



**RIVERSIDE COUNTY
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**
EDWIN GOMEZ, Ed.D. | County Superintendent of Schools

2026–2027

RIVERSIDE COUNTY

ACADEMIC DECATHLON

County Competition Handbook



In conjunction with:
California Academic Decathlon and United States Academic Decathlon
Information in document subject to change by contest officials.

The information in this handbook includes references to the United States Academic Decathlon (USAD) and California Academic Decathlon (CAD).

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IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES *(DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE)*

Date	Event
Wednesday, September 2, 2026	Intent to Participate Form Deadline
Wednesday, October 14, 2026	CAD Virtual Scrimmage Registration (RCOE will register teams based on Intent to Participate), GPA Team Roster, and Transcripts Deadline
Sunday, November 1, 2026	CAD School Registration Deadline
Monday, November 9, 2026	Team Registration Materials Deadline (Includes: team list, student participation forms, and volunteer information)
Saturday, November 14, 2026	CAD Virtual Scrimmage
Monday–Friday, December 7–11, 2026	RCAD Individual Team Test Practice Sessions on USAD Portal. (*Individual school sites are responsible for their district IT department to configure and allow access to USAD and Zoom using school computer devices.)
Wednesday, January 13, 2027	Academic Decathlon Competition - Essay Remote
Saturday, January 23, 2027	Academic Decathlon Competition - Objective Tests Remote
Saturday, January 30, 2027	Academic Decathlon Competition Speech & Interview 8:00 a.m. Super Quiz 1:00 p.m. Awards Ceremony 4:00 p.m. Riverside County Office of Education Conference Center 4280 Brockton Avenue, Riverside
Friday–Sunday, March 18–21, 2027	California Academic Decathlon State Competition Santa Clara, CA
Thursday–Sunday, April 29–May 1, 2027	United States Academic Decathlon Competition Bloomington, MN

The first place team will represent Riverside County at the California Academic Decathlon State Competition. The Riverside County Office of Education will provide a \$1,000.00 stipend to the district of the winning team, to be used for the team's travel to attend the California Academic Decathlon. Arrangements for travel will be made by the winning team's school/school district. The Riverside County Office of Education will also provide a \$500.00 stipend to the district teams that qualify and are invited to compete at the State competition by CAD. The Riverside County Office of Education will pay registration for the state competition. Schools must attend State competition in order to receive the travel stipend.

OVERVIEW OF THE UNITED STATES ACADEMIC DECATHLON

www.usad.org

The Academic Decathlon is a team competition wherein students match their intellects with students from other schools. Students are tested in ten categories:

- Art
- Economics
- Essay
- Interview
- Language and Literature
- Mathematics
- Music
- Science
- Social Science
- Speech

Gold, silver, and bronze medals are awarded for individual events and total scores. Winning teams advance through various levels of competition. The county champions compete at the state finals. State champions compete at the national level.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The Academic Decathlon requires participants to prepare for ten academic events. Like the Olympic Decathlon athletic contest, the Academic Decathlon does not permit participants to specialize but rather the Academic Decathlon encourages academic versatility by requiring students to prepare for all ten events. The Academic Decathlon stresses educational opportunity and academic excellence.

HISTORY

The Academic Decathlon was first created by Dr. Robert Peterson, former Superintendent of Schools in Orange County, California. Firmly believing that everyone's learning potential can be maximized through competitive challenge, Dr. Peterson set in motion the contest that has since come to be recognized as a high school academic team competition in the United States. The program spread rapidly throughout the various states due to the success and excitement it engendered. USAD® was founded in 1981.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Academic Decathlon is a ten event scholastic competition for teams of high school students grades 9-12. Each participating high school enters a team of nine students which includes three Honor students, three Scholastic students, and three Varsity students.

INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN THE ACADEMIC DECATHLON?

By encouraging students to compete for awards and recognition academically, just as athletes do physically, the Decathlon provides an antidote to intellectual lack of interest and underachievement. The Academic Decathlon recognizes the individual winners in each of its events. However, it is the well-rounded team whose high combined scores for all ten events will bring them to the topmost ranks of the champions. This is the Decathlon's way of emphasizing a growth of knowledge in all academic fields rather than a specialization in one.

The Decathlon program provides an incentive not only for the brilliant student to become interested in intellectual activities, but it opens the door to academic achievement for all. It gives scholars a similar public recognition and status that has been afforded to outstanding athletes.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Contact the Riverside County Office of Education by calling (951) 826-6570, or by visiting the Riverside County Office of Education website, www.rcoe.us/academic-decathlon. You may obtain competition information for the Riverside County Academic Decathlon in August.

When you receive the information, review the topic outlines and other factors about the program. Then begin to discuss the idea of starting a team. First, and most important, each team will need a faculty member coach. The coach should be a person with lots of energy and enthusiasm because he or she will have to motivate the students. Several teachers should be recruited to help, especially in economics, arts, music, or speech. The primary coach must be willing to spend many hours with their team.

RECRUITING STUDENTS

Academic Decathlon is a very difficult academic competition and it has immediate appeal for many A or B students. The “Varsity” students, those with a GPA below 3.499, are usually the most difficult to recruit for your team, but they often turn out to be the most spirited and the most successful. While each high school will need to devise its own strategies for team recruitment, the following procedures may bring you success:

- Check for PSAT/SAT scores; they often are predictors of success.
- Hold a student/parent night for those interested.
- Stress that being a member of the school sites Academic Decathlon team is an honor open to all interested students.
- Make it an honor to be on the Decathlon team - similar to being selected for other team activities or organizations such as Honor Society.

