

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to speech and debate in education;
3 creating a short title; creating s. 683.338, F.S.;
4 establishing Florida Speech and Debate Week in the
5 state; creating s. 1003.49967, F.S.; providing
6 legislative findings and intent; designating the
7 Florida Debate Initiative (FDI) as the official
8 statewide speech and debate organization in the state;
9 providing duties of the FDI relating to speech and
10 debate in the state; providing for the use of
11 legislatively appropriated funds; providing FDI,
12 school district, and Department of Education reporting
13 requirements; providing school district obligations
14 relating to speech and debate in education; creating
15 the Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame; providing
16 for the location, administration, and purpose of the
17 hall of fame; providing for funding of the hall of
18 fame; requiring the State Board of Education to
19 establish a speech and debate endorsement for teaching
20 certificates; providing requirements for such
21 endorsement; providing requirements for earning such
22 endorsement; requiring the endorsement to be used for
23 specified purposes; creating the Institute for Speech
24 and Debate Innovation within the Florida Virtual
25 School; providing requirements of the institute;

providing that materials created by the institute are owned by the state; requiring certain tools and platforms to comply with certain laws; creating s. 1004.0983, F.S.; requiring the Board of Governors and the State Board of Education to develop and establish certain coursework, certificate programs, and credentials relating speech and debate, coaching, and tournament options; providing requirements for such coursework; requiring the Articulation Coordinating Committee to approve such courses for inclusion in dual enrollment programs; encouraging specified institutions to partner with the FDI for specified purposes; providing appropriations; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. This act may be cited as the "Florida Speech and Debate Education Act of 2026."

Section 2. Section 683.338, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

683.338 Florida Speech and Debate Week.—

(1) The first Tuesday in November of each year is designated as "Florida Speech and Debate Week" to:

(a) Recognize the academic, civic, and leadership value of

51 competitive speech and debate.

52 (b) Honor educators, coaches, judges, and school districts
53 that support debate programming.

54 (c) Inspire students statewide to participate in debate as
55 a pathway to civic engagement.

56 (d) Promote the state's role as the national leader in
57 scholastic speech and debate.

58 (2) The Department of Education, local school districts,
59 local governments, and other agencies are encouraged to sponsor
60 events, exhibitions, and recognitions celebrating the impact of
61 speech and debate in the state.

62 **Section 3. Section 1003.49967, Florida Statutes, is**
63 **created to read:**

64 1003.49967 Speech and debate in public education.—

65 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.—The Legislature:

66 (a) Recognizes that speech and debate significantly
67 improve literacy, critical thinking, research ability, civic
68 knowledge, and leadership development for students.

69 (b) Recognizes that this state's civics and debate
70 expansion has become a national model, increasing access in all
71 regions.

72 (c) Finds that sustaining and improving this success
73 requires a permanent statewide organization with specialized
74 expertise, program capacity, and year-round operational support.

75 (d) Finds that the Florida Debate Initiative (FDI) has

76 demonstrated statewide effectiveness and is uniquely positioned
77 to ensure continuity, equitable access, quality programming,
78 tournament infrastructure, and instructional rigor.

79 (e) Intends to establish a comprehensive, statewide
80 infrastructure that expands, supports, and elevates K-20 speech
81 and debate education.

82 (2) STATEWIDE SPEECH AND DEBATE ORGANIZATION—

83 (a) The FDI is designated as the official statewide speech
84 and debate organization responsible for managing, developing,
85 and expanding K-20 speech and debate programs. The FDI shall:

86 (b) Manage the official Florida Speech and Debate League
87 and its regional teams and maintain the operation of league
88 tournaments, regional teams, and judge-training systems.

89 (c) Establish statewide competition rules, ballots,
90 judging standards, and tournament calendars.

91 (d) Operate or supervise district, regional, and state
92 tournaments.

93 (e) Train and certify coaches, judges, volunteers, and
94 tournament staff.

95 (f) Provide statewide programmatic support including:

96 1. Student programs, including American Dream Debates and
97 Veterans Day Speech Contest.

98 2. Leadership and services programs, including the Salute
99 to Service Veteran-Student Mentorship Program.

100 3. Competitive training for students, including ProCamp

101 for varsity competitors and middle school and high school summer
102 debate camps.

103 4. Educator training, including DebateED 101, DebateED
104 201, and summer coach retreats for new coaches.

