions.

Advisers should consider reviewing the following topics with members prior to the election:

- Who is eligible to run for office, and who is eligible to vote? If your chapter bylaws limit candidates to a certain grade level—for example, rising seniors—be sure this is reiterated and still has the approval of the current membership.

- Many chapters only allow active members in good standing (i.e., those active members not on warning/probation) to vote, run for, or hold office. Such rules must be outlined in the chapter bylaws.
- Chapter presidents and advisers should be aware of the quorum rule which indicates that no official business of the chapter—including voting—can take place unless a minimum of one more than 50% of the members are present. Local chapters can set a quorum at a higher or lower percentage, but it is important to take an accurate count of members attending and voting during the election process.
- Some chapters do not announce results until all members have submitted ballots, allowing those who missed the meeting to vote with the chapter adviser following the planned meeting.
- When confronting tie votes in any election, look to your established procedures for advice, and if no such statement exists, consider developing one prior to the next election. Recounting and revoting are often the first steps in such circumstances, even allowing the tied candidates to make additional comments to the membership.
- Are candidates allowed to campaign for offices? It is recommended that the adviser compare the chapter guidelines with those in place in the school's student council or other student organizations. When in doubt, request input from the principal. Similarly, there may be school system guidelines on elections for student groups that would need to be followed by your NHS chapter.

## OFFICER INSTALLATION

Once elected, new officers should be publicly installed. Chapters are encouraged to create a respectful ceremony for the installation that serves as a reminder of the duties these individuals have assumed and the responsibility of the membership to support their new leadership. Some chapters install new officers during their induction ceremony, while others hold elections after induction and install new officers prior to the end of the school year. There is no national policy mandating the schedule of officer elections or installation, but these local procedures must be outlined in the chapter bylaws.

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## **ADDRESSING OFFICER ISSUES AND VACANCIES**

There may be times when officers do not perform their duties as assigned. The procedure for officer discipline or removal should be addressed in the chapter bylaws. Officers can be warned, removed from office, or in some cases dismissed from the chapter. Though the latter function is reserved for the faculty council, all disciplinary processes should be spelled out in the chapter bylaws for all members. In the event of an officer vacancy, the chapter bylaws should similarly outline the process for filling vacancies whether by special election, appointment by the executive committee, the adviser or faculty council, or by simple succession.

## **THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The executive committee is composed of the chapter officers and the chapter adviser. This committee helps direct the business affairs of the chapter, and determines the dues structure, time and place of meetings, meeting agendas, and special projects. All actions and recommendations by the executive committee are subject to review by the membership and approval of the school principal.

# Chapter 6: Chapter Activities

## Meetings

Chapter bylaws should outline member responsibility for meeting attendance and the procedure to follow when an absence is necessary. The meeting schedule should be well-publicized and operate according to some recognized method of procedure (e.g., Robert's Rules of Order). The national office, while recognizing the importance of attending meetings, cautions against dismissal of members simply for poor meeting attendance. A member who fails to attend meetings should be counseled by the chapter adviser before disciplinary action is taken. A sample meeting agenda is provided in the Resources section later in this handbook.

## Service Requirements

The constitution mandates that each chapter conducts one or more chapter service projects each year (Article XIV). Each member would be expected to contribute to these projects.

As stated in the constitution, all NHS projects must:

- Fulfill a need within the school or community
- Have the support and approval of the administration and faculty
- Be appropriate and educationally defensible, and not in conflict with the activities of other school organizations
- Be well planned, organized, and executed

The needs of the school and community can be identified in a variety of ways. Conducting a needs survey with students, faculty and staff, parents, and community representatives is one place to start. Once projects (and other chapter goals) are developed, seek the support of the administration and faculty. Determine whether each project is required to be submitted for formal approval by the principal or even the local school board.

## INDIVIDUAL SERVICE PROJECTS

Individual members also have the responsibility to choose an individual service project(s) in line with their particular talents and interests. This approach emphasizes the need for cooperative effort in service to the community while providing an opportunity for individuals to discover and develop their unique contributions. Consider the following when developing the individual service requirement for your chapter:

- The constitution indicates that the project should reflect the "particular talents and interests" of the member. The individual member is given the responsibility of choosing and participating in the project, and they should be held accountable for reporting this in an official manner to the local chapter.
- Activities that directly benefit a member's family do not satisfy this requirement.
- Service projects done for financial or other compensation are often viewed as contrary to the common definition of "service," and are not counted towards the individual service requirement.
- Establish a firm deadline or schedule of benchmarks for completion of individual service that allows enough time for review and accountability if deadlines are missed (i.e., placing a member on warning, etc.)
- If the local chapter chooses, individual service can be performed while participating in a project planned and implemented by another group on campus or in the community. "Individual service project" does not necessarily imply that these projects must be completed alone, merely that it be beyond the activity undertaken through the required chapter service project.
- Chapter advisers may require proof of completion by asking members for an adult's signature from a supervisor or chaperone.
- Specify in writing which projects or activities will or will not count towards the individual service project. Project preapproval avoids circumstances where the chapter adviser might be unwilling to accept the service provided, e.g., a project being done for the member's family if that would run contrary to the local chapter guidelines.

## The Adviser Resource Center

The Adviser Resource Center (ARC) contains a variety of sample documents, onboarding materials, and other guidance to help new and existing advisers manage their chapters. Advisers can find the following materials in the ARC:

- New chapter checklist
- Training videos
- Sample bylaws
- The *NHS Handbook*
- Logo usage request form
- Sample letters for selection, induction, and disciplinary matters
- Induction ceremony templates
- Project planning resources
- Archived webinar presentations
- An overview of the complaint process

# Chapter 7: Recommendations and Best Practices

The following sections outline recommendations and best practices for chapter management. These are provided for chapter consideration. Final decision on implementation rests with each individual chapter. Additional resources, such as sample forms and letters, can be found in the Adviser Resource Center on the NHS website.

## Chapter Management Tools

### PLANNING YOUR HONOR SOCIETY YEAR

We hope all NHS advisers keep the following events in mind as their chapters prepare for the coming year:

**August/September.** The start of the school year for most schools. This is a good time to schedule your meetings for the school year, start goal setting with your chapter members, and review your local chapter policies and procedures and the NHS National Handbook. Confirm your plans for the chapter's fall selection process and induction.

**October.** National Principals Month.

**November/December.** A great time for holiday service projects for special groups in your community.

**January.** Mid-year performance review for your chapter members.

**February.** A great time to sponsor a faculty appreciation effort. In addition, plans for your spring selection and induction should be underway.

**March.** Time to finalize your orders of NHS supplies for your spring inductions. Annual renewal notices will be sent to the school principal. Start the renewal process before the June 30 deadline.

**April.** National Student Leadership Week (NSLW). Check the NHS website for information on this year's NSLW theme. Plan officer elections and set the date for officer installation.

**May.** As the school year comes to a close, hold officer elections. Complete your annual survey online for the national office before you leave for the summer.

