

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Fiscal Policy

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BILL: CS/CS/SB 1062

INTRODUCER: Appropriations Committee on Pre-K - 12 Education; Education Pre-K - 12 Committee; and Senator Brodeur and others

SUBJECT: Speech and Debate Education

DATE: February 23, 2026      REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Sabitsch</u>	<u>Bouck</u>	<u>ED</u>	<u>Fav/CS</u>
2.	<u>Gray</u>	<u>Elwell</u>	<u>AED</u>	<u>Fav/CS</u>
3.	<u>Sabitsch</u>	<u>Siples</u>	<u>FP</u>	<u>Favorable</u>

**Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:**

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

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**I. Summary:**

CS/CS/SB 1062 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 (DOE) 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.
- Designating February 1 through 7 as “Florida Speech and Debate Week” and describes the purposes of the week.

The bill appropriates \$2.4 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to implement these provisions in Fiscal Year 2026-2027. See **Section V., Fiscal Impact Statement**.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2026.

## II. Present Situation:

### Debate and Public Speaking

#### *History*

Debate is an ancient form of argumentation. It was first used as a way to resolve quarrels, but it soon became apparent that it could also be used as a tool to teach people how to think critically and argue effectively. It originated in Greece, around 500 B.C. There, Socrates used it in his philosophy classes at the Academy in Athens.

The Roman orators Cicero and Quintilian were masters of debate. They taught their students how to argue both sides of an issue so well that their opponents didn't even know they were being argued into a corner until it was too late!

Medieval scholars also used debate as a method of discussing important ideas with each other in order to come up with new ways of thinking, from science to religion.<sup>1</sup>

The development of public speaking as a specific skill is strongly linked to the development of democracy in Ancient Greece. Starting in 621 B.C. in Athens, laws began to convert from an oral tradition heavily controlled by nobility to a written form that could be applied equally and consistently. This codification (creating an organized system of laws) took power from the nobility and moved it into the courts. Assemblies were formed to review, revise, and create laws. Accordingly, there had to be substantive debate and persuasion to reach agreements on how to manage this evolution of legal doctrine, and those coming before the courts needed to engage in public speaking to advocate for their position.

Democracy demands public speaking as a tool for self-governance. Since being proficient in public speaking was so valuable, the study of how it works likewise became important, emerging as the study of rhetoric.<sup>2</sup>

#### *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.<sup>3</sup>
- 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Learning Leaders, *The History of Debate*, <https://www.learningleaders.com/insights/the-history-of-debate-from-ancient-greece-to-remote-learning> (last visited Feb 5, 2026).

<sup>2</sup> Boise State University, *A Brief History of Public Speaking*, <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/soc122/chapter/10-1-a-brief-history-of-public-speaking/> (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>3</sup> 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. 5, 2026).

territories following the Mexican War and would have a profound effect on the future of the United States.<sup>4</sup>

- 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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> The association reported 200 Florida high school members with 10,344 students participating.<sup>7</sup>

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:

- 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).<sup>8</sup>

The program is funded with a specific appropriation in the Florida budget of \$2.4 million in the 2025-2026 fiscal year.<sup>9</sup>

The FCDI is a program under the Department of Education (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.<sup>10</sup> In 2020 the Governor announced the establishment of the FCDI along with funding from the Marcus foundation for

<sup>4</sup> Britannica, *Lincoln-Douglas debates*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Lincoln-Douglas-debates> (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>5</sup> Britannica, *The Kennedy-Nixon debates*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/television-in-the-United-States/The-Kennedy-Nixon-debates> (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>6</sup> National Speech & Debate Association, *Membership at a Glance*, <https://www.speechanddebate.org/membership-database/> (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>7</sup> Email, National Speech & Debate Association (Jan. 21, 2026) (on file with the Senate Committee on Pre-K-12 Education).

<sup>8</sup> Florida Debate Initiative, *Programs*, <https://www.floridadebate.org/programs> (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>9</sup> Specific Appropriation 106, Ch. 2025-198, Laws of Fla.