TEAM/SCHOOL SCRIMMAGES

Holding practice scrimmages will help your students prepare for the county competition. A practice test booklet is included in the USAD curriculum package for those who purchase the materials. There are practice tests available at www.usad.org.

PURCHASING YOUR STUDY MATERIALS

Curriculum materials can be ordered from the United States Academic Decathlon (USAD). They provide curriculum materials in sets of ten (schools participating with fewer than ten team members should contact USAD for a per item cost breakdown). All USAD curriculum materials and test materials are based on the subject area outlines published in the USAD Study Guide.

The following items represent the minimum materials recommended for preparing your team to compete and are all included in the USAD basic curriculum package.

- **The Study Guide**

The study guide is the most essential tool for competing in the Academic Decathlon. This document sets forth the basic curriculum for the coming year with topic outlines in each of the standard subject areas. The general rules for the other three events - speech, interview and essay - are included, as well as the eligibility guidelines for participation.

The Study Guides are released in May each year and may be ordered from the USAD office. By submitting your order early (in February or March), you will receive your order in May and be able to distribute the Study Guides to team members before school is out for the summer.

- **Subject Area Resource Guides**

Subject Area Resource Guides in Art, Economics, Language and Literature, Mathematics, Music, Science, and Social Science, are available through USAD.

- **Art Reproductions Booklet**

This booklet is a companion to the Art Resource Guide and contains reproductions of the 18 artworks in the year's art curriculum.

- **Streaming Services**

Covers the music performed to be studied.

- **Recommended Additional Materials Not Included in the Basic Curriculum Package**

The novel "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

COMPETITION RULES

It is important that each student who participates at the county competition is made aware of the competition rules. **Rules are strictly enforced.** Any participant who has a medical condition that requires special provisions of any kind must provide the Riverside County Office of Education with written documentation from a physician in advance of the competition.

GENERAL INFORMATION

PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION

Team coaches will receive via email their team's roster with provided username, password, and student ID information. Any roster changes should be immediately communicated to the county Administrator. Participants will receive log-in credentials that consists of a username and password to access the USAD online testing platform. No student shall share their log-in credentials. No student should identify their school's name to any judge during the speech or interview competition.

THE TESTING ROOM

Participants should dress appropriately for testing. Anything that could conceal information is not acceptable to wear including caps, sunglasses, or anything that restricts a proctor's view of the participant's eyes. Students must leave backpacks, purses, etc. under their chair while testing. Hands must remain in view during testing. The RCAD does not serve as host to a regional scrimmage between schools.

LEAVING THE TESTING ROOM

A student who leaves the testing room will not be permitted to return until the next scheduled break. A participant who leaves must first secure the permission of the proctor and turn in their test and score sheet. The time lost may not be made up. At break time, everyone should remain seated until the Test Administrator dismisses the entire room.

SUPER QUIZ RELAY

This event is held before a large audience. Spectators are required to be as quiet as possible. Participants are not permitted to bring books, notes, purses, backpacks, coats, hats, electronic devices, or any other items to the team seating area or competition floor. Coaches are not allowed to sit with or communicate with their team members during the Super Quiz testing. Students are not to leave the testing area during Super Quiz.

TARDINESS

Participants are responsible for being in the proper test location at the time each test begins. A participant who is tardy will not be allowed to enter the testing room until the break and makeup tests will not be provided. Participants will not be allowed to enter the Super Quiz Relay venue once the competition begins.

TEST MATERIALS

The USAD online testing platform will be used for the Essay and Objective Tests. Calculators are not permitted during any competition event, including the Mathematics Test. Any unauthorized use of a calculator may result in disqualification. Coaches will receive an email with the competition schedule and participant login credentials.

STARTING/STOPPING

If a proctor determines that a student has failed to stop when instructed to do so or has started before being instructed to do so, the student will receive a score of zero for that particular test.

CHEATING

If a participant is involved in any unauthorized communication or uses any type of notes or unauthorized item, the proctor must immediately report the incident to competition officials or the Test Administrator. A participant who is proven to have cheated will be disqualified from the event and may be disqualified from the competition. Participants removed because of cheating or misconduct will not be eligible for any awards. The decision of the Riverside County Academic Decathlon officials is final and irrevocable.

WITHDRAWAL/ALTERNATES

If a student must be formally withdrawn, the coach must notify the county official. If one of the nine competing team members withdraws, an alternate may replace them up to the day before Day 1 of the competition. Alternates may compete in Essay and Objective Tests but are not eligible for Speech, Interview, or Super Quiz. The county championship team advancing to the California Academic Decathlon State Competition must consist of the same nine team members who competed at the county level.

ESSAY

The USAD online testing platform will be used for the essay. Coaches will receive official essay information that will include a window for the essay date and times. Makeup dates and times will not be provided.

OBJECTIVE TESTS

The USAD online testing platform will be used for the objective tests. Coaches will receive official test information that will include a window for the test date and times. Makeup testing dates and times will not be provided.

GENERAL INFORMATION

SPEECH AND INTERVIEW

Students are encouraged to find their assigned room for speech and interview 15 minutes before their scheduled time. Judges have a very full schedule and late arrivals may not be allowed to make up their time if they are late. Coaches and students should not congregate in the halls. Only those waiting to be next should be in the halls. Excessive noise will not be tolerated.

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Coaches, decathletes, parents, and teachers are required to comply with the competition rules and those stated in the Riverside County Academic Decathlon Competition Handbook. Failure to adhere to these rules may result in the disqualification of the participant and/or an entire team.

ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

THE TEAM

A team consists of nine full-time students from the ninth through twelfth grades from the same high school; or, if there is no ninth grade, a team consists of nine full-time students from the tenth through twelfth grades from the same high school. A full-time student is defined as a student who is enrolled in four or more class periods per day. Each team is made up of three Honor students, three Scholastic students, and three Varsity students, in accordance with the following grade point average definitions:

Honor:	3.85 - 4.00 GPA
Scholastic:	3.50 - 3.8499 GPA
Varsity:	0.00 - 3.499 GPA

Contestants may compete in a higher division than their own GPA category but not in a lower division. Ninth-grade students may compete in any category if they are enrolled full-time. Freshmen competing in the Scholastic or Varsity categories may be designated as freshman wildcards.

In an attempt to continue growing the Decathlon program in our county and increasing awareness of the program, the forming of a cooperative team is allowed. Per the guidelines of the California Academic Decathlon, in order to form a cooperative team, a CAD Cooperative Team Application must be submitted with the team registration materials by the November 1, 2026 deadline date so the form can be forwarded to the state CAD Director for approval. *(To access form, visit www.academicdecathlon.org.)* Two high schools may form a team for the 2026–2027 season, providing one of the conditions is met:

1. School #1 has an existing team and School #2 does not have a team.
2. Neither School #1 nor School #2 has a team.

If the application for formation of a Cooperative Academic Decathlon among two high schools is not within in the same school district, a written agreement must be included, approved by the school boards having jurisdiction over the two schools. For high schools within the same district, a resolution or written agreement must be provided certifying the school board approved the formation. Both approvals **must take place before the deadline date** when the CAD Cooperative Team Application is submitted.

Teams may designate up to five alternates in each category. Alternate students may participate in the Essay and Objective tests, but they do not take part in the Speech, Interview, or Super Quiz portions.

On Day 1 of the competition, only nine students may compete, and the same nine must continue for the duration of the event.

Each competing student participates in all 10 events of the Decathlon and may earn individual medals in each. According to USAD guidelines, an official team includes 6 to 9 students, with 2 to 3 students in each category: Honor, Scholastic, and Varsity. For team scoring, only six results are counted: the top two scores from each category. Schools can still qualify for team awards with fewer than nine students, as long as there are at least two students in each of the three categories.

Participating schools that do not have an eligible team will not be qualified to advance to the state competition or compete for team awards. The school participants may compete for individual awards.

Participation in the Riverside County Academic Decathlon is open to students attending a public school, private school, or charter school within Riverside County.

Home-schooled students can participate in the Academic Decathlon if their school district allows home-schooled students to participate in other extracurricular activities. Independent home-schooled students can only participate in the Academic Decathlon program at the high school they would attend if they were not home-schooled.

Within Riverside County, the determination of the composition of each team is made by the Riverside County Office of Education, and the decision of the Riverside County Office of Education is final.

The county championship team advancing to the California Academic Decathlon State Competition must adhere to the official team composition guidelines. The same nine students who competed and won at the county level are required to represent the team at the state finals. In the rare case of an extreme medical emergency occurring after the county competition, a substitution may be allowed. Any replacement must receive approval from the Riverside County Office of Education and authorization from the California Academic Decathlon organization.

Teams that advance to the state championship either by winning the county competition or scoring high enough to receive an invitation by CAD will not be disqualified if their

Source: United States Academic Decathlon

ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

number drops below the minimum required to compete as a team following the county competition. This rule allows for unforeseen circumstances that may cause a student to withdraw from competition following county competition and before the announcement of the state competition. If this occurs, teams will not be eligible for team awards at the California Academic Decathlon.

The Riverside County Office of Education has the full authority to declare the first-place team ineligible to attend the State Finals in accordance with the rules and practices and may send the second-place team to represent Riverside County. In such cases, the decision of the Riverside County Office of Education is final. The California Academic Decathlon organization will be notified promptly of such an occurrence.

GPA CLASSIFICATION

Coaches will be required to submit official transcripts to verify GPA eligibility. The unweighted cumulative GPA listed on the transcript will be used to determine placement in Honor, Scholastic, or Varsity categories. If a transcript does not include an unweighted cumulative GPA, a CAD Unweighted Cumulative GPA Worksheet may be used to calculate eligibility. This worksheet is to be used only when necessary and must exclude any grades from the current school year. It is the responsibility of the coach and student to ensure that only eligible coursework and grades are included in any GPA used for classification. Transcripts containing current-year grades must have those grades excluded from consideration.

The unweighted cumulative GPA must reflect all coursework completed prior to the student's current grade level. Grades earned during the current school year may not be factored into the GPA for eligibility purposes. Only grades earned through the summer before the current school year may be included in the GPA used to determine the student's category.

Students in 9th grade are eligible to participate in any category (Honor, Scholastic, or Varsity) as long as they are enrolled full-time (minimum of four courses). Students competing in the Scholastic or Varsity categories as ninth-grade students are considered freshman wildcards.

Incomplete grades are not included in computing the GPA unless the student received an F that appears on the transcript. Once a grade is given to remove an incomplete, that grade must be used to determine the Decathlon GPA.

Pass/No Pass, Credit/No Credit, and Incomplete grades are not accepted for GPA calculation purposes unless they are included in the unweighted cumulative GPA printed on the official transcript.

College courses are included in the GPA only if high school credit is given and the courses are listed on the official school transcript.

Weighted GPAs (e.g., AP or honors weighting), plus/minus modifiers, and alternate grading systems will not be factored in. Only the unweighted GPA listed on the transcript or calculated using the approved CAD worksheet will be accepted.