One of the best ways to keep up with upcoming special events is to read your weekly Honor Society News, and forward it to your chapter members so they can help you remember important activities during the school year.

## Maintaining Chapter Files and Chapter Notebooks

Some chapters may wish to maintain hardcopy files that can be accessed by the adviser, faculty council, and chapter officers. These files should be reviewed at the conclusion of the school year and items that don't need to be retained should be removed. To facilitate the development of the chapter filing system, consider the following list of topics and documents for your chapter files and notebooks:

- NHS Adviser position description
- Faculty council position description and duties
- NHS National Constitution and *NHS Handbook*
- Chapter Roster (Also retain digitally and on your NHS account on the NHS website.)
- Chapter bylaws
- Officer position descriptions and duties
- Annual chapter goals
- Chapter and school calendars
- Committee reports
- Induction ceremony scripts
- Meeting agendas, minutes, and reports
- Member responsibilities and obligations
- Mentoring and tutoring guidelines and procedures
- Project Ideas (character development, leadership promotion, scholarship promotion, chapter and individual service)
- A copy of the published selection procedures
- Fundraising project ideas and chapter financial records
- State NHS association records (if applicable)

## Obligations of Duly Inducted Members

Chapters are encouraged to provide new members with an outline of their membership obligations. This is in addition to the chapter bylaws, which all members and their parents should have access to review as needed. Keeping members and parents informed of their obligations, and providing this language helps to ensure the smooth operation of the chapter. A sample membership obligations letter is provided in the Adviser Resource Center.

Many chapters will outline all member obligations and include them either in the candidate's packet of information or in a new member packet, and then request (or require) that the student and parent or guardian sign the form affirming their understanding of all member obligations. That document will assist in supporting the school's position should a member be called up for disciplinary action for not meeting some or all the member obligations.

- **Maintaining standards (Article VIII):** Once selected, all members are expected to maintain the standards by which they were selected as published in the description of the local selection process.
- **Dues (Article IV):** Chapters may ask active members to pay annual chapter dues. The constitution limits this amount to \$20 per student per year. The inability of a member or their family to pay should not be a reason for discipline or dismissal of any member. Chapters are not required to charge dues, but once established, members can be required to meet this obligation. Chapters may make exceptions for hardships.
- **Meetings (Article XIII):** Chapters hold meetings and may require members to attend. The meeting schedule should be well publicized. In addition, chapter officers should work closely with the adviser to see that the agenda for all meetings is well-thought-out and planned.
- **Chapter Service Project(s) (Article XIV):** All chapters are required to sponsor a chapter service project and all members are expected to participate, if the project meets the criteria as outlined in the constitution.
- **Individual Service Projects(s) (Article XIV):** In addition to the chapter service project noted above, members are required to perform additional service according to their own talents and interests. The quantity of this service and the degree to which the chapter monitors this activity should be defined in the chapter bylaws.
- **Additional obligations (Article XVI):** If additional obligations exist for members of the chapter, such obligations should be spelled out in the local chapter bylaws for all members. It is recommended that a set of these bylaws be presented to each member yearly as a reminder of all member obligations.

## Induction Ceremony Recommendations

While the induction of members is a constitutional obligation, the planning and details of the ceremony are determined at the local level. Below are some considerations for conducting the induction ceremony. Additional guidance, including sample pledges and invitations, can be found in the Adviser Resource Center on the NHS website.

### INDUCTION OF MEMBERS

Induction of new members into the National Honor Society is an important event for the student, the chapter, the school, and the community. The ceremony, whether public or private, provides an excellent opportunity to dramatize the purposes of the chapter as found in Article I of the constitution. Because membership in NHS represents high levels of achievement, the induction ceremony itself should also reflect high standards.

### THE TRADITIONAL CEREMONY

The oldest and most common induction ceremony is the candle-lighting service. For a complete script, see the Adviser Resource Center at [nationalhonorsociety.org/](http://nationalhonorsociety.org/). After reviewing the script, take time to review all the following organizational suggestions.

### ORGANIZING THE LOCAL CEREMONY

The most common practice is for the officers and members of the local chapter to conduct the induction ceremony. In the case of the chapter's first induction, chapter members of a nearby school or faculty members may also participate. There is no requirement regarding the timing or the style of the ceremony other than the provisions from Article VIII. The national office has received suggestions that one special induction ceremony be developed and used by all chapters. However, the national office firmly believes that schools should create their own ceremonies and procedures. The only stipulation the national office has made regarding induction ceremonies is that they be "appropriate and impressive." As a result, there could be as many different ceremonies as there are chapters. The best advice comes from the constitution: Make it special for all involved.

Although the format of each chapter's induction program will vary with local traditions and procedures, each chapter should include in their script an emphasis on the

national criteria, namely scholarship, service, leadership, and character. A complete script, studied and rehearsed, is helpful to all participants. A checklist of props and supplies and other essential arrangements should augment the script.

As noted previously, initiation, blackballing, and hazing, or the like are expressly prohibited as part of any NHS activity. For this reason, the term induction ceremony is used in all national guidelines and is recommended for use at the local level instead of initiation to refer to the formal presentation of new members to the school and community.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING

**Use the logo.** Your chapter can use the national logo for its induction ceremony program. Chapters are encouraged to use the official emblems of the society in all official chapter functions, perhaps most importantly on the printed programs for induction ceremonies. All logo use should retain the honor that the Honor Societies stand for and preserve the reputation of the organizations by always displaying them with respect. Email the national office ([nhs@nationalhonorsociety.org](mailto:nhs@nationalhonorsociety.org)) with specific questions about logo use. For more information on the official guidelines for logo usage, see page 8 of this handbook.

**Carefully plan the details of the ceremony,** from the notification of inductees through the cleanup of the ceremony space. Utilize current chapter members in this entire process.

**Present new inductees with a token of membership.** This can be the NHS membership card, a membership certificate, an NHS pin, or any other suitable item. A formal printed program will also be a keepsake for students and parents.

**Register your new inductees.** Many chapters have a formal signing-in of the new members in a registry book that uses a new page for each induction ceremony. Chapter members can also create a student account on the NHS website. NHS advisers verify the student accounts and add the student to the chapter's online membership roster. This creates a permanent record of the chapter roster.

**Candle lighting.** Many chapters light candles to focus on the four criteria for membership. The national office is frequently asked what the "official" colors of the candles are, but there is no formal standard. It is often recommended to use the NHS colors of blue and gold along with your school colors as a starting point. Many chapters will use a

formal candelabra of four or five candles, lighting the other four from the central candle of knowledge or honor, when staging their ceremonies.

**History.** An important aspect of any induction ceremony is the telling of the chapter history—for whom the chapter was named, how long the chapter has been in existence, the names of famous chapter members, etc. Current chapter members can provide a great service to the chapter by researching this information in the school library, old yearbooks, or the local historical society.

