

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILL ANALYSIS

This bill analysis was prepared by nonpartisan committee staff and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

BILL #: [CS/HB 1059](#)

TITLE: Special Observances for Speech and Debate

SPONSOR(S): Booth

Committee References

Student Academic Success
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SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

The bill designates the first week of November as “Florida Speech and Debate Week”. The Department of Education, local school districts, local governments, and other agencies are encouraged to sponsor events, exhibitions, and recognitions celebrating the impact of speech and debate in the state.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

None

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ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

The bill creates “Florida Speech and Debate Week.” The bill designates the first full week of November as “Florida Speech and Debate Week” to:

- Recognize the academic, civic, and leadership value of competitive speech and debate.
- Honor educators, coaches, judges, and school districts that support debate programming.
- Inspire students statewide to participate in debate as a pathway to civic engagement.
- Promote the state’s role as a national leader in scholastic speech and debate.

The Department of Education (DOE), local school districts, local governments, and other agencies are encouraged to sponsor events, exhibitions, and recognitions celebrating the impact of speech and debate in the state. (Section 1).

The effective date of the bill is July 1, 2026. (Section 2).

RELEVANT INFORMATION

SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

[Speech and Debate Movements in the United States and Florida](#)

As a working democracy, speech and debate have had profound effects on the United States, highlighted by the selected examples below:

- Alexander Hamilton-Thomas Jefferson debates after the Constitution was ratified in 1788 in their clash over the Bank of the United States became a defining moment in shaping America’s economic direction and in clarifying the meaning of the Constitution.¹

¹ The Federalist Society, *Hamilton V. Jefferson: The Central Bank Debate*, <https://fedsoc.org/commentary/videos/hamilton-v-jefferson-the-central-bank-debate-policybrief> (last visited Feb. 11, 2026).

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- The Lincoln-Douglas debates were a series of seven debates during the 1858 Illinois senatorial campaign that largely centered on the issue of extending slavery into the new U.S. territories following the Mexican War and would have a profound effect on the future of the United States.²
- The Kennedy-Nixon debates in 1960 when a debate for the presidency was presented for the first time on television and reached an estimated 70 million people.³

The National Speech and Debate Association provides recognition and support to high school students participating in speech and debate activities. Established in 1925, the Association held its first national tournament in 1931 with 49 schools from 17 states. Recent membership from 2023-2024 shows 141,132 students on school rosters with 3,152 high school members.⁴ The association reported 139 active speech and debate coaches with 10,344 students participating in Florida in the 2023-24 school year.⁵

There are two organizations that facilitate and promote speech and debate in Florida, the Florida Debate Initiative (FDI) and the Florida Civics & Debate Initiative (FCDI).

The FDI is a Florida not-for-profit corporation. It began as the Central Florida Debate Initiative from 2014 to 2019 and later became the FDI. The FDI is dedicated to fostering a new generation of leaders by providing access to exceptional civics education resources, debate programs, and expertly trained teachers. Programs offered by the FDI include:⁶

- The American Dream Debate (a bilingual debate tournament);
- Civic immersion experience in Washington, D.C.;
- DebateED 201 (instruction for coaches);
- DebateED 101 (resources for educators);
- Speech and Debate Learning Retreat (for educators);
- Pro Camps FDI (student workshop);
- Salute to Service (leadership program);
- FDI Fellow Program (internship for college students);
- Florida Speech and Debate Summer Camp; and
- Turning Tides (a partnership program to empower youth in the juvenile justice system).⁷

The program was funded with a specific appropriation of \$2.4 million for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.⁸

The FCDI is a program under the DOE and the Florida Education Foundation. The FCDI was created in response to an Executive Order by the Governor that called for a comprehensive review of academic standards that included opportunities to equip high school graduates with sufficient knowledge of American Civics.⁹ In 2020, the Governor announced the establishment of the FCDI along with funding from the Marcus Foundation for elevating civic

² Britannica, *Lincoln-Douglas debates*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Lincoln-Douglas-debates> (last visited Feb. 11, 2026).

³ Britannica, *The Kennedy-Nixon debates*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/television-in-the-United-States/The-Kennedy-Nixon-debates> (last visited Feb. 11, 2026).

