

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.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Education Pre-K -12

BILL: SB 1062

INTRODUCER: Senator Brodeur and others

SUBJECT: Speech and Debate

DATE: January 26, 2026 REVISED: _____

ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1. <u>Sabitsch</u>	<u>Bouck</u>	<u>ED</u>	<u>Pre-meeting</u>
2. _____	_____	<u>AED</u>	_____
3. _____	_____	<u>FP</u>	_____

I. Summary:

SB 1062 creates the “Florida Speech and Debate Education Act” that includes the following provisions:

- Designates the Florida Debate Initiative (FDI), Inc. as the official statewide organization responsible for speech and debate programs and outlines requirements, authorized expenditures, and reporting requirements of the organization.
- Requires the Department of Education (DOE) to collaborate with the FDI to establish regional traveling debate teams and outlines requirements for teams and expenditures.
- Provides annual reporting requirements for district school boards regarding speech and debate competitions.
- Creates the Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame.
- Designates a week in November at the “Florida Speech and Debate Week” and describes the purposes of the week.
- Allows a certified teacher to earn an endorsement in speech and debate.
- Requires the Florida Virtual School to establish the Institute for Speech and Debate Innovation and provides requirements for the institute.
- Requires the development of undergraduate and graduate coursework, certificates and micro-credentials in speech and debate education.
- Requires the DOE to approve specific speech and debate courses for inclusion in dual enrollment programs.

The bill provides \$4.6 million to implement these provisions. See Section V. Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect on January 1, 2027.

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.¹

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!²

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.³

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.⁴

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.⁵

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.⁶
- 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.

¹ Learning Leaders, *The History of Debate*, <https://www.learningleaders.com/insights/the-history-of-debate-from-ancient-greece-to-remote-learning> (last visited Jan. 20, 2026).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ 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 Jan. 20, 2026).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ 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 Jan. 20, 2026).

territories following the Mexican War and would have a profound effect on the future of the United States.⁷

- 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.⁸

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.⁹ The association reported 200 Florida high school members with 10,344 students participating.¹⁰

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:¹¹

- 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).¹²

The program is funded with a specific appropriation in the Florida budget of \$2.4 million in the 2025-2026 fiscal year.¹³

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.¹⁴ In 2020 the Governor

⁷ Britannica, *Lincoln-Douglas debates*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Lincoln-Douglas-debates> (last visited Jan. 20, 2026).

⁸ Britannica, The Kennedy-Nixon debates, <https://www.britannica.com/art/television-in-the-United-States/The-Kennedy-Nixon-debates> (last visited Jan. 20, 2026).

⁹ National Speech & Debate Association, *Membership at a Glance*, <https://www.speechanddebate.org/membership-database/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

¹⁰ Email, National Speech & Debate Association (Jan. 21, 2026).

¹¹ Florida Debate Initiative, *Programs*, <https://www.floridadebate.org/programs> (last visited Jan. 20, 2026).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Specific Appropriation 106, s. 2, ch. 2025-198, Laws of Fla.

¹⁴ 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 Foundation¹⁵ committed \$5 million over a three-year period towards the initiative with the following goals:¹⁶

- 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ Florida Law designates the following example observances:

- American Founders Month;²⁰
- Holocaust Remembrance Day;²¹
- Responsible Fatherhood Month;²²
- Foster Family Appreciation Week;²³ and
- Drowsy Driving Prevention Week (Ronshay Dugans Act).²⁴

¹⁵ The Marcus Foundation, *About the Marcus Foundation*, <https://marcusfoundation.org/about-the-marcus-foundation/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

¹⁶ 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>.

¹⁷ 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>.

¹⁸ https://5400622c-3214-4001-887b-8a6328c71885.filesusr.com/ugd/ab06c2_3136dad194a64b39abff6fedbc941d5a2.pdf, at 5.

¹⁹ Chapter 683, F.S.

²⁰ Section 683.1455, F.S.

²¹ Section 683.196, F.S.

²² Section 683.3341, F.S.

²³ Section 683.333, F.S.

²⁴ Section 683.332, F.S.