105 5. Postsecondary programs, including the FDI Fellows
106 Collegiate Internship Program and the Civics Immersion
107 Experience in Washington, D.C.

108 6. Other public service initiatives.

109 (g) Maintain statewide data reporting and annual
110 accountability.

111 (h) Work constructively with nonstate-sanctioned leagues
112 while upholding the state's civic and patriotic development
113 goals.

114 (i) In partnership with the Department of Education,
115 establish regional traveling debate teams to represent the state
116 in national competitions. The FDI shall manage the team
117 selection, coaching assignments, training schedules, and
118 competition logistics. The regional teams shall:

119 1. Expand access for students from Title I, rural, and
120 emerging programs.

121 2. Provide advanced competitive training and coaching.

122 3. Strengthen the state's national competitive presence.

123 4. Prioritize all of the following when selecting students
124 for participation:

125 a. Public school students.

126 b. Geographic diversity.

127 c. Competitive performance and leadership potential.

128 (3) USE OF FUNDS.—Subject to legislative appropriation,
129 the FDI may use funds for:

130 (a) Administrative operations including staffing,
131 insurance, compliance, reporting, and statewide infrastructure.

132 (b) Programmatic operations, including curriculum,
133 training, summer programs, workshops, camps, and mentorship
134 programs.

135 (c) Tournament operations, including tournament logistics,
136 staff, judge training, technology, awards, and regional team
137 operations.

138 (d) Travel, lodging, training, and transportation for
139 participants, including the creation of the Academic Competition
140 Transportation Grant Program. The grant program shall be
141 administered by the FDI and the department and shall give
142 priority to rural, Title I, and transportation-limited school
143 districts. Grant program funds shall be used to provide school
144 districts with funds for all of the following:

145 1. Bus and charter costs.

146 2. Fuel expenses.

147 3. Driver compensation.

148 4. Travel-related expenses for competitive speech and
149 debate.

150 (e) Public-private partnership development including

151 sponsorship and philanthropic support.

152 (4) REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.—

153 (a) The FDI shall annually provide an accountability
154 report to the Department of Education and publish such report on
155 its website. The report must include:

156 1. The number of students participating in programs by
157 school district and student demographics.

158 2. The number of active speech and debate teams statewide.

159 3. Competitive and educational data and outcomes.

160 4. A summary of expenditures by major category, as
161 determined by the department.

162 5. Any other information requested by the department.

163 (b) Each school district shall annually provide a report
164 to the department. The report must include:

165 1. The number of active speech and debate teams.

166 2. Student participation rates in such teams and
167 competitions.

168 3. Competitive performance and public-service engagement.

169 4. Transportation, facilities, and administrative support
170 received by the district.

171 5. Any barriers to expansion and resources needed by the
172 district.

173 (c) The department shall annually summarize statewide
174 findings and publish an annual report that includes the data
175 provided under paragraphs (a) and (b). Such report must be

published on the department's website.

(5) SCHOOL DISTRICT OBLIGATIONS.—Each school district:

(a) Must ensure reasonable parity in transportation, facilities, administrative support, and resources provided to competitive speech and debate teams and interscholastic athletic teams.

(b) May use motor carriers and charter services to transport students to academic competitions, including speech and debate tournaments.

(6) FLORIDA SPEECH AND DEBATE HALL OF FAME.—

(a) There is created the Speech and Debate Hall of Fame, which shall be located in the Capitol in a publicly accessible area or at another suitable location designated by the Florida Historic Capitol Museum Director. The Speech and Debate Hall of Fame shall serve as the official statewide institution recognizing exceptional contributions to competitive speech and debate in the state and:

1. Honor distinguished students, coaches, educators, alumni, veterans, public servants, benefactors, and supporters who have elevated speech and debate in Florida.

2. Preserve the history, impact, and cultural significance of competitive debate.

3. Inspire future generations of Florida students to pursue speech, debate, public leadership, and civic excellence.

(b) The Speech and Debate Hall of Fame shall be

administered jointly by the Florida Education Foundation and the Commissioner of Education, or his or her designee.

(c) The Florida Education Foundation shall convene a committee to establish nomination and selection procedures that ensure representation from:

1. Speech and debate educators.
2. Former competitors.
3. School district administrators.
4. Community stakeholders.
5. The FDI.