**Speakers.** It is always appropriate to bring in a notable speaker to present remarks and challenges to the new inductees. Local dignitaries such as mayors or school board members are individuals who should be approached for remarks.

**Rehearsal.** Prior to any successful ceremony, it is important to rehearse. Rehearsal guarantees confidence in the presenters and the avoidance of any unnecessary glitches or time-consuming mistakes.

## SAMPLE INDUCTION CEREMONY AGENDA

Whether using the traditional ceremony or another script, the typical induction ceremony contains the following key features:

- Pre-ceremony entertainment: live or recorded music
- Processional/entrance of staff, members, and inductees
- Call to order by the presiding officer, chapter adviser, or principal
- Welcome message by the chapter president, adviser, principal, or other speaker
- Introduction of guest speaker
- Guest speaker
- Presentation of the pillars of NHS membership. This is often accompanied by the lighting of candles.
  - a. Scholarship
  - b. Service
  - c. Leadership
  - d. Character
- Honor Society Pledge taken by all new inductees
- New member introduction, candle lighting, certificate or pin presentation, signing of chapter registry (a roll call of new members; methods of recognition will vary)

- Special awards or recognition: Chapters often thank the faculty council, award honorary memberships, or recognize outgoing officers. Some chapters also install new officers after the induction of new members.
- Closing remarks by the principal or chapter adviser
- Adjourn to reception or banquet

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CEREMONY ORGANIZERS

**Required attendance.** Chapters can require attendance at the ceremony for all newly selected candidates. As previously mentioned, should circumstances such as illness or personal emergency or other legitimate extenuating circumstance prevent a candidate from attending the scheduled ceremony, an informal induction should be held for the candidate at a later date.

**Sharing images of your ceremony.** Utilize social media to share your chapter's induction ceremony and individual member celebrations.

**Additional resources.** Additional information about induction ceremonies is available in the Adviser Resource Center on the NHS website.

**Evaluation.** It is important to evaluate each year's ceremony. Evaluations can be conducted with the chapter officers. Input from current members who attended, and the new members (and their parents), is helpful. When completed, share the results of the evaluation with the principal, and seek their input.

Include in your evaluation some or all of the following:

- **Key resources.** Be sure to identify the vendors who provided supplies and materials for the ceremony.
- **Thank-yous.** Identify all of the individuals who should receive thank-you notes for their support of the event. Don't forget the school custodial staff for their help in setting up and cleaning up after the event.
- **Improvements.** Identify mistakes or areas of improvement and propose changes for future inductions.
- **Positives.** Be sure to highlight the strong points of the ceremony—what worked well for the attendees?

## RESOURCES FOR THE INDUCTION CEREMONY

- **The Adviser Resource Center:** for sample pledges, letters of invitation, and scripts.
- **The NHS Store:** for NHS induction supplies and membership products.

## Chapter Meetings

Holding chapter meetings is not a specific requirement for NHS, but meetings do provide a means for planning, teaching leadership skills, communicating to the membership, and generally making the adviser's job a little easier. Chapter bylaws should outline member responsibility for meeting attendance and the procedure to follow when an absence is necessary. All chapter meetings should be well planned with a thought-out agenda and operate according to some recognized method of procedure (e.g., Robert's Rules of Order). It is the responsibility of the chapter officers, with support of the chapter adviser, to plan and conduct all meetings in such a manner that members believe their time is well spent. The national office, while recognizing the importance of attending meetings, cautions against dismissal of members simply for poor meeting attendance. A member who fails to attend meetings should be counseled by the chapter adviser before disciplinary action is taken.

## SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA

Consider the model provided below for a meeting agenda. Always have a written agenda developed and distributed prior to the meeting so that chapter members know what their responsibilities are if they appear on the agenda, and what topics will be discussed at the meeting so that they can prepare ahead of time. Chapter officers, particularly the chapter president, are encouraged to work with the chapter adviser to prepare each meeting's agenda. Be sure to consult the agendas and minutes from previous meetings to determine those issues that merit continued consideration. Prior to the meeting:

- Distribute a copy of the agenda to all members or make it available for viewing.
- Identify a presiding officer for the meeting who consults with the chapter adviser to review the agenda items.
- Notify individuals with specific responsibilities at the upcoming meeting (e.g., secretary, treasurer, committee chairs, project chairs) of their duties for the meeting and when they appear on the agenda.
- Notify members about the meeting time and place.

## SAMPLE AGENDA OUTLINE

- I. Call to Order
- II. Roll Call/attendance procedures

- III. Minutes of the previous meeting (review and approval)
- IV. Treasurer's report\* (review and approval)
- V. Committee reports\* A. Standing committee reports B. Special committee reports
- VI. Old/unfinished business\*\*: carried over from the last or previous meetings
- VII. New business\*\*
- VIII. Other reports, announcements, and reminders of events or responsibilities, including but not limited to the announcement of the date and time of the next regularly scheduled meeting
- IX. Guest presentation or program topic for this meeting (location of this segment of the meeting agenda may depend on the nature of the content and the scheduling needs of the guest presenter, e.g., the principal, who may need to speak at the beginning of the meeting instead of the end)
- X. Adjournment\*

\* It is recommended that all reports be submitted in writing to the secretary by the end of the meeting, and that a time limit and/or format be given to each report-giver to ensure consistent and informative reporting.

\*\* In sections VI and VII above (old and new business), when motions are presented for consideration by the membership, it is strongly recommended that the chapter utilize the fundamental principles of meeting management from Robert's Rules of Order or other established systems of meeting management to consider each topic.

## Chapter Committees

Some chapters establish committees to further organize the functions of their chapter. Traditionally the chapter president appoints all committee chairpersons with prior approval of the chapter adviser or executive committee. A traditional structure identifies two types of committees: standing committees and special committees. Standing committees are those that the chapter can expect to use every year. An example might be the "induction ceremony committee" charged with designing and implementing the annual new member function. A special committee, also known as an ad hoc committee, can be appointed to handle events unique to a particular year.

An alternative structure for committees can be derived from the purposes of the Honor Society. This structure would incorporate four committees described as follows:

- **Scholarship:** provide mentoring and tutoring project supervision, honor roll postings, freshman motivation programs, etc.
- **Service:** fulfill the chapter's obligations to both school and community, organize and implement projects, assist in tracking service hours of members
- **Leadership:** supervise officer training, creation of a member's handbook, bylaws review and/or revision, etc.
- **Character:** develop and monitor a code of ethics, provide inspirational quotations for each meeting

Whatever structure you choose, committees are helpful tools to organize your chapter and to ensure involvement of all members. Officers can chair these groups or involve other leaders within the chapter to assume additional positions of responsibility.

## Service Project Planning

A well-thought-out and organized approach to projects is key to chapter success and to maintaining the standards of NHS. The constitution mandates that each chapter conducts a chapter service project each year (Article XIV). In addition, the national office suggests that chapters choose one or more additional major projects for the school year. Each member would be expected to contribute to those projects.