Florida Educator Certificate Endorsements

Florida law allows the Department of Education (DOE) to adopt endorsements as add-ons to an existing educator certificate.²⁵ Endorsements demonstrate specialized expertise in a subject area, instructional strategy or specific student population. The following are current adopted endorsements:

- American sign language;
- Athletic coaching;
- Autism spectrum disorders;
- Driver education;
- English for speakers of other languages (ESOL);
- Gifted;
- Orientation and mobility;
- Prekindergarten disabilities;
- Reading; and
- Severe or profound disabilities.²⁶

Florida Virtual School

The Florida Virtual School (FLVS) was established in 1997²⁷ as a pilot project to create Florida first internet -based public high school. Currently, as a fully accredited, statewide public school district, FLVS offers more than 190 online courses to kindergarten through grade 12 students and has enrolled more than 4.6 million students. The FLVS exists as a not-for-profit corporation.²⁸

Features of the FLVS include the following:²⁹

- The FLVS is included in Florida's accountability system and receives a school grade based on the same criteria as other public schools.
- Florida school districts may choose to enter an agreement with FLVS to operate a district franchise/district virtual school.
- FLVS Flex Offers more than 190 tuition-free courses to Kindergarten-Grade 12 public, private, charter, and homeschool Florida students with year-round enrollment and 24/7 course availability. Students take FLVS courses to get ahead or graduate early, to allow flexibility for extracurricular activities, or to take courses not offered by their district.
- FLVS Full Time offers a comprehensive, full-time curriculum to Kindergarten-Grade 12 students in the state and follows the traditional 180-day academic calendar. FLVS Full Time combines the structure of a traditional school with the flexibility of online learning.
- Students enrolled in FLVS Flex and FLVS Full Time are funded based on courses successfully completed.

²⁵ Section 1012.586, F.S.

²⁶ Florida Department of Education, *Educator Certification-Certificate Subjects*, <https://www.fl DOE.org/teaching/certification/certificate-subjects/> (last visited Jan. 22, 2026).

²⁷ Section 1002.37, F.S.

²⁸ Florida Department of Education, *Florida Virtual School*, <https://www.fl DOE.org/schools/school-choice/virtual-edu/florida-virtual-school/> (last visited Jan. 22, 2026).

²⁹ Florida Department of Education, *General Information About Florida Virtual School*, <https://www.fl DOE.org/schools/school-choice/virtual-edu/florida-virtual-school/general-info-flvs.shtml> (last visited Jan. 22, 2026).

- Students attending a private school can enroll in FLVS Flex courses when their school affiliates with FLVS.³⁰

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

SB 1062 creates the “Florida Speech and Debate Education Act,” and creates s. 1000.09, F.S., to provide legislative findings as follows:

- That speech and debate significantly improve literacy, critical thinking, research ability, civic knowledge, and leadership for students.
- That the state’s civics and debate expansion has become a national model, increasing access to this instruction in all regions and that sustaining and improving this success requires a permanent statewide organization with specialized expertise, program capacity, and year-round operational support.
- That the Florida Debate Initiative (FDI) has demonstrated statewide effectiveness and is uniquely positioned to ensure continuity, equitable access, quality programming, tournament infrastructure, and instructional rigor and that it is the intent of the Legislature to establish a comprehensive statewide infrastructure, under the FDI’s direction, that expands, supports, and elevates K–20 speech and debate education.

The section designates the FDI as the official statewide speech and debate organization and is given the following tasks:

- Manage the official Florida Speech and Debate League and its regional teams.
- Establish statewide competition rules, ballots, judging standards, and tournament calendars.
- Operate or supervise district, regional, and state tournaments.
- Train and certify coaches, judges, volunteers, and tournament staff.
- Provide statewide programmatic support, including student programs, educator training, and public service initiatives.
- Maintain statewide data reporting and annual accountability.
- Work constructively with nonstate-sanctioned leagues while upholding Florida’s civic and patriotic development goals.

Additionally, the FDI is required to implement and maintain a comprehensive suite of statewide programs, including all of the following:

- Student speech and debate programs.
- Student leadership and service programs.
- Competitive speech and debate training for students.
- Educator training.
- Postsecondary and workforce internships.
- Operation of speech and debate tournaments.

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

- Administrative operations, including staffing, insurance, compliance, reporting, and statewide infrastructure.