(d) The Speech and Debate Hall of Fame shall be funded subject to legislative appropriation, private donations, and sponsorships. Such funding may be used for exhibits, archival material, digital displays, and recognition ceremonies.

(7) SPEECH AND DEBATE ENDORSEMENT FOR CERTIFIED TEACHERS.—The State Board of Education shall establish a speech and debate endorsement for teaching certificates issued pursuant to s. 1012.56.

(a) The endorsement must:

1. Recognize specialized instructional and coaching expertise in competitive speech and debate.
2. Promote high-quality instruction and competitive standards statewide.
3. Strengthen district capacity to launch, expand, and sustain debate programs.

226 (b) The state board shall establish the requirements to
227 earn an endorsement in speech and debate. Such requirements
228 must, at a minimum, include:

229 1. Completion of:

230 a. Approved coursework in argumentation, rhetoric,
231 communication, or debate instruction; or

232 b. Equivalent professional development offered by the
233 Florida Debate Initiative or state colleges.

234 2. Demonstrated competency in rules, events, and
235 competitive standards of scholastic debate.

236 (c) The endorsement shall qualify for professional
237 development and credit for the renewal of a teaching
238 certificate.

239 (d) School districts are encouraged to provide salary
240 supplements or stipend of teachers who hold the speech and
241 debate endorsement.

242 (8) INSTITUTE FOR SPEECH AND DEBATE INNOVATION.—

243 (a) There is established within the Florida Virtual School
244 the Institute for Speech and Debate to expand instructional
245 access and technological modernization for speech and debate
246 instruction.

247 (b) The institute shall:

248 1. Develop online curriculum and instructional modules in
249 speech and debate.

250 2. Create artificial intelligence-based coaching tools,

digital judging tutorials, and analytics dashboards.

3. Produce virtual and augmented reality simulations for competitive practice.

4. Ensure equitable access for school districts lacking onsite coaching capacity.

(c) Materials produced by the institute shall be owned by the state for public use.

(d) All tools and platforms created or used by the institute must comply with state and federal student privacy laws.

Section 4. Section 1004.0983, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

1004.0983 Postsecondary speech and debate education; dual enrollment.—

(1) The Board of Governors and the State Board of Education shall develop and establish undergraduate and graduate coursework, certificate programs, and micro-credentials in speech and debate education, coaching, and tournament operations. The Department of Education shall adopt such courses into the statewide course numbering system under s. 1007.24.

(2) Such coursework may include:

(a) Rhetoric, argumentation, and communication theory.

(b) Coaching methods and competitive event instruction.

(c) Tournament management and adjudication.

(d) Public speaking pedagogy.

276 (3) Such coursework must be available through in-person,
277 hybrid, and virtual classes.

278 (4) The Articulation Coordinating Committee shall approve
279 a list of such courses to include in the state's dual enrollment
280 program. If feasible, such courses shall:

281 (a) Be used to meet the requirements for a standard high
282 school diploma under s. 1003.4282.

283 (b) Be eligible for a diploma endorsement signifying
284 advanced competency in speech and debate.

285 (c) Be available through distance-learning options to
286 ensure statewide access.

287 (5) State universities and Florida College System
288 institutions are encouraged to partner with the Florida Debate
289 Initiative to align courses with statewide competitive standards
290 and coaching needs.

291 **Section 5.** (1) For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the sum of
292 \$2,400,000 in recurring funds is appropriated from the General
293 Revenue Fund to the Department of Education for the Florida
294 Debate Initiative for administrative operations, programmatic
295 operations, tournament operations, training, coaching support,
296 and statewide infrastructure.

297 (2) For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the sum of \$250,000 in
298 recurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to
299 the Department of Education for the Florida Debate Initiative to
300 fund regional traveling debate teams, including training,

coaching, travel, lodging, and competition registration and costs.

(3) For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the sum of \$700,000 in recurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of Education for the Florida Debate Initiative to administer and fund the Academic Competition Transportation Grant Program.

(4) For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the sum of \$750,000 in recurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Virtual School Institute for Speech and Debate Innovation for the purposes of this act.

(5) For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the sum of \$500,000 in recurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of Education for the creation of endorsements for teaching certificates, professional development, and the operation of the Speech and Debate Hall of Fame pursuant to this act.

(6) For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the sum of \$250,000 in nonrecurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of Education for a physical or digital Speech and Debate Hall of Fame exhibit.

Section 6. This act shall take effect January 1, 2027.