If a school or a teacher has a policy of changing grades subsequent to receipt of advanced placement test scores, the new grade must be used for the computation of the Decathlon GPA if it falls within the focus period for which the GPA is being computed. Before a team may advance to the next round of competition, changes in the student's transcript must be reported immediately, and a new Academic Decathlon GPA calculation worksheet must be submitted. If the current grade changes the status of a student's category, the student will no longer be eligible for that category for future rounds. Failure to report changes may result in disqualification.

VERIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY

Each high school will submit official transcripts to verify eligibility of team members. The school certification of transcripts will be the final indication of a student's eligibility and GPA category. The county facilitator shall check the GPA computation in accordance with the established guidelines and verify the eligibility of each team member. It is the responsibility of the coach and student to ensure they are placed in the correct category. GPA classifications shall be determined using the approved unweighted cumulative GPA methodology and eligibility guidelines. A CAD Calculation Excel Worksheet will be made available to assist those that do not have an unweighted cumulative GPA listed on their transcript or need to remove courses from a current year. The CAD Calculation Excel Worksheet will automatically calculate a decathlete's GPA and identify the lowest division in which a decathlete may compete.

The worksheet is based upon a GPA scale presented by [The Princeton Review](#). The team coach shall be notified of any discrepancies.

ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

FOREIGN STUDENTS

Foreign students must submit transcripts issued or verified by a recognized high school or district authority. The unweighted cumulative GPA shown on those transcripts will determine placement. A student must have at least one year of unweighted cumulative grades provided by the school's registrar to ensure official placement in a GPA category. Additionally, the school must provide documented proof explaining why additional years could not be included.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

If a student wishes to use words or phrases from a foreign language in his/her speech or interview, then he/she is responsible for translating those words and/or phrases into English, and this must be done within the given time limit. Foreign language interpreters are prohibited.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Please contact RCOE for student assistance/accommodations by December 16, 2026.

STATE COMPETITION

In order for a student to be eligible to advance to the state competition, the student must participate in all 10 individual subjects (Art, Economics, Essay, Interview, Literature, Mathematics, Music, Science, Social Science, and Speech) in the county competition, unless a valid written statement is provided by the county Administrator and approved by the State Association and Director.

To participate in any state level competition (Round 3), participants must have an official copy of their high school transcript postmarked after September 1, 2026.

Official transcripts must be submitted to the CAD office following the regional competition. In addition, CAD or USAD may request transcripts directly from the high school in order to verify eligibility. The decision of the Riverside County Office of Education regarding the certification of the county championship team will be final.

Participation in the Riverside County, California, and/or United States Academic Decathlon is voluntary and open to all students regardless of race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, disability, or handicap.

COMPETITION EVENTS

TESTING PROCEDURE

The tests in the seven written test subject areas are multiple choice with five answers. Each test has 50 items, except math which has 35. Before beginning the coaching process in each of the subject areas, a thorough review of the official USAD Subject Area Guide and Practice Test for that area is advised.

Participants will receive log-in credentials that consists of a username and password to access the USAD online testing platform.

TEST ROOM SEATING ARRANGEMENT

Students are required to sit in assigned seats. Coaches should instruct their team to sit in the same seat for all the tests. Coaches are not allowed to be in the testing room during the event.

ART TEST

Total points possible: 1,000

The art test covers the specific pieces of art listed in the Study Guide, the artists, the schools of art, and the fundamental concepts, and techniques that are utilized by those artists and within those schools of art. The Book of Art Reproductions contains full color reproductions of the selections. It is also possible to obtain slides of the art works from USAD, which many art teachers like to use for lecture purposes. Independent research on the artists' techniques, concepts, and schools of art will be required.

MUSIC TEST

Total points possible: 1,000

The music test covers the specific pieces of music listed in the Study Guide, the composers, styles, historical periods, and fundamental concepts of music including instruments and voices that are pertinent to the theme. The USAD Subject Area Guide in music provides information on each composer and the particular selection. A portion of the music test involves a listening section, in which students listen to an excerpt, recognize it, and answer a question about the piece. The art and music sections of the Academic Decathlon are a wonderful opportunity to provide a rich cultural experience for students that may not be otherwise available.

LITERATURE TEST

Total points possible: 1,000

The literature test in the Academic Decathlon usually includes one or two novels and several poems. The test also contains a section on analytical reading in which the students read a new "unknown" passage about 25 lines long and answer 10 questions about the work. In these questions, the students are asked to do any of the following:

- Recognize the main idea.
- Recognize restatement of information.
- Make inference on the basis of information.
- Identify techniques used to determine tone.
- Recognize tone.
- Analyze argument.
- Identify meaning of a word in context.

Because this type of analysis is intrinsic to all reading comprehension, team members will most likely have a long background of performing this type of task on standardized tests and in English classes. It is, therefore, an area that you will probably not address in your Academic Decathlon preparation unless you have time.

Ideally, team members have read the novel(s). The language and literature test presumes a mastery of the novel that requires students to discuss characters by name, settings by location, and incidents by description. In addition, they must have a working knowledge of the literary terms that are used in literary analysis and the ability to apply them properly to the novels. Some time must be spent on focused team discussions of the novel with the aid of the Subject Area Guide.

There are usually several poems of varying length in the poetry section on the language and literature test. Students must be able to identify or discuss each poem by author, title, format, subject, and theme, and must have a working knowledge of the literary terms and their application. While test items on the poetry often contain a reproduction of the particular line or lines from the poem that are relevant to the question, the student is expected to have sufficient recall of the poem to know how those lines fit into the total "happening" in the poem.