<sup>10</sup> Executive Order 19-32 (2019)

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

- 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>

### **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.<sup>14</sup> Florida Law designates the following example observances:

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

<sup>11</sup> The Marcus Foundation, *About the Marcus Foundation*, <https://marcusfoundation.org/about-the-marcus-foundation/> (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>12</sup> 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> (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>13</sup> Florida Civics & Debate Initiative Handbook, at 5 (2025-2026), available at [https://5400622c-3214-4001-887b-8a6328c71885.filesusr.com/ugd/ab06c2\\_3136dad194a64b39abf6fedbc941d5a2.pdf](https://5400622c-3214-4001-887b-8a6328c71885.filesusr.com/ugd/ab06c2_3136dad194a64b39abf6fedbc941d5a2.pdf) (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>14</sup> Chapter 683, F.S.

<sup>15</sup> Section 683.1455, F.S.

<sup>16</sup> Section 683.196, F.S.

<sup>17</sup> Section 683.3341, F.S.

<sup>18</sup> Section 683.333, F.S.

<sup>19</sup> Section 683.332, F.S.

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill creates s. 1000.09, F.S., to specify the creation, designation, and responsibilities for competitive speech and debate.

The section designates 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.

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.

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.

The section 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.

The FDI is required to make publicly available and submit to the 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.

The bill creates s. 683.221, F.S., to designate that February 1 through 7 of each year be designated 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.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

#### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

#### **V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

None.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

The bill provides an appropriation of \$2.4 million for the 2026-2027 fiscal year as follows:

- \$2.4 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to support the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc.'s responsibilities including administrative, programmatic, and tournament operation duties.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill creates the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 683.221 and 1000.09.

**IX. Additional Information:**

- A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**  
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

**CS for CS by Appropriations Committee on Pre-K - 12 Education on February 18, 2026:**

The committee substitute removes from the bill:

- Designation of the Florida Speech and Debate Education Act.
- Creation of the Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame.
- Certified teacher endorsement in speech and debate.
- Creation of regional debate teams.
- Creation of the Debate Across the Curriculum Pilot Program.
- Requirement for the Florida Debate Initiative (FDI) to establish and operate a charter school named the Florida Speech and Debate Academy.
- School district reporting requirements.
- Requirement for the Florida Virtual School to establish the Institute for Speech and Debate Innovation.
- Requirement of one-half credit in speech and debate as a graduation requirement.
- Requirement for the Board of Governors and the State Board of Education to develop speech and debate training pathways.
- Requirement for the Department of Education (DOE) to approve courses for inclusion in dual enrollment programs.

The committee substitute maintains the following provisions of the bill:

- Designation of February 1 through 7 as “Florida Speech and Debate Week” and the purposes of the week.
- Designation of the Florida Debate Initiative (FDI), Inc. as the state’s nonprofit speech and debate organization responsible for speech and debate programs and the requirements of the organization.
- Authorization for participation in non-FDI organizations and for FDI partnerships, and adds the Florida Civics and Debate Initiative (FCDI) as a collaborative partner.
- Specifies civics and debate events to be held by the FCDI, FDI, or jointly.
- Authorized use of funding by the FDI but specifies that expenses could be for local, state, and national travel to competitions hosted by the FDI, FCDI and other debate organizations.
- Reporting requirements for the FDI but defines the reporting requirements and adds requirements for the FDCI to provide data to FDI.

The committee substitute changes the effective date of the bill to July 1, 2026.

The committee substitute maintains the \$2.4 million in recurring funds for the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc., but removes all other appropriations from the bill.

**CS by Education Pre-K – 12 on January 27, 2026:**

The committee substitute maintains the provisions of the original bill but adds the following:

- Florida Debate Initiative (FDI) responsibilities and uses of funding.
- An authorization for school districts, schools and students to participate in events and organizations outside of the FDI.
- Establishment of the Debate Across the Curriculum Pilot Program for one year.
- An authorization for FDI to establish a charter school.
- The designation of February 1 through 7 as “Florida Speech and Debate Week” replacing a week in November.
- Requirements for the Florida Virtual School to coordinate with FDI on specific activities through a formal partnership.
- An additional requirement for earning a standard high school diploma for students entering grade 9 beginning in the 2028-2029 school year.
- An additional \$1 million in funding in 2026-2027 for the Debate Across the Curriculum pilot program.
- \$7.74 million in funding in 2027-2028 specifically for the Florida Speech and Debate Academy.

**B. Amendments:**

None.