Once projects (and other chapter goals) are developed, seek the support of the administration and faculty. Determine whether each project is required to be submitted for formal approval by the principal or even the local school board. Publishing a calendar of proposed activities for the school year for the faculty to review may solicit comments as well as resources for the chapter to use when undertaking the project, including volunteer helpers. Clearly identifying the nature of the need that the project is responding to and then determining the goal(s) of the activity to share with others will prove valuable.

Some additional questions to consider are included in the "Twelve W's of Project Planning"—a helpful tool to use when starting the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating your activities. The chapter's executive committee is encouraged to see that chapter projects are scheduled or arranged so those members who have jobs or family responsibilities are able to participate. No member who sincerely wishes to fulfill the service obligation should be prevented from doing so because of scheduling conflicts. In some cases, scheduling conflicts will be unavoidable.

The chapter leadership can consider multiple projects to allow members to choose from a menu of events to fulfill their service obligation in a timely manner.

## TWELVE W'S OF PROJECT PLANNING

Planning any activity requires careful thought and preparation. Before stepping into action, be sure that you can answer the following questions.

1. What are you planning to do?
2. Why do you want to do this project?
3. When and where will the activity take place?
4. Who will benefit from the project?
5. What staff member(s) will need to approve the project?
6. What funds are needed?
7. When will the basic planning be done?
8. What committees are necessary?
9. What kind of publicity is needed?
10. Who deserves a special thank-you?
11. Was the project worthwhile?
12. What's next? Where do we go from here?

## ADDITIONAL PROJECT IDEAS

The NHS website includes the National Student Project Database, containing project ideas submitted regularly by members. Visit [nationalhonorsociety.org/projects](http://nationalhonorsociety.org/projects) and share this link with your chapter officers or committee chairs as a resource. The weekly *Honor Society News* is another resource for chapter service ideas. Schools that complete particularly noteworthy projects should consider submitting them to the National Student Project Database.

## FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

NHS and NJHS chapters are not required in any national policies to raise money for any reason or cause. Each chapter is required, as noted in the constitution, to pay an annual affiliation fee to the national office, but even that payment is not required to come from the chapter's treasury. The hope is that the school budget sets aside funds for this payment each year.

Even in the case of chapter dues, no required fee is called for, but a national limit is set. The constitution indicates that chapters may charge dues, but that the amount is not to exceed \$20 per member per year.

Many chapters engage in fundraising to purchase supplies for their induction ceremonies or to pay for insignia. In addition, a large number of chapters participate in fundraising activities to collect donations for a local, national, or international charity of their choice. It is crucial that every chapter adviser consult with the principal, school bookkeeper, or activities director regarding the policies and regulations that exist regarding fundraising activities by the chapter. Many states have very specific rules for school-based fundraising. The safe handling of all monies collected in these activities is a perennial concern for the school, and local officials can provide the best guidance in this area. In general, all projects that involve the raising or collection of money should have the formal approval of the school principal, at a minimum, before being undertaken.

Many chapters come from small communities or areas where the socioeconomic status of the students and their families prohibit making large financial donations. Alternative ways of giving exist through service projects at school and in the community, where all chapters can fulfill their constitutionally mandated annual chapter service project without having to be concerned with collecting monies for donations. This tradition of service has existed from the beginning for both NHS and NJHS and continues to be a source of pride for all involved in the programs. With more schools calling upon all student groups to be self-supporting combined with larger goals for charitable contributions, consider the following points as you examine your chapter's ability to raise funds:

- Evaluate your financial needs. Do not fundraise unless there is a supportable goal for the activity.
- Visit the National Student Project Database at [nationalhonorsociety.org/projects](http://nationalhonorsociety.org/projects) for ideas.
- Consider raising money to give as scholarships to deserving senior members.
- Establish a financial goal for your service projects through which you also contribute an amount in support of the organization (e.g., the local food bank, soup kitchen, homeless shelter) in addition to the work your members undertake on their behalf each year.
- Establish a student store or concession stand with staff from the chapter to provide ongoing revenue.
- Create an advisory committee of businesspersons and parents to develop creative and enterprising fundraising ideas.

# Appendix

## History of NHS

The National Honor Society (NHS) stands as a beacon of intellectual rigor, a celebration of service, a paragon of leadership, and a champion of character.

In 1921, amidst an educational landscape caught between the balancing act of athletics and academics, Dr. Edward Rynearson, principal of the Fifth Avenue High School in Pittsburgh, PA, had a profound vision. He saw the future of an organization that would not only ignite the flames of scholarship but also fan the sparks of service, leadership, and character in the young minds of our nation.

With the support of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), Rynearson's dream turned into reality, and on March 1, 1921, the National Honor Society was born. It was an initiative that changed the narrative of American education. NHS, in its founding resolution, established the notion that high schools must be the wellspring of democracy, and anything that jeopardized this was not just a roadblock to education but inimical to public welfare.

Over the century that followed, NHS has grown into a robust institution, evolving and adapting to the changing times while holding steadfast to its founding principles. Today, NHS stands tall with more than 16,000 active chapters spanning the length and breadth of every state, territories, and even overseas. It has profoundly impacted the lives of countless young individuals, fostering the four key pillars of scholarship, service, leadership, and character. The resolution also proclaimed that organizations should not only satisfy a social need but also “be devoted to the purposes of worth to the individual and of profit to the school.”

NHS expanded its reach in 1929 by establishing the National Junior Honor Society (NJHS), giving middle school students an opportunity to benefit from this prestigious institution. The momentum continued in 2008 when NASSP, in collaboration with the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), created the National Elementary Honor Society, extending the opportunity to our youngest of achievers.

The power of NHS lies in its unique model that allows a high degree of flexibility and autonomy for local chapters to innovate and evolve while staying true to the NHS National Constitution. Each chapter becomes a creative engine, promoting Honor Society standards while nurturing a culture of initiative, resourcefulness, and ingenuity.

Guiding the day-to-day operations of NHS is the dedicated team at NASSP, while the organization's strategic oversight is provided by the NASSP Board of Directors. This synergy ensures the legacy of Rynearson's vision is carried forward, impacting lives and fostering excellence, one student at a time.

## HIGHLIGHTS IN HONOR SOCIETY HISTORY

- 1916** The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is formed.
- 1921** The National Honor Society is formed by NASSP; the first chapter established at the Fifth Avenue School, Pittsburgh, PA.
- 1923** First edition of the *NHS Handbook* published by NASSP.
- 1929** Formation of the National Junior Honor Society by NASSP.
- 1934** Creation of the first student activities publication from NASSP, *Student Leader*.
- 1946** Ten winners are announced for the first National Honor Society Scholarships.
- 1973** NASSP opens its new headquarters in Reston, VA, in the new Center for Educational Associations.
- 2008** Formation of the National Elementary Honor Society by NASSP and NAESP.