COMPETITION EVENTS

If you are not an English teacher, recruiting one will prove to be very beneficial. You will need the assistance of an English teacher in many English-related areas including essay, poetry, novels, and perhaps critical reading. After the students have read and “learned” the literature, extended discussion periods on each piece of literature will be necessary for developing a full and accurate understanding of each one.

ECONOMICS TEST

Total points possible: 1,000

In most high schools, Economics is now taught during the last semester of the senior year, usually opposite a semester of American government. If this is the situation in your school, then it is likely that at the time of your preparation for competition no one on your team has studied any economics. For this reason, the Academic Decathlon economics test is very basic, made up of the most fundamental concepts and terminology. You should focus coverage on only the materials that students will need to master outlined in the Study Guide. Your school’s economics textbook might also be helpful.

MATHEMATICS TEST

Total points possible: 1,000

Math is the test that is typically the least prepared for in the competition. Most coaches will allow students to rely on their years of math training and their inherent abilities to perform reasonably on the math test. It is possible to sharpen those skills with only one or two math sessions that could result in a significant improvement in scores.

On a comprehensive math test, the student spends time recognizing the type of problem presented and the proper solution process called for. A skillful math teacher can review the practice test and prepare students for a quick recognition of each problem type.

SCIENCE TEST

Total points possible: 1,000

The actual topic changes from year to year. It is important, therefore, to check the Study Guide and obtain the Subject Area Guide to determine the precise focus of the event. Because science is not seen as a uniform area in all high schools’ core courses, the material that decathletes are expected to master is kept relatively fundamental.

SOCIAL SCIENCE TEST

Total points possible: 1,000

It is more difficult to identify the proper scope and depth of preparation in Social Science than in any other area. The USAD Subject Area Guide in Social Science endeavors to correct this situation by covering the subject that varies tremendously from year-to-year with most of the relevant material that students need to know in preparing for the competition. This reduces the arduous and often unnecessary task of researching the topic and creating outlines to simplify the learning.

SUPER QUIZ RELAY

Contestants are seated as a separate group before the competition begins. The seating arrangement during testing for the competitors, in single chair rows, is as follows:

- Varsity students - 7, 8, 9
- Scholastic students - 4, 5, 6
- Honor students - 1, 2, 3

Participants from each school are assigned to the seating arrangements in rows marked with the team name. The general public is seated in the stands separately from the contestants. Competitors will be in chairs on the main floor. Proctors will be assigned to confirm students are properly seated. No materials may be brought into the area; all supplies will be provided.

Preliminary and/or welcoming remarks are given by the emcee, contest officials, etc. Proctors are asked to take their assigned places on the competition floor. The emcee then explains the procedures and rules to the participants and the audience.

The emcee calls up one area of contestants, (i.e., “Varsity”). After students are settled and proctors have verified contestant numbers, the emcee begins the competition.

The emcee will call each category (Varsity, Scholastic, Honor) up to answer a series of questions. Each question is shown on a large screen while the emcee reads the question. All questions are multiple choice. After the question and answer choices have been read, students are given 10 seconds to work collaboratively (20 seconds for math questions) to determine the best answer for each question. The emcee will announce when the 10 seconds have been reached. The student’s pencil must be down then until the answer sheet is scored. The answer is then read by the emcee.

COMPETITION EVENTS

Proctors monitor the students while they are marking their answer sheets, score the answer sheets, and indicate correct responses by instructing the students to raise a hand. Each group of students rotate through the process. After all students have completed the oral event, the students return to their original seats in the main floor area.

During the Super Quiz, if an answer, right or wrong, is called out by the audience and is heard by the emcee or proctors, the question will be eliminated. If answers continue to be called out or somehow transmitted to the contestants, the audience member, student, and/or whole team may be asked to leave at the discretion of the contest officials.

If a student wishes to contest an answer, the team coach should submit the appeal in writing to the county official within 15 minutes following the Super Quiz relay.

CURRICULUM INFORMATION

The following curriculum information is provided as general information only.

Participants should visit the website for the United States Academic Decathlon (www.usad.org) to obtain complete and specific information regarding curriculum that will be used during the Academic Decathlon competition.

The curricular theme for the 2026–2027 competition is *Journeys of Transformation: An Exploration of Travel and Transportation*. The following is general information on the topics in each of the subject areas, courtesy of USAD:

- **ART:**
The art curriculum will explore themes of travel and transportation in art.
- **ECONOMICS:**
The economics curriculum will cover fundamental economic concepts, microeconomics, and macroeconomics and will include a thematic section on the economics of transportation.
- **LITERATURE:**
The literature curriculum will explore journeys, quests, and travel in literature and will include critical reading, one long work of literature, and selected shorter works. The long work of literature will be *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro.
- **MATHEMATICS:**
The mathematics curriculum will cover general mathematics, geometry, and an introduction to differential calculus.*
- **MUSIC:**
The music curriculum will focus on travel and transportation in music.
- **SCIENCE:**
The science topic will be an introduction to animal behavior and migration.
- **SOCIAL SCIENCE:**
The social science topic will be an introduction to human geography and migration.**
- **SUPER QUIZ:**
Super Quiz will include questions from seven different subject areas: art, economics, literature, math, music, science, and social science.

*The 2026–27 mathematics curriculum and materials will be the same as were used for the 2023–24 U.S. Academic Decathlon.

**The portion of the social science curriculum that covers human migration will present an introduction to migration patterns and processes and will include historical case studies but does not discuss current issues and policies related to migration.

