

2026-2027 Divisions, Categories, Judging Criteria and Awards

(updated August 2026)

Levels:

Shining Star: An inclusive level for students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

Recreational: For those students who participate in dance class and/or extra rehearsals up to 3 hours per week. This provides a less intimidating approach to the competitive experience for those dancers new to competitions or who have less experience. Recreational Overall winners are not eligible for Gift Certificates or Cash Awards. Recreational duet/trio and group routines cannot contain Elite dancers. (This rule does not apply to productions.) Dancers that compete more than one solo must compete in the Competitive or Elite Division.

Competitive: For students that participate in class and/or extra rehearsals for 3-6 hours per week. Dancers that compete more than one solo should be entered in the competitive or elite division. Competitive Overall winners are eligible for Gift Certificates, but ineligible for Cash Awards. The highest adjudication a competitive routine can receive is a Diamond. Students striving to achieve a Mic Drop should enter the Elite division.

Elite: **New since 2026:** *Petite dancers can now be classified as Elite.* Our Elite division is for Petite, Junior, Teen and Senior students who participate in class and extra rehearsals for more than 6 hours a week. Elite dancers are the only dancers eligible to receive our Prestigious “Mic Drop” Award. Elite Overall winners are eligible for Gift Certificates and/or Cash Awards. Elite dancers cannot compete in recreational duet/trios or groups (other than productions.) Only Elite overall winners 9 and over and members of the Dream Team (selected at Encore Extreme in the fall) will be invited to perform in the Grand Finals Gala Opening Number.

The following dancers 9 and over from the current year are invited to participate in this advanced number:

Elite Division 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Overall Solos and Super Solos

Elite Division Title Winners 1st, 2nd, and 3rd

Elite Division 1st Overall Duet/Trios

Dream Team Members for the current year

Please note that a minimum number of participants are required at regionals in order for a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winner to be announced. Only students announced at regionals as 1st, 2nd or 3rd (as explained above) are eligible for the opening number. Students ages 9 and over that did not pre-qualify are invited to audition at Grand Finals to be a part of the Opening Number.

Pro-Am: Any routine containing a professional must compete in the Pro-Am age division. A professional is defined as any person 20 years of age or older who is or has ever been a teacher, assistant teacher, or professional dancer. A group division containing only one professional forces that group division to compete in Pro-Am.

Additional rules concerning levels:

****If a dancer is in more than 6 routines, they cannot be categorized as recreational and must be listed as a competitive dancer.***

****If a dancer is in more than 10 routines, they cannot be categorized as recreational or competitive and must be categorized as an elite dancer.***

****Dancers that compete more than one solo must compete in the Competitive or Elite division.***

****No more than 40% of the dancers in a duet/trio or group routine can be dancers from a higher level. For example, if there are 10 dancers in a recreational routine, a maximum of 4 of them can be competitive level dancers.***

New since 2026 - Level Bump Rule: *If a dancer competes their solo in the recreational or competitive level and 2/3 of the judges panel feel they should be competing in a higher level, the routine will be bumped to the next highest level. This dancer will be announced at awards with the level they were bumped to. This dancer will be allowed to place in the overalls, but only in terms of a tie. Wherever the dancer's score would place them in the overalls they will tie the dancer who is registered for that level. Example: Dancer A registers a competitive solo, judges determine she is elite and bump her up, her score would place her 3rd overall in the elite division, she will tie for 3rd with Dancer B who registered elite and has the 3rd highest elite solo score.*

Because dance competitions have no way of knowing how many hours a week a student trains, placement is ultimately left to the teacher's discretion. However, if 2/3 judges on the judges' panel see repeated elements of a higher level, they reserve the right to move the routine to the next highest level. In addition, Encore DCS will have a "head judge" at each event. This judge will be responsible for making sure rules are being followed and for alerting the auditor if the panel feels that the routine should be bumped to another level.

Age Divisions:

Mini: 5 & Under

Petite: 6-8

Junior: 9-11

Teen: 12-14

Senior: 15-16, 17-18

Adult: 19-24, 25-39, & 40 & up

All ages for Regionals and Grand Finals are determined as of January 1, 2027. For Duet/Trios and Groups, the average age determines the age division. Drop the decimal point when averaging the ages, i.e., an age average of 12.5 would compete in the 12-year-old division.