³⁰ Florida Department of Education, *General Information About Florida Virtual School*, <https://www.fl DOE.org/schools/school-choice/virtual-edu/florida-virtual-school/general-info-flvs.shtml> (last visited Jan. 22, 2026).

- 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.
- Public-private partnership development, including sponsorship and philanthropic support.

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 section allows a certified teacher to earn an endorsement in speech and debate and requires the DOE to adopt the requirements for the endorsement that include the following:

- Completion of coursework approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) in argumentation, rhetoric, communication, or debate instruction;
- Completion of professional development offered by the FDI or equivalent professional development offered by a Florida College System institution or state university;
- Competency, as determined by the SBE, in the rules, events, and competitive standards of scholastic debate.

The section requires the DOE to collaborate with the FDI to establish regional traveling debate teams to represent Florida in national competitions. Teams must be accessible to students at Title I and rural schools. Teams are required to provide competitive training and coaching for speech and debate. The bill permits all travel costs to be covered through legislative appropriation, public-private partnerships, and sponsorships and permits school districts to use school buses to transport students to and from speech and debate competitions.

The bill creates s. 265.0042, F.S., establishing the Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame on the Plaza Level of the Capitol Building in Tallahassee. The bill requires the Department of Management Services to coordinate with the Department of Education (DOE) and the Commissioner of Education on the design and requires the hall of fame to do the following:

- Honor distinguished students, coaches, educators, alumni, veterans, public servants, benefactors, and supporters who have elevated speech and debate in this state.
- Preserve the history, impact, and cultural significance of competitive debate.
- Inspire future generations of Florida students to pursue speech, debate, public leadership, and civic excellence.
- Convene a committee to establish procedures to nominate and select individuals to be featured.

The bill creates s. 683.221, F.S., to designate that the week that includes the first Tuesday of November 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 modifies s. 1001.42, F.S., to require district school boards to make publicly available online and submit to the DOE an annual report by a date set by the DOE that includes the following:

- The number of active speech and debate teams.
- Student participation rates.
- Competitive performance and public service engagement.
- Transportation, facilities, and administrative support provided.
- Resources needed to expand the program.

The bill modifies s. 1002.37, F.S., to require the Florida Virtual School to establish the Institute for Speech and Debate Innovation (ISDI). The institute is required to:

- Develop online curriculum, micro-credentials, and instructional modules for speech and debate.
- Create artificial intelligence-based coaching tools, digital judging tutorials, and analytics dashboards.
- Produce virtual reality and augmented reality simulations for competitive practice.
- Ensure equitable access for districts lacking onsite coaching capacity.

The bill creates s. 1004.0983, F.S., to require the Board of Governors (BOG) and the State Board of Education (SBE) to develop undergraduate and graduate coursework, certificates, and micro-credentials in speech and debate education, coaching, and tournament operations. The BOG and the SBE are permitted to collaborate with the FDI to develop coursework which may include the following:

- Rhetoric, argumentation, and communication theory.
- Coaching methods and competitive event instruction.
- Tournament management and adjudication.
- Public speaking pedagogy.

The bill creates an undesignated section of law that requires the DOE to approve postsecondary courses developed by the BOG and SBE pursuant to s. 1004.0983, F.S., created in the bill, for inclusion in dual enrollment programs for an eligible secondary student or home education student as provided in Florida Law.³¹

The bill takes effect January 1, 2027.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

³¹ Section 1007.271(1), F.S.

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 a total appropriation of \$4.6 million for the 2026-2027 fiscal year as follows:

- \$2.4 million in recurring funds to be appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to support the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc.'s responsibilities including administrative, programmatic, and tournament operation duties.
- \$250,000 in recurring funds to be appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to support FDI's responsibilities for regional traveling debate teams to support their training, coaching, lodging, and competition costs.
- \$700,000 in recurring funds to be appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to school districts for travel costs to attend speech and debate competitions.
- \$500,000 in recurring funds to be appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the State Board of Education to develop the teacher endorsement and to support the Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame.
- \$750,000 in recurring funds to be appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Virtual School to support the Institute for Speech and Debate Innovation.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends sections 1001.42 and 1002.37 of the Florida Statutes. This bill creates sections 265.0042, 683.221, 1000.09, and 1004.0983 of the Florida Statutes. The bill creates two undesignated sections of Florida Law.

IX. Additional Information:**A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