CALCULATOR POLICY

Calculators are not permitted during any Riverside County Academic Decathlon competition event, including the Mathematics Test. This prohibition applies to all calculator types, including basic, scientific, graphing, and calculator-enabled electronic devices.

Participants are expected to complete all mathematics questions without the use of a calculator. Any unauthorized use of a calculator during competition may result in disqualification.

SPEECH RULES AND GUIDELINES

In the Speech competition, students will be scored on their ability to do the following:

1. Organize ideas in a clear and logical pattern that is appropriate to the speaker's purpose and convincing to the audience.
2. Express ideas using effective vocabulary and the structures of English appropriate to formal usage.
3. Present a physical image that aids the audience in the acceptance of the spoken ideas.
4. Use voice (pitch, volume, and flexibility) to maintain maximum attention.

In addition, the speech will be judged on the following:

1. Ideas, originality of thoughts, persuasiveness of reasoning, achievement of purpose, and sense of value.
2. Overall impression.

SPEECH EVENT

Total points possible: 1,000

(Combined score of Prepared Speech – 700 points maximum and Impromptu Speech – 300 points maximum.)

- The speech event involves students in the delivery of both an individually prepared speech and an impromptu speech.
- Objective: To assess the Decathlete's ability to present a speech prepared in advance in accordance with specific written criteria and to assess the Decathlete's ability to present an impromptu speech.

RULES AND PROCEDURES OF THE CONTEST

At a scheduled time during the competition, each student will report to a preassigned room in which they will remain for approximately eight (8) minutes. Upon arrival in the room, the student should tell the judges their name and ID number and give judges adequate time to check this information on the scoring sheets. A timekeeper will signal the students when they should begin their speech. The student will first present their 3½- to 4-minute prepared speech before a panel of judges. A brief explanation of the rules to be followed include:

PREPARED SPEECH

Total points possible: 700

- Note cards may be used.
- Speech may not be read.
- Speech must be given while standing before the judges. *(Disabled students exempt from standing.)*
- Speech must be original.
- No props may be used.
- The student must not reveal or identify information about their school, district, or location in any manner.
- Speech must not be less than 3½ minutes, and no more than 4 minutes.

To assist the student in compliance with the time limitation rule, the following timing procedure will be followed:

- The timer will say "begin."
- After three minutes, the timer will show a card with a number that will signify how much time is remaining.

IMPROMPTU SPEECH

Total points possible: 300

The judge chairperson will hand the student a sheet containing three topics. Upon receipt of the set of topics, the student will be allowed one minute to mentally prepare his/her speech, then the student will be asked by the judges to present the speech.

Presentation of the 1½- to 2-minute *impromptu speech* on one of the topics will be given following these rules:

- Student may not leave the room during preparation time.
- Students may use note cards, as long as the note cards were prepared during the one-minute preparation period prior to the impromptu speech. Blank note paper will be provided by the judges. Notes prepared prior to event are not allowed. Students must leave notes with the judges following their presentation.
- Speech must last between 1½ and 2 minutes.
- The contestant must not reveal anything that might be interpreted as identifying information regarding school, state, region, or location in any manner, either in informal conversation, speech content, apparel, or insignia of any kind.
- Speech must be given while standing before the judges. *(Disabled students exempt from standing.)*

SPEECH RULES AND GUIDELINES

TIMING PROCEDURE FOR IMPROMPTU SPEECH

- The student receives the topic sheet and the timekeeper will say, “Begin.” The student then begins their one minute preparation time.
- When one minute has passed, the timekeeper will signal to stop, then will immediately signal the student to begin speaking by saying, “Begin.”
- After one minute, the timer will hold up the one minute remaining card.
- After 1½ minutes, the timer will hold up the 30 seconds remaining card, and at the end of 2 minutes the timer will hold up the :00 minutes remaining card.
- The timer will not say stop at the end of 2 minutes. If the student continues to speak after “0,” a scoring penalty will apply.

Impromptu Speech topics change each year and new topics are also issued periodically throughout the contest.

SPEECH PENALTY POINTS

If a student exceeds the time limit or does not meet the minimum time limit on the prepared speech, a deduction of seven points will be assessed against the score. If a student exceeds the time limit or does not meet the minimum time limit on the impromptu speech, a deduction of three points will be assessed against the score.

Judges are instructed not to ask for the name of the student’s school or city or any information that would indicate the student’s school or school district.

PREPARED SPEECH

Speech Development is the way the speaker puts ideas together so the audience can understand them. The speech is structured around a purpose and this structure must include an opening, body, and conclusion. A good speech immediately engages the audience’s attention and then moves forward toward a significant conclusion. This development of the speech structure is supported by relevant examples and illustrations, facts, and figures, delivered with such smoothness that they blend into the framework of the speech to present the audience with a unified whole.

Effectiveness is measured in part by the audience’s reception of the speech, but a large part is the subjective judgment of how the speech came across. Judges will ask themselves:

- “Was I able to determine the speaker’s purpose?”
- “Did the speech relate directly to that purpose?”
- “Was the audience interest held by the speaker?”
- “Was the speech subject appropriate for this particular audience?”

Correctness of language ensures that attention will be directed toward what the speaker says, not how it is said. Proper use of grammar and correct pronunciation will show that the speaker is the master of the words being used.

Appropriateness of language refers to the choice of words that relate to the speech purpose and to the particular audience hearing the speech. Language should promote clear understanding of thoughts and should fit the occasion precisely.