Categories and Acrobatic Tricks:

Performance Categories include: Tap, Jazz, Ballet, Pointe, Lyrical, Contemporary, Clogging, Musical Theater, Character, Gymnastics, Folkloric, Baton, Pom Pom, Liturgical, Modern, Hip Hop, Open, AcroJazz, Song & Dance and Vocal. Vocals are allowed only in Song & Dance and Vocal.

New this year: Photogenic entries are accepted **at Regionals and Nationals**. Photos should be 8x10 and must be submitted on-site at the event. For Regionals, photos need to be submitted **at least an hour prior** to the **corresponding age and level solo awards ceremony**. Please check the event program to confirm when the photogenic awards are scheduled for your specific age and level. For Grand Finals, see requirements in the Grand Finals rules and regulations.

Acrobatic Tricks: An acrobatic trick consists of a complete 360-degree rotation of the body with head inverted or a pass containing multiple gymnastic moves (excluding shoulder rolls.) Unlimited tricks are allowed only in Gymnastics, Character, Open, Pom Pom, Musical Theater, AcroJazz, Hip Hop, and Contemporary. All other categories are limited to 3 acrobatic tricks. Routines that contain more than 3 tricks will be automatically moved to the correct category. If multiple students perform the same trick at the same time, it only counts as ONE trick. All passes with multiple tricks are counted as ONE trick.

Group Divisions & Time Limits:

Solo & Duet/Trios - 3-minute maximum

Small Group {4 – 9 dancers} 4-minute maximum

Large Group {10 – 19 dancers} – 4-minute maximum

Super Group {20 or more dancers}– 4:30 maximum

Productions {unlimited dancers} – 9-minute maximum

*There will be a 10 second grace period for all routines. Extended time is permitted in all divisions at a rate of \$5/person for every minute over the time limit. Routines that have not purchased extended time are subject to a 1-point deduction per judge for every minute over the time limit.

Judging:

All entries will be judged based on a point system by a minimum of three qualified judges. Judging is based on Technique, Showmanship, Musicality, and Overall Appeal (25% each). If a tie in scoring occurs, the tie will be broken based on Technique scores followed by Overall Appeal, Musicality, and then Showmanship. In the event a tie still exists, the judges will make the final decision. Judges reserve the right to move entries to proper category for judging if improperly registered. A minimum point requirement of 240 points must be met to receive 1st place in the event that only one entry is registered for that category.

Super Solo and Title Competition:

Super Solo - Students who perform more than 1 solo must be entered in the Competitive or Elite Division and will be placed in our "Super Solo" Overall Awards. The highest two solo scores for each Super Solo are averaged to determine the Super Solo score for overall placement. ALL Super Soloists will be recognized with a special award. Students performing only one solo per competition will be judged separately for Overall awards only and will compete for the Top Soloist in every age division. Vocal and Song & Dance are excluded from Super Solo.

Regional Title Competition – Soloists are eligible to compete for Title Winner for an additional charge. Regional Title scores are based on Showmanship and Overall Appeal. All genders are combined for title awards. One Title winner will be announced in each level and age division. For example, there will be a Recreational Junior Title Winner, Competitive Junior Title Winner and Elite Junior Title Winner. Only one solo per student is eligible for Title competition.

"Solo Title Entry" must be checked on the registration form to compete for title. Vocal and Song & Dance entries are ineligible for Title. There are TWO ways to compete for Title:

1) If a student competes only one solo, they would be eligible for Title Winner AND regular Overall Solo awards.

2) If a student competes multiple solos, they would be eligible for Title Winner (by selecting just one of their solos to compete for title) AND their top two scores would go into the running for Overall Super Solo.

National Title Competition – Solo scores of Overall Appeal and Showmanship will determine placement. The Top 10 finalists will be asked to improv on stage. The Top 5 will be asked an on-stage question. Scores for National Title winners will be calculated by starting with each student's solo title score (the combination of showmanship and overall appeal.) Students will receive up to 10 additional points for Improv and if they make the Top 5, they can receive up to 10 points for the question portion. Dancers will be ranked from lowest to highest based on their cumulative title, improv and on-stage question scores.

30TH Anniversary Exclusive Awards and Recognition

Regional Competition

Group routines are eligible to compete for the **Encore Pearl of Excellence**. The regional Pearl of Excellence Award is based on the highest-scoring group routine in each level and age division, with ties broken by the Technique score.

In addition, the judges will select one 11 & Under group routine and one 12 & Over group routine across any level for the **Encore Pearl of Distinction**, based on the performances they find most compelling. The winning studios for both awards will be nominated to participate in our social media poll, which begins June 21, 2027, on the Encore DCS Instagram page. Leading up to Grand Finals, a new level and age division will be posted daily for clients, families and friends to vote for their favorite studio within 24hrs. The winners of this poll will earn a spot in our 30th Anniversary Grand Finals Standing Ovation.