## Legal Memorandum

**NASSP Legal Memorandum: Selection, Dismissal, and Discipline: Legal Guidelines for NHS®** ©2019 NASSP. First published, Fall 2003. Updated by Foresight Law + Policy, Washington, D.C., May 2019.

### INTRODUCTION

Grades, competitive school activities, selective course placement, and selective honors encourage and reward students and may help them obtain postsecondary opportunities. Given the benefits of NHS, students—or more often their parents or guardians—who do not receive desired results may challenge a local chapter's selection process and operational decisions. When disagreements arise, a principal's first inclination may be to forego distinguishing students, or to reduce the chapter's selection standards. Instead, local leaders overseeing chapter activities should continue to evaluate students, using well-defined procedures and professional practices to place themselves and the selection process beyond reproach. This memorandum aims to help local NHS chapters—including principals, faculty councils, and chapter advisers—strengthen their selection and operational processes by highlighting common legal issues they should consider in consultation with their local legal counsel.

### NHS MEMBERSHIP: A PRIVILEGE, NOT A RIGHT

In the handful of legal challenges to local chapters' selection decisions, courts have consistently held that membership in NHS and other selective organizations is a privilege, not an entitlement. As such, there has been no recognition of a property or liberty interest in membership selection that would give rise to constitutional due process rights. In *Miller v. Goldberg* (1981) (citing *Board of Regents v. Roth*, 1972), a New York trial court analogized nonselection for NHS to the nonrenewal of an untenured teacher; like the untenured teacher, the nonselected student has only "an abstract need or desire" to be offered membership and not a legitimate claim. In *Karnstein v. Pewaukee School Board* (1983), a U.S. District Court in Wisconsin endorsed this view, noting that though membership in NHS was "a valuable medal ... when applying for admission to some colleges," it is an "honor" rather than a legal "entitlement" and therefore does not warrant "the requirements of due process of law." This rule is so well established

that in *Dangler v. Yorktown Central Schools* (1991), a U.S. District Court in New York not only rejected a student's challenge to his nonselection, it sanctioned the plaintiff with a \$60,000 penalty, in the form of attorney's fees, for bringing a frivolous lawsuit.

Since the NHS selection process does not involve a liberty or property interest, the due process clauses of the U.S. Constitution's Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments do not apply. Once a student has been inducted, however, they may gain, in some jurisdictions, a limited property right to membership as a matter of state law. Thus, Article X, Sec. 4 of the NHS Constitution entitles NHS members to due process if they are going to be deprived of their membership. Due process is a very broad concept. At a minimum it requires the individual whose liberty or property is in jeopardy to be provided notice and an opportunity to be heard (*Fuentes v. Shevin*, 1972).

Returning to the untenured teacher analogy used by the court in *Miller v. Goldberg*, as tenured teachers are entitled to certain due process protections before dismissal, so too are NHS members (see also *Warren v. National Assoc. of Secondary School Principals*, 1974; *Ector County Independent Sch. Dist. v. Hopkins*, 1974).

### SELECTIVITY WITHOUT PREJUDICE

Honor societies are meant to be selective, but they must never discriminate. Chapters must avoid using improper criteria when determining which students should be invited to join a team, enroll in advanced courses, or be offered membership into honorary groups. Schools need not, however, avoid differentiating and distinguishing students to recognize and encourage student achievements. When local NHS chapters' standards are reduced to avoid conflict, programs and honors lose their value. Therefore appropriate and lawful selectivity is essential to any useful selection process.

### ENSURING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Prejudice has no place in the NHS selection process, nor should it be a factor in the selection process of other student activities. Federal laws enforced by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of

Education.<sup>i</sup> Prohibited sex discrimination includes harassment directed at lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students, and 13 states have laws that fully protect LGBTQ students from discrimination.<sup>ii</sup> Prohibited race, color, or national origin discrimination, protects students of any religion from discrimination, including harassment, based on a student's actual or perceived: (1) shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, or (2) citizenship or residency in a country with a dominant religion or distinct religious identity (see for example, OCR Case Resolution: Fremont Unified School District, CA (09-13-5001)). The U.S. Department of Justice also separately enforces federal laws that expressly prohibit religious discrimination in schools.<sup>iii</sup>

The *NHS Handbook's* sample bylaws include a suggested paragraph regarding nondiscrimination policies for chapters. Before adopting the model policy, chapters should consult with their school's principal and local legal counsel to ensure that policy aligns with state and local requirements.

Furthermore, other characteristics not related to the NHS criteria, such as a student's political views, socioeconomic status, or family status, should also never be used by a local chapter to prevent a student from obtaining or maintaining NHS membership. The faculty council should also not base its decisions on rumor or hearsay. The council should rely on students' official school records, information submitted by students (generally not school records), and, whenever possible, firsthand faculty observations.

## **SELECTION: IDENTIFYING THE CRITERIA**

Every decision to select, discipline, or dismiss a student from a selective student activity must be based on the standards for membership. The only way that such decisions can be fair is if they are based on clearly defined standards that are published and presented to the students and their parents or guardians. Though subjectivity may play an important part in the selection, discipline, and dismissal of members, a transparent and objective selection process will enhance the program's integrity and make the process less vulnerable to criticism.

The NHS Constitution identifies four criteria to be used in member selection: (1) scholarship; (2) service; (3) leadership; and (4) character. Each factor involves subjective assessments.

Thanks to student cumulative grade point averages, scholarship requires the least subjective review by the faculty

council; while leadership and service are more subjective, they can still be quantified and considered with relative objectivity. However, character judgments are subjective by nature; therefore, it is not surprising that most controversies result from issues involving character.

The faculty council may reduce the subjectivity of their character evaluation by relying on documented evaluations of student performance. Such evaluations may include school records, character or conduct ratings on report cards, professional records of individual faculty members, comments based on professional evaluations, discipline actions, and faculty evaluation forms.

## **HOW FAR BACK?**

While NHS honors outstanding scholarship, service, leadership, and character, it is important to remember that students are developing and learning—they will make mistakes and are expected to mature. This context raises the question of how far the faculty council should look when examining a student's past. Courts will likely leave this question to the faculty council's discretion, as long as the council's decision is applied consistently. Note, however, that the *NHS Handbook* prevents faculty councils from reviewing a student's behavior prior to high school and states that "it is advisable to consider the whole child as found in a cumulative report of behavior while in high school." When making its assessment, the faculty council should consider the severity of prior shortcomings and evidence of improvement. Most importantly, the council must apply the same standard to all students.

## **COUNTING CHARACTER BEYOND THE SCHOOL**

NHS is meant to honor exceptional students for their achievements. In doing so, the faculty council will often consider achievements—both in and out of school—when making selection, discipline, and dismissal decisions. Courts have consistently recognized NHS's right to consider students' behavior in the community outside of school when selecting, disciplining, and dismissing members. Whether or not to consider students' behavior outside of school is left to local chapters' discretion. If local chapters choose to consider students' behavior beyond the school walls, then they should notify students and parents or guardians that student behavior in and out of school will be evaluated.

