

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BILL ANALYSIS

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

TITLE: Speech and Debate Education

SPONSOR(S): Booth

COMPANION BILL: [CS/CS/SB 1062](#) (Brodeur)

LINKED BILLS: None

RELATED BILLS: None

Committee References

[Student Academic Success](#)

14 Y, 0 N, As CS



[Education & Employment](#)

19 Y, 0 N, As CS

SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

Subject to appropriation, the bill addresses speech and debate in Florida schools by:

- Designating the Florida Debate Initiative (FDI), Inc. as the state's nonprofit statewide speech and debate organization and outlines requirements, authorized expenditures, and reporting requirements of the organization while allowing schools, districts and students to participate in outside organizations.
- Requiring the FDI to work in alignment with and support of the Florida Civics and Debate Initiative (FCDI) within the Department of Education and requiring the two organizations to jointly host and operate the National Civic and Debate Championship.
- Requiring the FCDI to lead specific events including FCDI Day at the Capitol.

Additionally, the bill designates February 1 through 7 as "Florida Speech and Debate Week" and describes the purposes of the week.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

The designation of FDI as the state's nonprofit statewide speech and debate organization and the associated duties are subject to appropriation and therefore there is no fiscal impact unless funds are specifically appropriated.

JUMP TO

[SUMMARY](#)

[ANALYSIS](#)

[RELEVANT INFORMATION](#)

[BILL HISTORY](#)

ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

The bill designates, subject to appropriation, the Florida Debate Initiative (FDI) as the state's nonprofit statewide [speech and debate](#) organization that manages, develops, and expands K-20 civics, speech, and debate programs, however districts, schools, and students are permitted to participate in speech activities outside of the FDI. The FDI shall support and expand access to statewide civic literacy and speech debate by:

- Educating and training coaches and students.
- Training judges and volunteers.
- Promoting educational competition opportunities.
- Leading training and leadership development experiences.
- Establishing competition standards.
- Maintaining statewide data reporting.
- Assisting the Florida Civics and Debate Initiative (FCDI) in civics-focused education, training, and programming initiatives. (Section [2](#)).

The FDI is given specific authorization to establish and maintain partnerships with school districts, charter schools, state agencies, postsecondary institutions, nonprofit organizations, private entities, and national or international organizations to achieve its goals.

STORAGE NAME: h1059a.EEC

DATE: 2/26/2026

The bill requires the FCDI and FDI to jointly host and operate the annual National Civics and Debate Championship known as The Great Debate. In addition, the FCDI shall lead specific civics immersion events including FCDI Day at the Capitol and the Great American Civics Challenge.

The FDI is required to provide logistical support, debate tournament operations support, and tournament coordination support for the Great Debate and other collaborative initiatives to advance statewide speech and debate opportunities. (Section [2](#)).

The bill additionally authorizes the FDI to expend funds for the following:

- Administrative operations, including staffing, insurance, compliance, reporting, and statewide infrastructure.
- Programmatic operations, including curriculum, training, summer programs, workshops, camps, and mentorship programs.
- Tournament operations, including logistics, staff, judge training, technology, awards, and regional team operations.
- Travel, lodging, training, and transportation for participants including local, state, and national travel to competitions hosted by FDI, FCDI, or other civics, speech, and debate organizations.
- Public-private partnership development, including sponsorship and philanthropic support.
- Memberships, affiliations, and participation fees related to civics education, speech, debate, leadership, and academic competition programs. (Section [2](#)).

The FDI is required to make publicly available and submit to the Department of Education (DOE) a report by December 31 of each year that includes the following:

- Student participation in statewide programs, by district and demographics.
- The number of active student teams in statewide speech and debate programs.
- Competitive and educational outcomes of statewide programs.
- A categorized summary of all expenditures.
- The FCDI is required to provide the FDI data needed for its annual reporting by November 1 of each year to account for joint programming between the two organizations. (Section [2](#)).

The bill [designates](#) February 1 through 7 of each year as “Florida Speech and Debate Week” with the following purposes:

- To recognize the academic, civic, and leadership value of competitive speech and debate.
- To honor educators, coaches, judges, and school districts that support debate programming.
- To inspire students statewide to participate in debate as a pathway to civic engagement.
- To promote Florida’s role as the national leader in scholastic speech and debate.
- The bill allows public schools, state agencies and other entities to observe Florida Speech and Debate Week. (Section [1](#)).

The effective date of the bill is July 1, 2026. (Section [3](#)).

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
- 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

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. 26, 2026).

² Britannica, *Lincoln-Douglas debates*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Lincoln-Douglas-debates> (last visited Feb. 26, 2026).

³ Britannica, *The Kennedy-Nixon debates*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/television-in-the-United-States/The-Kennedy-Nixon-debates> (last visited Feb. 26, 2026).

⁴ National Speech & Debate Association, *Membership at a Glance*, <https://www.speechanddebate.org/membership-database/> (last visited Feb. 26, 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. 26, 2026).

⁶ Florida Debate Initiative, *Programs*, <https://www.floridadebate.org/programs> (last visited Feb. 26, 2026).

⁷ Florida Debate Initiative, *Programs*, <https://www.floridadebate.org/programs> (last visited Feb. 26, 2026).

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

⁹ Executive Order 19-32 (2019).

announced the establishment of the FCDI along with funding from the Marcus Foundation for elevating civic 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. 26, 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
Student Academic Success Subcommittee	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. 			
Education & Employment Committee	19 Y, 0 N, As CS	2/26/2026	Hassell	Wolff
THE CHANGES ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designated, subject to appropriation, the FDI as the state’s nonprofit statewide speech and debate organization and outlines requirements, authorized expenditures, and reporting requirements of the organization. Required, subject to appropriation, the FCDI to lead specified events and coordinate with the FDI in organizing other speech and debate events and data sharing. Amended the dates for “Florida Speech and Debate Week” as well as the purpose and scope of that observance. 			

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