

Virtual & Online Schools and the NHS & NJHS Constitution: Questions for Consideration

Note: All virtual or online schools applying for charters with NHS or NJHS must answer the questions found below and submit responses with their charter applications. Effective July 1, 2009.

NHS, NJHS, and NASSP have recently approved allowing virtual or online schools to charter with the Honor Societies. As a result of extensive research, reservations based on existing policies and guidelines for the Honor Societies that had prevented such approval in the past have generally been resolved as these new institutions have evolved. However, to be certain that your virtual program can fully meet the requirements and obligations that chartering an Honor Society brings to your school, we invite schools forming a new chapter to review and respond to the following questions. You can visit www.nhs.us/constitutions for the complete texts of the NHS or NJHS National Constitution. The Article/Section references below are to those documents. Compliance with all aspects of these documents is a requirement for all chapters.

Questions that arise from this review can be directed to nhs@nhs.us or by calling our Membership Department/Chartering office at 703.860.7214.

1. Article 4. Section 1. Chartering and Accreditation.

A. Is the school a public school (chartered or otherwise)? Public schools are eligible for consideration as long as the remaining qualifications are met.

B. If not a public school, does the school have accreditation from one of the approved accrediting organizations (see www.nhs.us/charter for a link to this list) or have approval by the state department of education? The national office (NASSP) does not approve or provide accreditation for schools. We rely instead upon those established organizations that provide such as part of their roles in the education community. You will be asked to identify the school's public or non-public status and if the latter, to identify the source of accreditation or approval by submitting verification of such with the charter application.

2. Article 5. Principal. *Is there a principal who can assume full responsibility for all actions and decisions of the chapter and fulfill all of the duties called for in this article?* Principals provide initial approval for the formation of the chapter, appoint the chapter adviser and members of the Faculty Council, and hear appeals when they arise. The national data base of chapters must include the name of one individual to serve in this capacity for each chapter.

3. Articles 6 and 7. Advisers and Faculty Council members. *Are there members of the local school faculty (employed educators of the school) who will serve as chapter adviser and as members of the 5-person faculty council?* A total of six (6) staff members are required to operate a chapter. Parents and other volunteers as well as non-certified staff (cooks, custodians, secretaries, technicians, etc.) are not eligible to serve in these positions. In addition, principals and assistant principals cannot serve in these capacities.

4. Article 6, section 3: Reviewing members for compliance

Concern: Chapter advisers must have the ability to monitor the grades, service and leadership activities, and character of members.

Question: *In your virtual school environment, how will the adviser monitor standards and obligations – particularly character? Does the school maintain a disciplinary record on students regarding cases that are handled by the school administration?*

5. Article 8, section 4: Induction

Concern: Induction is required in order for candidates to become members. The general understanding and intent of the “ceremony” is that it is an event that is attended in person where candidates recite the NHS or NJHS pledge, light candles, etc.

Question: *How will virtual schools accommodate this ceremonial requirement? Does the school retain capacity to provide appropriate public recognition of the new members?*

6. Article 9, section 1: Eligibility

Concern 1: Enrollment of one semester is required to establish eligibility for any student. Some students enrolled in virtual schools are dual-enrolled in more traditional schools, which conceivably allows for the possibility of dual membership. However, members can only belong to one chapter at a time, and if dismissed from one cannot join another.

Question: *How will virtual schools ensure that members are not dual-enrolled in other schools and do not have dual membership in the Honor Society?*

Note: This matter of dual enrollment is one of the most significant concerns for the national office. In essence, any student who is enrolled at a brick-and-mortar school that maintains an active chapter of NHS or NJHS could *not* be eligible for membership in the virtual/online school chapter or *vice versa*. The school that ultimately grants the high school diploma would be considered the student’s base school, whether virtual or brick-and-mortar. A student can transfer to one or the other as long as the end result is a diploma from the school where membership finally resides. We seek to avoid having a student who is not selected as a member at one school turning around to be selected at the other – thus creating unnecessary problems and conflict for all involved.

7. Article 9, section 1, continued:

Concern 2: Home school students are not eligible for NHS or NJHS membership unless they are enrolled in a school maintaining an active chapter (usually as a part-time student). Some students enrolled in virtual learning are also home schooled full-time.

Question: *If the school accepts home school grades, then those grades are not from accredited schools as required in Article 4, section 1. How will the schools determine eligibility for membership (i.e. full-time virtual students vs. students who are full-time home school students?)* Currently chapters will most often disregard grades earned via homeschool courses (not supervised by the virtual/online or other institution), using only those grades earned on their campus when determining scholastic eligibility. Similarly, if the homeschool student is not obtaining his/her diploma from the school where the chapter exists (versus a student who is part-time enrolled but IS earning his or her diploma from the school), then eligibility may not be possible.

8. Article 9, section 2: Evaluating criteria

Concern: Character is one of the 4 (or 5 for NJHS) criteria for membership. Character can be evaluated in many ways – through faculty evaluations, teacher or external source recommendations, school discipline records, etc. As one of the criteria for selection, this quality cannot be omitted by any chapter and the method to be used will need to be explained in the description of the chapter’s selection process (per Article 9, Section 4).

Question: *How will your virtual school chapter evaluate character?*

9. Article 10, section 4: Due Process hearing

Concern: This section of the constitution requires a due process hearing in all cases of pending dismissal. The intent of this article is to provide the member an opportunity to speak on one’s own behalf. The national office interprets “before” to mean a face-to-face meeting with the council, except where the member voluntarily chooses to submit a written statement. While some schools may be able to arrange a video conference or similar accommodation, that cannot be assumed of all virtual schools.

Question: *How will a school guarantee this important right to due process for all its members?* This function must be provided for and cannot be overlooked from the perspective that “we will never dismiss a member.”

10. Article 13: Meetings

Concern: With a virtual environment, and in some cases with students in differing time zones, it may be hard to schedule chapter meetings, to discuss ideas and plan activities.

Question: *How will your virtual school coordinate meetings of the chapter?*

11. Article 14: Activities

Concern: Each chapter is required to sponsor one or more service projects during the year, and, in addition, each member must perform individual service. Fulfilling this requirement may prove to be a challenge.

Question: *How does your virtual school propose to meet this service obligation? How do you propose to monitor and verify individual service?*

12. Article 15: Insignia

Concern: If a member resigns or is dismissed, he/she must return the emblem (honor cord, stole, membership pin or card.) Chapters will need to ensure that these items are returned if a member resigns or is dismissed.

Question: *How will your virtual chapter ensure that dismissed/resigned members or members not in good standing do not keep and wear stoles or honor cords at a traditional graduation ceremony?* Technically if the provision noted above that calls for students to be members only of chapters in the school where they will graduate, this should not be a major problem, but the conflict might arise and we request consideration be given to the resolution.

Questions? Concerns? You can direct your concerns to nhs@nhs.us or call our Membership Department/Chartering office at 703.860.7214. Additional details regarding the establishment and operation of chapters of NHS or NJHS are found in the national handbooks, provided as a service to all newly-chartered schools or available from the NASSP Sales office, sales@principals.org.

--Return to “Starting a Chapter” (www.nhs.us/charter).

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[Updated and Submitted for posting, Questions for Virtual Schools_DPC_9.3.09]