National Competition

(Encore Pearl of Excellence & Encore Pearl of Distinction)

There will be one winner for each level and age division from our social media poll. The winning studios will **AUTOMATICALLY** earn a spot in our *30th Anniversary Grand Finals Standing Ovation* **AND** can *choose what routine* to bring to compete in the corresponding standing ovation. The selected routine is **required** to have competed at a 2027 regional event and be registered for our 2027 Grand Finals.

Trophies & Awards:

*Every routine will receive a Mic Drop, Diamond, Platinum, High Gold, or Gold recognition. The prestigious “Mic Drop” award is reserved for routines competing in the Elite Division. In addition, the highest scoring routine will be recognized in each category.

*Recreational routines are eligible for adjudication pins, overall pins and banners. Competitive level routines are eligible for adjudication pins, overall pins, banners, and gift certificates. Elite level routines are eligible for adjudication pins, overall pins, banners, gift certificates and cash awards. Detailed information on awards can be found on our awards section of the website.

Photos and Videos:

Encore DCS is excited to include photos and videos of each routine with entry fees. Media will be available via digital download within five business days of the event. Passwords for downloads will be provided to all teachers that have paid in full. Teachers will be responsible for distributing the studio password to parents and students. To locate photos after the event, visit our website, click the city you attended, and click on the link for Photo or Video.

ENCORE DCS - Rules and Regulations

1. All entries should be completed via online registration at www.encoredcs.com at least 28 days prior to the event. Registration is accepted on a first come first served basis and is limited to the amount of competition time available. Many events reach capacity well before the deadline and any entries exceeding the limit will be turned away. Studios should submit a minimum \$500 deposit at the time of registration.
2. A tentative schedule outline will be available on our website at least two weeks prior to the event. Detailed schedules are emailed to studio directors approximately 10 days prior to the event.
3. **All changes and corrections are due at least 14 days prior to the event. Any changes made after this deadline will result in a \$10 fee per change charged to the studio account. Change fees must be paid by credit card online before revised schedules will be released to the studio.**
4. Payment by check can be mailed to 203 West Butler Street Lexington, SC 29072. **New this year -** Payment by **electronic check is accepted online**. Credit card payments are accepted online with a 3% service charge. Money orders are not accepted via postal mail.
5. A 50% deposit of total entry fees must be received 28 days prior to the event. Full payment must be received at least 14 days prior to the competition date or a \$10.00 late fee per entry will be added. A \$25 fee will apply to all returned checks. Returned checks will automatically be turned

over to an outside Collections Agency and/or the Solicitor's office. Absolutely no personal checks for entry fees will be taken at the event and any unpaid entries will not be allowed to perform.

6. No refunds of fees will be given after the deadline date. A credit for another regional competition or Grand Finals for the current year or following year will be issued to the studio in the event that a dancer is unable to perform. If a competition is cancelled due to weather, pandemic or other circumstances beyond our control, we will be happy to issue a full studio credit to attend a future event.
7. We do not accept independent entries. Each studio is required to bring a minimum of two performing individuals. A dance studio attending the competition must support each entry. This rule does not apply to soloists that qualify for Nationals. Independent dancers can register for Encore Extreme convention classes but must be registered under a studio name if competing in the solo competition.
8. Gift certificates and scholarships for Encore DCS and Encore Extreme are not interchangeable and can only be used at the event listed on your certificate.
9. Electronic waivers: A parent or guardian must complete a waiver in order for their child to participate. Waivers will now be submitted electronically. The Waiver link can be found in your Dance Comp Genie registration. The link for the waiver can be shared with your parents via email by clicking on "Copy Waiver Link." This link is automatically saved and can be pasted into an email and shared with parents.
10. Encore DCS reserves the right to change the number of competition days based on registration received and is not liable for refunds based on schedule changes.
11. Dancers should be ready to compete at least ONE HOUR ahead of their scheduled performance time.
12. Unless arranged ahead of time, a 5-point deduction will be made for any routines not performed within three numbers of the scheduled order.
13. Music should be uploaded to the studio's Dance Comp Genie account at least two days prior to the first day of the event. A backup form of music is always recommended and required.
14. Soloists may not compete against themselves in the same category. All other dancers in duet/trios, groups, and productions may enter as many categories as they wish as long as they do not compete against themselves in the exact same groups. (Soloists are limited to one solo at Encore Extreme conventions.)
15. A 5-point deduction will be made for routines that are not completed due to a dancer running off stage. Routines age 11 and under will be offered the opportunity to re-compete if they choose to do so. Routines age 12 and over will receive a 5-point deduction and the opportunity to dance again for adjudication only. This deduction does not apply to routines that are not completed due to a technical error or other uncontrollable event not attributable to the dancer's performance.
16. Freestanding props are allowed but must be easily moved into the theater and on & off stage without disrupting the competition in progress. **Props for solos and duet/trios** should be set within one minute. **Props for groups and productions** should be set within two minutes. **If extended time is required for prop building an additional fee of \$25 per minute following the allotted time will incur.** This request MUST be noted during registration prior to the final schedule for Encore DCS to allot the appropriate amount of time in the final schedule per routine. Routines that have not purchased extended time are subject to a 1-point deduction per judge for every minute over the time limit plus the additional prop building fee mentioned above. Fire, water, or excessive littering is not allowed on stage, and any debris should be removed by the studio within 30 seconds following the routine.
17. Prop Definition and Usage Rule: A *prop* is defined as any inanimate object used as part of the performance. A human being on stage, whether active or stationary, is not considered a prop unless they are aiding a shining star dancer. If a human participant is on stage, they are to be