⁴ National Speech & Debate Association, *Membership at a Glance*, <https://www.speechanddebate.org/membership-database/> (last visited Feb. 11, 2026).

⁵ National Speech & Debate Association, *2023-2024 Data Warehouse Update*, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WuNOeb_XR_A6atkRFQUt83_4xjrfkE8ZQsG6p98ef5I/edit?gid=2124723893#gid=2124723893 (last visited Feb. 11, 2026).

⁶ Florida Debate Initiative, *Programs*, <https://www.floridadebate.org/programs> (last visited Feb. 11, 2026).

⁷ Florida Debate Initiative, *Programs*, <https://www.floridadebate.org/programs> (last visited Feb. 11, 2026).

⁸ Specific Appropriation 106, s. 2, ch. 2025-198, Laws of Fla.

⁹ Executive Order 19-32 (2019).

knowledge, civic skills and civic disposition for middle and high school students. The Marcus Foundation¹⁰ committed \$5 million over a three-year period towards the initiative with the following goals:¹¹

- promote the expansion of middle and high school debate and speech programs to all of Florida's public school districts;
- increase middle school civics end of course state passage rates;
- increase high school U.S. History end of course state passage rates;
- implement a National Civics, Speech, and Debate competition for all students; and
- make Florida a nationwide leader in training Florida high school teachers and train other states to continue or begin to successfully run competitive school speech and debate teams.¹²

The FDI contributes both financial resources and programmatic support to the FCDI to help advance FCDI's statewide goals of increasing civic literacy, amplifying student voice, and preparing the next generation of active, informed citizens. As FCDI's educational support organization, FDI focuses on:

- educating and training coaches and students;
- training judges and volunteers;
- promoting educational competition opportunities;
- leading training and leadership development experiences; and
- establishing competition standards.¹³

Special Observances in Florida

The legislature has designated specific days, weeks or months to provide special appreciation, celebration, or remembrance for various purposes. For each designation the day, week or month is described and in some cases either allows or requires the Governor to issue a proclamation for the observance.¹⁴ Florida Law designates the following example observances:

- American Founders Month;¹⁵
- Holocaust Remembrance Day;¹⁶
- Responsible Fatherhood Month;¹⁷
- Foster Family Appreciation Week;¹⁸ and
- Drowsy Driving Prevention Week (Ronshay Dugans Act).¹⁹

¹⁰ The Marcus Foundation, *About the Marcus Foundation*, <https://marcusfoundation.org/about-the-marcus-foundation/> (last visited Feb. 11, 2026).

¹¹ Office of the Governor Press Release (Jan. 27, 2020), available at:

<https://www.flgov.com/eog/news/press/2020/governor-ron-desantis-announces-florida-civics-and-debate-initiative-marcus>.

¹² Office of the Governor Press Release (Jan. 27, 2020), available at:

<https://www.flgov.com/eog/news/press/2020/governor-ron-desantis-announces-florida-civics-and-debate-initiative-marcus>.

¹³ https://5400622c-3214-4001-887b-8a6328c71885.filesusr.com/ugd/ab06c2_3136dad194a64b39abf6fedbc941d5a2.pdf, at 5.

¹⁴ Chapter 683, F.S.

¹⁵ Section [683.1455, F.S.](#)

¹⁶ Section [683.196, F.S.](#)

¹⁷ Section [683.3341, F.S.](#)

¹⁸ Section [683.333, F.S.](#)

¹⁹ Section [683.332, F.S.](#)

BILL HISTORY

COMMITTEE REFERENCE	ACTION	DATE	STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF	ANALYSIS PREPARED BY
<u>Student Academic Success</u> <u>Subcommittee</u>	14 Y, 0 N, As CS	2/11/2026	Sanchez	Wolff
THE CHANGES ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removed provisions related to the designation of a statewide speech and debate organization, the establishment of a speech and debate hall of fame and an institute for speech and debate, requirements for speech and debate coursework and certifications, and removed appropriations. 			

THIS BILL ANALYSIS HAS BEEN UPDATED TO INCORPORATE ALL OF THE CHANGES DESCRIBED ABOVE.