

By Senator Brodeur

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1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to speech and debate; providing a
3 short title; creating s. 265.0042, F.S.; creating the
4 Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame; requiring the
5 Department of Management Services to set aside an area
6 in the Capitol Building; requiring the department to
7 consult with the Florida Education Foundation and the
8 Commissioner of Education; providing the duties for
9 the hall of fame; requiring the hall of fame to
10 convene a committee for specified purposes; creating
11 s. 683.221, F.S.; designating Florida Speech and
12 Debate Week each year in November; providing purposes
13 for the annual observance; authorizing specified
14 entities to observe Florida Speech and Debate Week;
15 creating s. 1000.09, F.S.; providing legislative
16 findings and intent; designating the Florida Debate
17 Initiative, Inc., (FDI) as the official statewide
18 speech and debate organization; providing the duties
19 of FDI; requiring FDI to implement and maintain
20 specified statewide programs; providing authorized
21 uses of funds for FDI; requiring FDI to publish online
22 and submit annually to the Department of Education a
23 specified report; authorizing a certified teacher to
24 earn an endorsement in speech and debate; specifying
25 requirements for the endorsement; requiring the
26 department to collaborate with FDI to establish
27 regional traveling debate teams; authorizing a school
28 district to use school buses to transport students to
29 speech and debate competitions; amending s. 1001.42,

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F.S.; requiring each district school board annually to publish online and submit to the department a report; specifying requirements for the report; amending s. 1002.37, F.S.; requiring the Florida Virtual School to establish the Institute for Speech and Debate Innovation; providing duties of the institute; creating s. 1004.0983, F.S.; requiring the Board of Governors of the State University System and the State Board of Education to develop specified undergraduate and graduate coursework, certificates, and micro-credentials; authorizing the Board of Governors and the State Board of Education to collaborate with FDI to develop coursework; requiring the department to approve specified dual enrollment courses; 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."

Section 2. Section 265.0042, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

265.0042 Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame.—

(1) There is created the Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame. The Department of Management Services shall set aside an area on the Plaza Level of the Capitol Building and shall consult with the Florida Education Foundation and the Commissioner of Education regarding the design and theme of the area.

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(2) The hall of fame shall do all of the following:

(a) Honor distinguished students, coaches, educators, alumni, veterans, public servants, benefactors, and supporters who have elevated speech and debate in this state.

(b) Preserve the history, impact, and cultural significance of competitive debate.

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

(3) The hall of fame shall convene a committee to establish procedures to nominate and select individuals to be featured.

Section 3. Section 683.221, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

683.221 Florida Speech and Debate Week.—

(1) The week that includes the first Tuesday of November shall be designated as "Florida Speech and Debate Week."

(2) Florida Speech and Debate Week shall be observed for all of the following purposes:

(a) To recognize the academic, civic, and leadership value of competitive speech and debate.

(b) To honor educators, coaches, judges, and school districts that support debate programming.

(c) To inspire students statewide to participate in debate as a pathway to civic engagement.

(d) To promote Florida's role as the national leader in scholastic speech and debate.

(3) Public and charter schools, state agencies, and other entities may observe Florida Speech and Debate Week.

Section 4. Section 1000.09, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

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88 1000.09 Competitive speech and debate.—

89 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS.—

90 (a) The Legislature finds that speech and debate
91 significantly improve literacy, critical thinking, research
92 ability, civic knowledge, and leadership for students of this
93 state.

94 (b) The Legislature also finds that this state's civics and
95 debate expansion has become a national model, increasing access
96 to this instruction in all regions. Sustaining and improving
97 this success requires a permanent statewide organization with
98 specialized expertise, program capacity, and year-round
99 operational support.

100 (c) The Legislature further finds that the Florida Debate
101 Initiative has demonstrated statewide effectiveness and is
102 uniquely positioned to ensure continuity, equitable access,
103 quality programming, tournament infrastructure, and
104 instructional rigor. It is the intent of the Legislature to
105 establish a comprehensive statewide infrastructure, under the
106 Florida Debate Initiative's direction, that expands, supports,
107 and elevates K-20 speech and debate education.

108 (2) CREATION, DESIGNATION, AND RESPONSIBILITIES.—The
109 Florida Debate Initiative, Inc., (FDI) is designated as the
110 official statewide speech and debate organization responsible
111 for managing, developing, and expanding K-20 speech and debate
112 programs.

113 (b) FDI shall do all of the following:

114 1. Manage the official Florida Speech and Debate League and
115 its regional teams.

116 2. Establish statewide competition rules, ballots, judging

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standards, and tournament calendars.

3. Operate or supervise district, regional, and state tournaments.

4. Train and certify coaches, judges, volunteers, and tournament staff.

5. Provide statewide programmatic support, including student programs, educator training, and public service initiatives.