Speech Value justifies the act of speaking. The speaker has a responsibility to say something meaningful and original to the audience. The listeners should feel the speaker has made a contribution to their thinking. The ideas should be important ones, although this does not preclude a humorous presentation of them.

Voice is the sound that carries the message. It should be flexible, moving from one pitch to another for emphasis, and should have a variety of rate and volume. A good voice can be clearly heard and the words easily understood.

Non-Verbal presentation of a speech carries part of the responsibility for effective communication. The speaker’s appearance should reinforce the speech, whether profound, sad, humorous, or instructional. Body language should support points through gestures, expressions, and body positioning. The speaker’s manner should indicate an interest in the audience and confidence in their reactions.

SPEECH RULES AND GUIDELINES

IMPROMPTU SPEECH

Content justifies the act of speaking. The speaker has a responsibility to say something meaningful and original to the audience. The listeners should feel the speaker has made a contribution to their thinking. The ideas should be important ones, although this does not preclude a humorous presentation of them.

Delivery presentation of a speech carries part of the responsibility for effective communication. The speaker's appearance should reinforce the speech, whether profound, sad, humorous, or instructional. Body language should support points through gestures and expressions.

Overall Effectiveness is measured in part by the audience's reception of the speech, but a large part is subjective judgment of how the speech came across. Judges will ask such questions as:

- *“Was I able to determine the speaker's purpose?”*
- *“Did the speech relate directly to that purpose?”*
- *“Was the audience interest held by the speaker?”*

INTERVIEW RULES AND GUIDELINES

INTERVIEW EVENT

Total points possible: 1,000

At a scheduled time during the competition, each student will go to a pre-assigned table for the interview event. The students will remain in the interview room for approximately 10 minutes. The chairperson of the interviews will give a brief explanation of procedures to be followed.

TIME FORMAT

Time allotted to each decathlete.

Time for introductions and review
of procedures (script)1 minutes
Interview7 minutes
Adjudication2 minutes

Total Time.....10 minutes

OBJECTIVE

The interview experience should assist students in learning to present themselves positively when interviewing for a job, scholarship, or any competitive position. It should also give them the experience of learning to listen and respond in an appropriate manner. The objective of the program is to give students opportunities to develop oral communication skills.

Through the interview process, the individual reveals:

- Problem-Solving Skills
- Analytical Skills
- Organizational Skills
- Creating/Developing Skills
- Interpersonal Skills
- Promotional Skills

JUDGING FORMAT

Judges will be evaluating one student at a time using the Interview Scoring Form. Each judge team will have a chairperson/timekeeper. The student may be seated or standing in front of the judges during the interview.

Each year a list of interview questions are provided. Judges are instructed not to ask any questions regarding race, religion, creed, ethnic groups, national origin or ancestry, political beliefs or affiliations, or any questions that can be construed to relate to these subjects.

SCORING

Students will be judged on their ability to do the following:

1. Present ideas and responses informally and orally that are appropriate to the setting and the questions asked.
2. Listen to the comments and inquiries of the interviewers and elaborate with interesting details and vivid impressions while avoiding repetition.
3. Establish and maintain rapport with the judges through voice, gesture, and attitudinal posture.
4. Use voice, vocabulary, and language structures appropriate to informal oral communication.

INTERVIEW RATING SCALE

Voice is the way a speaker controls volume, clarity, and distinctness of voice to gain greater audibility. Voice should have a variety in the rate, volume, and pitch to engage interest, hold attention, and convey self-assurance.

Language Usage refers to the appropriate choice of words, proper use of grammar, and correct enunciation. Language should promote clear understanding of thoughts and be appropriate for the occasion.

Interpersonal Skills are measured by the candidates ability to establish rapport with the interviewers. The candidate's response shall correspond to and interact with the interviewers' questions, and he/she should stimulate an environment with the interviewers.

Non-Verbal Language refers to the manner in which the candidate uses gestures, facial expressions, and physical involvement for effective communication. It is the indirect revelation of the candidate's real self while speaking. The candidate should speak with enthusiasm and assurance, showing interest in the interviewers and confidence in his/her responses.

Manner is measured through the candidate's ability to speak with enthusiasm and assurance while showing interest in the interviewers and confidence in their reactions. The candidate should be direct in his/her response.

Listening Skills refers to the ability to analyze and interpret "what is being asked." In order to answer skillfully and address the issue being considered, the candidate must listen carefully and attentively. The candidate's responses to the questions will give an indication of his/her level of attention and ability to identify, sort, and process information being requested.

INTERVIEW RULES AND GUIDELINES

Answering Skills refers to the ability to address the issue being considered, present information in a clear and concise manner, organize information in a logical and sequential order, adjust responses appropriately to a variety of audiences, and pace conversation to convey necessary information and achieve purpose. Order, logic, imagination, intelligence, and other personal qualities are reflected in the way answers are given. A well thought-out answer engages the interviewers' attention and gives insight into the candidate's personal qualities, skills, goals, and experiences. Relevant examples and illustrations support the answers. All information presented should be relevant to the question being asked.

Responses refer to the quality of the answers given. The candidate should reflect on the questions to provide thoughtful and insightful responses. A well thought-out answer engages the interviewer's attention and gives insight into the candidate's personal qualities, skills, goals, and experiences. The answers are supported by relevant examples and illustrations. All information presented should be relevant to the question being asked. The candidate should speak with certainty and conviction.

Overall Effectiveness measures the nature of information provided, manner in which it was communicated, overall impression it created, and rapport established between the interviewer and the candidate. Some of the questions to consider are:

- Did the candidate provide the information requested in a skillful manner?
- Was the information relevant and meaningful?
- Was the candidate able to achieve a positive impression of his/her skill, experiences, and personal qualities?