considered an active member of the performance and must be included in the calculation of the age division for the entry unless otherwise discussed with registration.

18. No lighting changes are allowed at Regionals.
19. We at Encore DCS pride ourselves on running a family friendly competition. If every judge on the panel feels that a routine is inappropriate for the age a 10-point deduction will be made.
20. All 1st, 2nd, & 3rd place routines, or those scoring a minimum of 240 points at regionals are eligible to attend Grand Finals. If a student is unable to compete in a group at Finals, a substitution may be made. New routines not competed at regionals may be pre-qualified for Grand Finals through video submission. Please email info@encoredcs.com for details.
21. Encore DCS will provide two wireless handheld microphones for use in Vocal and Song & Dance routines. Personal microphones and headsets can be used with our sound system, however, must be tested before the competition starts.
22. Teachers and studio directors should bring any question or challenge of routines or rules to the attention of the Encore DCS director in charge prior to the respective awards ceremony.
23. Judges reserve the right to deliberate and choose the Highest Scoring Routine.
24. All rules and regulations listed here for Encore DCS apply to Encore Extreme unless otherwise noted.
25. Encore DCS provides livestream for \$2.99 when possible (\$2 of each livestream will be donated to our E.A.E Scholarship). Please note that competition location and wireless signals affect our ability to provide this service. It's important to let friends and family watching the competition know that the competition may run ahead of schedule.
26. Photography and video recording is always prohibited! Videotaping and photography of any kind is not allowed in order to protect the performers, choreography and due to our contracts with professional videographers and photographers. Personal cameras, video cameras, and any other recording devices are prohibited in the auditorium.
27. All dancers, teachers, and guests are expected to display good sportsmanlike conduct to all participants at all times. Encore DCS does not discriminate but does reserve the right to refuse entrance to any competitor, spectator, studio, or individual that has been deemed to exhibit unsportsmanlike behavior.
28. Only performers, teachers, and staff are allowed on stage before, during and after a competition.
29. All awards should be picked up at the conclusion of the event and will not be mailed. Judges' audio critiques and score sheets will be downloaded to Dance Comp Genie after the event and will be emailed to teachers within three days of the event. Score sheets and video critiques will also be available in the studios Dance Comp Genie account unless there is a balance due. Teachers will receive an email when scores and critiques are available.
30. All teachers, parents and participants give Encore DCS the right to use their photo or video with any advertising or media campaign. By performing at Encore DCS events, all competitors consent to the use of photographs and/or video footage for promotional purposes, which may include social media and streaming of routines online.
31. Gift certificates or credits that are awarded to groups can only be redeemed for group entry fees at future Encore DCS events.
32. Encore DCS and the hosting venue are not responsible for personal injury or property loss to either contestants or spectators. Performers in a dance competition are subject to risks which can include, but are not limited to sprains, pulled muscles and broken bones. Participation in Encore DCS events indicates the acceptance of these types of risks and participants and spectators agree that they will not hold Encore DCS, its officers, employees or staff responsible for injuries or illnesses contracted by them while in attendance of any Encore event.
33. Rules, regulations and prizes are subject to change and are always available at www.encoredcs.com.