6. Maintain statewide data reporting and annual accountability.

7. Work constructively with nonstate-sanctioned leagues while upholding Florida's civic and patriotic development goals.

(3) STATEWIDE PROGRAMS.—FDI shall implement and maintain a comprehensive suite of statewide programs, including all of the following:

(a) Student speech and debate programs.

(b) Student leadership and service programs.

(c) Competitive speech and debate training for students.

(d) Educator training.

(e) Postsecondary and workforce internships.

(f) Operation of speech and debate tournaments.

(4) AUTHORIZED USES OF FUNDS.—FDI may expend program funds on all of the following:

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

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

(c) Tournament operations, including logistics, staff,

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146 judge training, technology, awards, and regional team
147 operations.

148 (d) Travel, lodging, training, and transportation for
149 participants.

150 (e) Public-private partnership development, including
151 sponsorship and philanthropic support.

152 (5) ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING.—FDI shall make publicly
153 available online and submit, no later than December 31, an
154 annual report to the Department of Education which includes all
155 of the following:

156 (a) Student participation in statewide programs, by
157 district and demographics.

158 (b) The number of active student teams in statewide speech
159 and debate programs.

160 (c) Competitive and educational outcomes of statewide
161 programs.

162 (d) A categorized summary of all expenditures.

163 (6) ENDORSEMENT IN SPEECH AND DEBATE.—Pursuant to s.
164 1012.56 and State Board of Education rule, a certified teacher
165 may earn an endorsement in speech and debate if he or she
166 demonstrates all of the following:

167 (a) Completion of coursework approved by the state board in
168 argumentation, rhetoric, communication, or debate instruction.

169 (b) Completion of professional development offered by the
170 FDI or equivalent professional development offered by a Florida
171 College System institution or state university.

172 (c) Competency, as determined by the board, in the rules,
173 events, and competitive standards of scholastic debate.

174 (7) REGIONAL TRAVELING DEBATE TEAMS.—The department shall

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collaborate with 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 must provide competitive training and coaching for speech and debate.

(a) All travel costs may be covered through legislative appropriation, public-private partnerships, and sponsorships.

(b) A school district may use school buses to transport students to and from speech and debate competitions.

Section 5. Present subsection (29) of section 1001.42, Florida Statutes, is redesignated as subsection (30), and a new subsection (29) is added to that section, to read:

1001.42 Powers and duties of district school board.—The district school board, acting as a board, shall exercise all powers and perform all duties listed below:

(29) SPEECH AND DEBATE COMPETITION REPORTING.—Each district school board shall annually make available online and submit to the Department of Education, by a date set by the department, a report that includes all of the following information:

(a) The number of active speech and debate teams.

(b) Student participation rates.

(c) Competitive performance and public service engagement.

(d) Transportation, facilities, and administrative support provided.

(e) Resources needed to expand the program.

Section 6. Present subsection (11) of section 1002.37, Florida Statutes, is redesignated as subsection (12), and a new subsection (11) is added to that section, to read:

1002.37 The Florida Virtual School.—

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(11) The Florida Virtual School shall establish the Institute for Speech and Debate Innovation (ISDI). The ISDI shall do all of the following:

(1) Develop online curriculum, micro-credentials, and instructional modules for speech and debate.

(2) Create artificial intelligence-based coaching tools, digital judging tutorials, and analytics dashboards.

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

(4) Ensure equitable access for districts lacking onsite coaching capacity.

Section 7. Section 1004.0983, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

1004.0983 Speech and debate training pathways.—The Board of Governors and the State Board of Education shall develop undergraduate and graduate coursework, certificates, and micro-credentials in speech and debate education, coaching, and tournament operations.

(1) Coursework may include all of the following:

(a) Rhetoric, argumentation, and communication theory.

(b) Coaching methods and competitive event instruction.

(c) Tournament management and adjudication.

(d) Public speaking pedagogy.

(2) The Board of Governors and the State Board of Education may collaborate with the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc., to develop coursework.

Section 8. The Department of Education shall approve courses developed pursuant to s. 1004.0983, Florida Statutes, for inclusion in dual enrollment programs under s. 1007.271,

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Florida Statutes.

Section 9. (1) For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the sum of:

(a) \$2.4 million in recurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to support the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc.'s responsibilities assigned under s. 1000.09(4), Florida Statutes, including administrative, programmatic, and tournament operation duties.

(b) \$250,000 in recurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to support FDI's responsibilities assigned under s. 1000.09(7), Florida Statutes, including for regional traveling debate teams to support their training, coaching, lodging, and competition costs.

(2) \$700,000 in recurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to school districts for travel costs to attend speech and debate competitions pursuant to s. 1000.09, Florida Statutes.

(3) \$500,000 in recurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the State Board of Education to develop the teacher endorsement under s. 1000.09(6), Florida Statutes, and to support the Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame under s. 265.0042, Florida Statutes.

(4) \$750,000 in recurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Virtual School to support the Institute for Speech and Debate Innovation pursuant to s. 1002.37(11), Florida Statutes.

Section 10. This act shall take effect January 1, 2027.