In *Farver v. Board of Education* (1999), students were suspended from participation in school activities, including NHS, when they were caught attending a weekend party

where alcohol was served to minors. The U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland held that alcohol abuse was of sufficient concern to school officials to justify their action, and thus the court refused to prevent the suspensions from school activities. There have been several cases like *Farver*, dealing with students' off-campus alcohol consumption; in each case, the court recognized underage drinking as an offense reasonably within the scope of NHS punishment (see also *Piekosz-Murphy v. Board of Education of Comm. High School Dist. No. 230*, 2012). In *Warren v. National Assoc. of Secondary School Principals* (1974), a student was dismissed from NHS after a faculty council member witnessed him drinking alcohol off campus at a nonschool social outing. Though the court held for the student, it did so not because the offense was not punishable, but because there were inconsistencies and procedural faults in the faculty council's response to underage drinking.

A less-clear legal issue arises when juvenile criminal records are used to assess a candidate's or member's character. Because juvenile records are generally confidential, their use by the faculty council raises concerns. The legality or illegality of the faculty council using juvenile records varies by state, but because such records are generally confidential it is prudent for local chapters to refrain from allowing their use and to base decisions on other information.

## DRUG TESTING

In an effort to fight drug abuse, some school districts have instituted mandatory, suspicion-less drug testing for students participating in student activities, so long as state law allows such testing. In *Board of Education v. Earls* (2002), the U.S. Supreme Court found that drug testing of students who participate in competitive student activities does not violate students' Fourth Amendment protection from unreasonable search and seizure. Allowing drug testing of students in all student activities, this case expanded an earlier Supreme Court ruling that allowed student athletes to be tested (see *Vernonia School Dist. 47J v. Acton*, 1995). The rules regarding drug tests for students are likely to continue to develop given *Board of Education v. Earls*. NHS chapters should not implement drug-testing programs independent of school policies, and school officials should consult local legal counsel when considering such programs.

## FREE EXPRESSION

Where the U.S. Constitution protects students' expression, schools must not prevent their expression or retaliate against students for engaging in free speech. Courts have given schools enormous leeway with regard to restricting speech in order to facilitate order. When student expression is not disruptive, however, it is generally protected. For example, the Supreme Court has decided that the U.S. Constitution protects students who choose not to recite the Pledge of Allegiance (*West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 1943). This protection extends to students' participation in school-sponsored organizations. See for example, *Sagehorn v. Independent School Dist. No. 728*, 2015, in which the court found that the student adequately pleaded a violation of their First Amendment rights when the student was suspended for a website post and forced to withdraw it.

The application of First Amendment protections to student activities was illuminated by the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut in a case regarding a student's refusal to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. In that case, the court ordered a student's induction into NHS when evidence led the court to believe that the student's nonselection was in retaliation for her refusal to pledge allegiance to the flag (*Byars v City of Waterbury*, 1997). The case involved a high school senior who refused to recite the Pledge of Allegiance because she believed that there was no justice for Black Americans. The faculty council responded to claims of retaliation by citing disciplinary issues, but the court concluded that the limited incidents cited by the committee were directly related to the school's policy of sending students who refused to recite the Pledge to the principal's office. The court cited the student's exemplary record and school involvement, and noted that prior to her nonselection, neither she nor her parents were ever informed of any problems with her conduct. The court concluded that the concerns cited by the committee were pretextual and that the student's nonselection was based on her refusal to recite the Pledge.

Plaintiffs, however, do not always find such success. In *Dangler v. Yorktown* (1991), the plaintiff claimed that he was denied membership in NHS due to his father's outspoken criticism of the school. The court rejected the claim when the plaintiff was unable to provide evidence that the father's comments were part of the faculty council's consideration after the council provided other reasons for his non selection. Selection, discipline, and dismissal should never be used to suppress students' constitutional rights or to retaliate for the exercise of those rights.

The best defense against false claims of retaliation is to adopt and implement well-defined procedures and criteria for selection and to be willing and able to provide reasonable, constitutional explanations for nonselection.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION**

As explained above, federal law prohibits excluding students with disabilities from NHS consideration because of their disability; neither must they be given an unfair advantage. When a student meets NHS standards in every way except that prevented by a disability, they should not be disqualified from consideration for honorary membership (Article VIII, Sec. 3 of the NHS Constitution). As the *NHS Handbook* explains, honorary membership is available to students who represent the ideals of NHS but who are disqualified from consideration through no fault of their own. Examples of individuals who should be considered for honorary membership include students with disabilities that prevent their qualification and foreign exchange students who, because of their exchange program, fail to meet the attendance requirements. Honorary membership should still be selective.

In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) investigated a parent's claim that his son was denied induction into NHS based on his disability (Hopewell, 1999). The student received a letter sent to academically eligible students inviting him to submit the appropriate information forms to be considered for membership. At the start of the selection process, the parent submitted a letter to the faculty council explaining that his son was being treated for "abnormalities in the thoracic spine" and, as a result, his activities would be limited. After reviewing the student's activities and teacher surveys, the faculty council elected not to offer him membership. The student was given a letter from the adviser congratulating him on his scholastic accomplishments but informing him that he did not meet all of the standards for selection.

In response to inquiries by the student's father, the principal interviewed members of the faculty council and relayed to the father the student's failure to satisfy the leadership and service requirements. After further inquiry, the father was informed that his son "refused to participate in any class discussions, would not sit in the circle for seminar discussion, and would not make any oral presentations." It was also explained that the student was absent from club meetings without providing reasons and had listed membership in the chess club, though he had attended only one meeting. OCR interviewed school

officials and concluded that the faculty council did not consider the student's disability during the selection process and did not even realize his condition until they received the father's letter.

In addition, the faculty council considered the student for honorary membership, but found that he did not meet the service, leadership, and character criteria. The father claimed that his son was unable to meet the NHS criteria because of his disability, but he was unable to provide OCR with a list of "relevant activities that the student was unable to perform that would meet the NHS criteria." Therefore, OCR concluded that the student was not denied membership based on his disability. OCR did ask school officials to include a nondiscrimination disclaimer in letters to parents to inform them that the process did not involve discrimination. Schools should include the nondiscrimination disclaimer in all letters regarding NHS and may consider honorary membership for students whose disability prevents them from satisfying the standards for selection despite the student's representation of the four NHS criteria: scholarship, service, leadership, and character.

## **PREGNANCY**

A faculty council must never disqualify a student for NHS membership based on the student's pregnancy, parental status, or sex stereotypes. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 prohibits discrimination based on sex, which includes pregnancy. Title IX guidance, published by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, makes clear it is "illegal for schools to exclude a pregnant student from participating in any part of an educational program. This prohibition applies to ... extracurricular programs, interscholastic sports, honor societies..." ("Supporting the Academic Success of Pregnant and Parenting Students," page 5).

