

MATHCOUNTS®

Inspiring Excellence Through Math

August 17, 2010

Dear MATHCOUNTS Supporter,

By now, many of you are aware that MATHCOUNTS has altered its eligibility rules for the Competition Program. Starting in the 2010-2011 school year, small schools, home schools and virtual schools will not be allowed to combine to form teams at MATHCOUNTS competitions, but will instead need to register as individuals. Unfortunately, there has been some miscommunication about the actual impact of this rule change and what it means for the participants. We would like to clarify these misconceptions and provide the rationale for the rule change.

Honorary Chairman

William H. Swanson

Chairman and CEO
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Misconception # 1: MATHCOUNTS is now banning homeschoolers from participating in MATHCOUNTS.

This is completely false. Home school students still will be able to take part in MATHCOUNTS and compete as individuals. The only thing this will preclude them from participating in is the Team Round at the Chapter and State Competitions. While this round is an exciting component for the students who take part, the reality is that most of the students who participate in MATHCOUNTS do not get the opportunity to take part in these Team Rounds. Last year, there were over 108,000 students who participated in the MATHCOUNTS Competition Program. Of those, only 20% were able to participate in the Team Round at the Chapter Competition. This is due to the fact that many students who advance to the Chapter Competition do so as individuals as well as the fact that over 65% of students who participate at the school level do not advance to the Chapter Competition at all.

Additionally, participating as an individual will not preclude further advancement in the competition since individuals, as well as teams, are eligible to advance from the Chapter to the State Competition. At the State Competition, advancement to the National Competition is based solely on individual performance – there is no advancement to Nationals based on team performance. Therefore, this change will not affect any student's ability to reach and compete at the highest levels of MATHCOUNTS.

Misconception #2: There was no reason for this change.

The change was made in direct response to challenges that undermined both the fairness of the Competition Program and the ability of our volunteers to run this program on a nationwide basis.

In recent years, there were multiple instances when the ability of small school, home school, and virtual school participants to combine to form a team has resulted in the creation of teams that were in direct violation of our rules for participation. In other cases, teams were formed that technically adhered to the stated rules and procedures, but violated the spirit of fair competition in this event. The concern over these instances was voiced to MATHCOUNTS by the other participants, as well as volunteers around the country attempting to conduct fair and successful competitions.

At the same time, additional difficulties in administering the program were raised with the expansion of different types of non-traditional schooling options. Virtual schools, cyber schools and home schools in different states each have different criteria for a student to be considered an official representative of that school. With each year, it became more time and resource intensive to ensure that all participants representing these schools were fairly doing so in the same manner that the brick and mortar school participants had to.

In an attempt to address these concerns, steps were taken in recent years to address these situations. MATHCOUNTS altered the forms used for competition registration and made modifications to our internal processes to try to ensure fair participation. But despite our best efforts, this past year we still had situations arise where teams and individuals were manipulating the registration process and as a result called the integrity of the competition into question. Additional steps had to be taken that were fair, consistent across every state and chapter, and accessible to MATHCOUNTS given the resources of the organization.

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Misconception #3: This decision was made hastily, without the input of all constituencies or without regard to the impact of this rule change on the participants.

The decision to make this rule change came after several years of consideration of the MATHCOUNTS staff, the MATHCOUNTS Rules and Procedures Committee and the MATHCOUNTS Board of Directors. During this process, all affected constituencies were consulted and had a voice in the process. This included teachers, volunteers, alumni, and members of the home school community. Everyone involved in the decision realized there would be ramifications of whatever action was taken, and that some participants who had been fairly participating in the program would have to alter their MATHCOUNTS experience. While no one wants to take away any portion of the MATHCOUNTS experience from any student, the decision was made with the recognition that a competition must have clear, enforceable rules in place to maintain the highest level of fairness. With that in mind, when presented with all of the information that went into this decision, all parties to the long deliberation agreed that the best course of action was to alter the rules.

We understand that for some this may negatively impact their interest in MATHCOUNTS. However, we also believe that the true benefit of MATHCOUNTS comes not from the one day of competition, but from the months of work and collaboration that takes place leading up to the competition. In that regard, we hope that small and home schools do not alter the way they prepare for MATHCOUNTS, even if they are registered as individuals.

We hope that this communication helps to clarify some misconceptions about the new rules at MATHCOUNTS and helps put into perspective the challenges we faced that led to these new rules. We appreciate the strong interest many of you have shown in regards to MATHCOUNTS and we hope that you will continue to regard MATHCOUNTS as a trusted resource for math education.

Sincerely,



Louis M. DiGioia
Executive Director and Secretary of the Board of Directors
MATHCOUNTS Foundation

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