Appearance refers to the appropriate attire of the candidate. The candidate follows Academic Decathlon dress standards.

Judges are instructed not to ask the student the name of their school, district, city, or any information that would indicate their school or school district.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions used in the interview change each year and new questions are issued periodically throughout the contest. Interview question suggestions come from the California Academic Decathlon organization.

ESSAY GUIDELINES

ESSAY

Total points possible: 1,000

All students will be required to write an essay. Fifty (50) minutes will be allotted to write the essay. At the beginning of the 50-minute session, each student is given the following instructions:

- Select one of the prompts as the topic for your essay.
- Write a well-developed and organized essay in which you clearly respond to the question or direction that is presented in the prompt.
- Follow the accepted rules of standard English sentence structure, usage, spelling and punctuation; use appropriate diction and style.
- For the essay topic you choose, state your individual thesis or position clearly. Use specific information and examples from your studies to support your position.
- Provide a final paragraph to conclude or close your essay.

Point Value		ESSAY EVALUATION FORM		
0	1	2	3	4
		Introduction / Thesis [0 – 4 value] • Original, insightful, and/or interesting • Not merely restating the prompt		
		Response to Prompt* [0 – 4 value] • Conveys understanding of the prompt and tasks • Clearly addresses all aspects of the prompt		
		Evidence* [0 – 4 value] • Specific and accurate examples • Evidence supports thesis and main ideas		
		Analysis/Commentary [0 – 4 value] • Ideas explained thoroughly • Points argued effectively		
		Cohesion [0 – 4 value] • Articulate and clearly focused • Assertions equivalently developed		
		Organization [0 – 4 value] • Paragraphs have topic sentences • Paragraphs have thoughtful transitions		
		Closing [0 – 4 value] • Intentional finish • Not repetitive or merely summarizing		
		Word Choice / Diction / Voice [1 – 4 value] • Diction appropriate to topic • Student writer knows/owns the words used		
		Spelling / Punctuation [1 – 4 value] • Accurate spelling • Proper punctuation		
		Grammar / Sentence Structure [1 – 4 value] • Subject/verb agreement • Varied sentence structure		

Total Points x 25 =

Off Prompt (OP) = Zero Score ☒
 Prompt is not addressed ☐

Nonscorable (NS) = Zero Score ☒
 Essay is: illegible, insufficient, a blank paper ☐

* USAD publishes essay scoring guidelines for Essay Judges, which include details student writers may include in response to each prompt

OVERVIEW OF SCORING

EXPLANATION OF SCORING

1. The Academic Decathlon consists of ten events plus Super Quiz. Only six scores are counted for the team ranking; top two Honor, top two Scholastic, and top two Varsity scores.
2. Seven of the objective tests have 50 questions; the raw score is converted to a 1,000-point basis with each question worth 20 points. The math test has 35 questions.
3. Each essay will undergo a standardized scoring process using established scoring criteria. Scores will be reviewed for consistency, and essays with significant scoring discrepancies will undergo further evaluation to ensure accurate and fair results.
4. The speech and interview are performed before judges. Judges complete digital scoring. Scoring platform computes an average score based on a maximum of 1,000 points.
5. Gold, silver, and bronze medals are awarded in each event and for each category. All ties are awarded.
6. Team overall ranking is determined by the top two scores in each category, i.e., the top two Honor scores, the top two Scholastic scores, and the top two Varsity scores.
7. Each coach will receive the individual and team scores.
8. At the county level, special awards include the Winning Coach award, Highest Scoring Student for each team award, and the Highest Scoring Student overall award.
9. In the Super Quiz, each student will answer 14 questions worth 70 points each.
10. The highest possible team score in the competition is 65,880 points. A team score consists of six scores per team - top 2 Honors, 2 Scholastic, 2 Varsity. NOTE: It is not necessary that the six students whose scores count for the Super Quiz team score be the same six students whose scores count for the overall team score.
 - 7 written objective tests x 1,000 points each = 7,000
 - Speech component = 1,000
 - Interview component = 1,000
 - Essay component = 1,000
 - » Team Score: 10,000 points x team of 6 students = 60,000

- Super Quiz
 - » 14 questions x 70 points = 980 points x team of 6 = 5,880
 - » Total team score possible: 65,880

APPEALS PROCEDURE

Appeals regarding any test item can be made by any contestant through the team coach. Appeals must be presented on an Appeals Form to the county official during the earliest break after a test has been completed. Appeals on the oral Super Quiz must be presented within 15 minutes of the completion of the Super Quiz. All appeals decisions will be made by an Appeals Committee convened by the county contest official at the time of the appeal.

If the Appeals Committee deems a question invalid, all students will be given credit for that question. Appeals identifying an invalid answer on Super Quiz will result in the giving of credit to all correct answers. The decision of the Appeals Committee is final.

Appropriate behavior and sportsmanship are expected throughout all aspects of the event.

Essay, Speech, and Interview scores are **not** subject to appeal. No appeals will be allowed once the contest day competition activities have been completed.

No oral appeals will be accepted. Appeals accepted in writing only; appeals must be submitted by coaches. Students cannot be involved in the appeal process nor should they attempt to lobby the County or State Coordinator or the Appeals Committee concerning their appeal.

RIVERSIDE COUNTY ACADEMIC DECATHLON



**RIVERSIDE COUNTY
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**
EDWIN GOMEZ, Ed.D. County Superintendent of Schools