There have been several court cases involving NHS chapters that unlawfully tried to use pregnancy as evidence of premarital sex. Courts have consistently said that using outside of wedlock pregnancy as a character measure without also making efforts to penalize paternity outside of marriage creates a gender bias against female students. In *Cazares v. Barber* (Case No. CIV-90-0128-TUC-ACM, slip op. (D. Ariz. May 31, 1990), the United States District Court for the District of Arizona determined that a pregnant female student was not admitted into NHS because she was pregnant while a male student who was an unwed father was admitted. Finding this to violate Title IX, the court ordered

that the NHS induction ceremony not take place without the student. The school authorities then cancelled the entire induction ceremony to avoid admitting her. Subsequently, holding that the school acted in bad faith, the court ordered the school to pay the plaintiff's attorneys' fees (*Schweitzer*, 1999). In the most recent of such cases, the federal court in *Chapman v. Grant Cnty. Sch. Dist.*, 30 F. Supp., 2d 975 (E.D. Ky. 1998), the court issued an injunction requiring NHS to invite two students who met requirements into the chapter after the NHS chapter discriminated against the students based upon their pregnancies in violation of Title IX. The court said "that the defendants have failed to articulate a legitimate credible non-discriminatory reason for their NHS pregnancy policy. The reasons articulated for the exclusion of the plaintiffs are vague, conclusory and undocumented."

### **PROCEDURE: IT'S THE JOURNEY, NOT THE DESTINATION, THAT COUNTS**

Generally, courts are reluctant to intervene in school matters when intervention means second-guessing professional educators' evaluations (*Schweitzer*, 1999). Courts are more likely to intervene, however, when the procedure used is challenged.

Therefore, the most important legal consideration for selective school organizations is the process.

As with most selective activities, induction in NHS is a privilege, not a right, and as such does not warrant due process. Students, parents, or guardians will expect, however, and should receive, fair treatment. Fair treatment can be achieved through the thoughtful creation and professional execution of procedures designed to ensure fairness. Both during and after the selection process, transparency and clarity are central to the process's integrity. Ensuring public access to selection procedures will help to ensure that families understand the reasons for nonselection, and it will contribute to a well-managed and trusted process.

The NHS Constitution and *NHS Handbook* provide certain procedures for the selection, discipline, and dismissal of members that must be followed by every chapter. The *NHS Handbook* also provides guidance regarding possible additional procedures. The principal, adviser, and faculty council should read these materials carefully and ensure their practices adhere to the NHS Constitution.

## **INFORMATION FORMS**

A simple, but extremely important, step that chapters should take to prevent complications is a matter of terminology. The term "application" can carry with it many complex legal implications that are inappropriate in the context of NHS membership. To avoid binding themselves to unnecessary restraints, chapters should more accurately identify the information provided by students being considered by using the term "information forms."

## **TEACHER EVALUATIONS OF STUDENTS**

Courts have consistently upheld the professional use of teachers' evaluations of students in the selection process. A U.S. District Court in Arkansas has held on several occasions that teacher evaluations, including anonymous evaluations, do not violate the U.S. Constitution (*Bull v. Dardanelle Public School Dist.*, 1990; *Price v. Young*, 1983). In states where anonymous recommendations pass judicial scrutiny, courts will generally defer to the discretion of school officials. Nonetheless, the *NHS Handbook* prohibits using anonymous evaluations, because they may raise questions about the selection process's integrity or violate state law. In Texas, for example, state law prohibits anonymous recommendations. The Texas Commissioner of Education ruled in 2002 that because anonymous evaluations prevent parents from receiving full information regarding their child's activities—which they are entitled to by the Texas Education Code—such evaluations are in violation of the Code and therefore not allowed (*Byard v. Clear Creek Indep. School Dist.*, 2002).

## **INFORMATION: REVELATION BREEDS RESOLUTION**

The NHS selection process should be transparent and accessible. Under the NHS Constitution, Article IX, Sec. 4, the selection process must be published and available to students, parents or guardians, and faculty. To the greatest extent possible, the selection criteria and process should be printed in the student handbook. Describing NHS standards and selection process in school newsletters, newspapers, or other publications is a simple way to reach interested students, parents, or guardians. Informed students and parents or guardians help to ensure fewer surprising results.

NHS encourages chapters to provide inquiring students and their parents or guardians with reasons for nonselection. By providing families with an explanation, NHS may facilitate students' improvement in areas where they fail to

meet criteria and help to improve their chances for future selection. Disclosure also protects the integrity of the decision by demonstrating valid reasons for nonselection. By responding to requests for explanation by students and their parents or guardians, schools can prevent discrimination and assuage other concerns. Unless the discussion is arbitrary, capricious, or without a rational basis, however, federal or state laws generally do not require chapters to justify selection decisions. For example, in New York, admission decisions are left to the local board of education and faculty. However, the New York State Education Department has set aside decisions deemed arbitrary, capricious and without rational basis (see *Appeal of Torre-Tasso*, 1994). Other administrative decisions in New York have found that if a local chapter has published selection procedures in place, a rationale for nonselection does not need to be given (*Appeal of Guardi*, 2003). Faculty councils, advisers, and principals should determine what level of information to disclose in accordance with state and local laws and their chapter bylaws and consistently apply that decision. It can be as simple as telling the student and parent or guardian which of the four criteria was not met, or more substantive information may be shared. Like selection decisions, the process for responding to nonselection inquiries must be consistent and transparent.

### **WRITING: IF YOU WRITE IT, DO IT; AND IF YOU DO IT, WRITE IT**

Often courts look to NHS governing documents to determine the responsibilities of an adviser, faculty council, and principal. Therefore, when chapters document their procedures, they are binding themselves to their own expectations. For example, in *Warren v. National Assoc. of Secondary School Principals* (1974), a teacher caught a student drinking outside of school, which led the faculty council to dismiss the student from NHS. However, the faculty council did not follow the procedures outlined in the NHS Constitution and in their own chapter bylaws. Because of this failure, the court found that the student's dismissal violated his right to due process. Thus, schools should be deliberate when establishing and changing bylaws, because what is written will often bind them. The binding nature of NHS documents might lead some to consider putting very little of their procedure in writing. Though writing may at times constrain the chapter, it also serves as one of the chapter's greatest protectors. Given that courts generally avoid questioning the judgment and discretion of school officials, the bulk of courts' review is concentrated on whether the school followed procedures.

Just as courts look to NHS documents for guidance as to what should have been done when they are not followed, they also may look to the documents as the rule of law that the chapter must follow. In such cases, if the chapter follows its own procedures and the procedures are fundamentally fair, then the court will not intervene. Further, clear procedures guide effective and consistent decision-making.

### **RECORDS AND STUDENT PRIVACY**

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) governs the handling of education records. FERPA entitles students and their parents or guardians to access the student's education records and requires schools to maintain the confidentiality of student information in these records. However, in most cases, NHS records—such as teacher recommendations and faculty council notes—are not, and should not be, education records as stipulated by federal law. OCR has ruled that NHS documents that are not made part of the permanent school record are not covered by FERPA (Letter regarding Complaint #04-01-1034, March 27, 2001). Therefore, the applicability of FERPA will depend on if the NHS records are maintained by the school and directly relate to the student. (See for example, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Education Laws and Regulations, stating that any written material produced or introduced during the selection process to NHS becomes part of the student record if it individually identifies the student and is kept by the school.)

Because NHS records generally do not, and should not, become permanent school records, FERPA has limited application to the retention of NHS records (see *Protecting Student Privacy*; 34 C.F.R. § 99.3 et. seq.) The Department of Education's Family Policy Compliance Office has held that it is not a violation of FERPA to destroy evaluations if there are no pending requests for review of them at the time of destruction (Letter to Coleman, Family Policy Compliance Office, August 7, 1998). Therefore, so long as state and local laws and policies do not require the school to retain such records, school officials may destroy teacher evaluation forms used in the NHS selection process if there are no pending requests for the documents.

If chapters choose to do this, they should maintain a record sufficient to assist the principal or other authoritative body in any review of the faculty council's decision. This may include a tally of points, if a point system is used, or a summary of the areas of deficiency that prevented admission. It

also may be worthwhile for schools to put a timeframe on appeals. For example, if no appeal is filed within a reasonable time after notice of nonselection, then the school may destroy documents used in the selection process. Students and parents or guardians should be informed of such an appeal policy before selection decisions are made.

While FERPA does not necessarily protect documents accumulated in the selection process, state laws and local school system policy requiring record retention and disclosure vary. For example, Texas law considers NHS records, including teacher recommendations, as education records; therefore, NHS records must be retained by the school (see Texas Education Code 26.004(b)(9)). In Texas, parents may even have access to notes that members of the faculty write to themselves about a parent or student. In *Lett v. Klein Independent School Dist.* (1996), the school system was ordered to deliver to a father a teacher's notes regarding complaints concerning his child's grade. Texas is not the norm, but principals and faculty councils should consult state law and local policy to determine how to handle records.

## **DUE PROCESS FOR DISCIPLINE AND DISMISSAL**

The NHS Constitution gives the chapter the power to discipline and dismiss members for failing to maintain NHS standards of conduct. Unlike member selection, discipline and dismissal require at least minimal due process. The NHS Constitution provides members due process by requiring that members receive notice of dismissal proceedings and an opportunity to be heard prior to the faculty council's vote on the case in question. While many of the rights associated with criminal or even civil due process do not apply to the discipline or dismissal of members, the faculty council must exercise basic elements of fairness that include written notice of the reasons for the proposed action; time to prepare an explanation of any mitigating circumstances; and an opportunity to present that explanation to the faculty council. Written notice of a final decision to dismiss should be sent to the student, or their parent or guardian, and to the principal. After being dismissed, a student may appeal the decision first to the principal and thereafter under the same rules pertaining to any other disciplinary action used in the school district.

Dismissal from NHS is never automatic. Even if a student falls below the criteria for selection, dismissal does not automatically follow. The student's right to a hearing, as outlined in Article X Sec. IV of the NHS Constitution, must be applied. Once dismissed, a former member may

never be reconsidered for admission. It is important to remember, however, that National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) members do not automatically become NHS members. Thus, the faculty council may elect to not select a student despite their membership in NJHS; in such a case, the student would remain eligible for future admission into NHS.

The adviser should periodically review the standing of members for compliance with NHS standards. Any member who falls below the standards should be warned in writing of the nature of the violation and the possible consequences of not improving. If a student's behavior deteriorates, advisers should inform students of their concerns and allow them time to improve. A single serious infraction, however, may warrant consideration of dismissal without providing an opportunity for improvement. The NHS Constitution in no way prevents a chapter from dismissing a student after a single infraction when the student's behavior is a gross violation

of NHS standards, school rules, or the law. To be fair, advisers should make students aware of what is expected of them. This goal is best achieved by discussing expectations with members and informing members' parents or guardians, in writing, of the expectations and obligations placed on members.

For minor offenses, the adviser or faculty council may choose to discipline a member rather than pursue dismissal. Discipline measures may include suspension from NHS activities or restriction of member privileges. For example, members may be denied the privilege of wearing the NHS cord at graduation. Certain NHS benefits may not be denied to members even if they are not in good standing. For example, NHS members must be recognized at graduation as members of NHS, and their NHS membership must be included on applications and resumes. These benefits may only be revoked by a member's dismissal or the member's resignation.

## **LIABILITY**

Public school officials are generally entitled to limited immunity from liability under the doctrine of sovereign immunity. However, because the doctrine of sovereign immunity for state and local government employees is a matter of state law, the extent of this immunity varies by jurisdiction. In most states, government employees are immune from liability for acts involving the exercise of their judgment or discretion performed within the scope of their employ-

ment; however, malicious and reckless acts are usually not protected. Though sovereign immunity may prevent liability, it will not always prevent the cost of litigation. There is also the danger that a court will misconceive the nature of NHS as a Montana court did when it concluded that teachers participating in the NHS selection process were not acting in their capacity as employees of the school district (*Becky v. Butte-Silver Bow Sch. Dist. No. 1*, 1995). Because sovereign immunity only applies when the defendant acted in their capacity as a government employee, this case may jeopardize immunity for school officials. However, sovereign immunity was not at issue in this case, and had it been, the court may have been more cautious in analyzing the role of the teachers involved. It is unlikely that a court considering sovereign immunity would come to the same conclusion. For all schools, both private and public, the best way to avoid litigation is to make your procedures beyond reproach and your practices professional.

## **RULES TO REMEMBER**

The good news is that contrary to popular perception, frivolous lawsuits usually fail in court. Therefore, if school officials follow the procedures detailed in the NHS Constitution and *NHS Handbook* and create and implement procedures conforming to state and local laws, then matters of selection, discipline, and dismissal will generally be left out of the courts and remain in the school. Courts typically understand that school officials know students and issues in education better than judges do; therefore, if school officials avoid constitutional issues and abide by federal, state, and local laws, courts will usually defer to the discretion of those in the school. Schools should simply strive for fundamental fairness—and the best way to ensure fairness is through the establishment and execution of fair procedures.

If principals are interested in creating an NHS chapter in their school, or if principals or NHS advisers have questions regarding the NHS Constitution, *NHS Handbook*, or other NHS issues, they should contact NHS via email at [nhs@nationalhonorsociety.org](mailto:nhs@nationalhonorsociety.org) or visit the NHS website at [nationalhonorsociety.org](http://nationalhonorsociety.org).

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- 34 C.F.R. §99.3 (Definitions).

## ENDNOTES

i Discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination Act of 1975.

ii California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington, as well as the District of Columbia provide protection on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, while Wisconsin provides protection on the basis of sexual orientation only.

iii Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits the denial of educational opportunities on the basis of religion.



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