

**By** the Committee on Education Pre-K - 12; and Senators Brodeur, Burgess, and Gaetz

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to speech and debate education; providing a short title; creating s. 265.0042, F.S.; creating the Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame; requiring the Department of Management Services to set aside an area on a specified level in the Capitol Building; requiring the department to consult with the Florida Education Foundation and the Commissioner of Education for a certain purpose; providing the duties of the hall of fame; requiring the hall of fame to convene a committee for specified purposes; requiring the committee to include at least one member or his or her designee from the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc; creating s. 683.221, F.S.; designating Florida Speech and Debate Week annually in February; providing purposes for the annual observance; authorizing specified entities to observe Florida Speech and Debate Week; creating s. 1000.09, F.S.; providing legislative findings and intent; designating the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc., (FDI) as the official statewide speech and debate organization; providing the duties of FDI; providing construction; authorizing FDI to establish and maintain certain partnerships; requiring FDI to implement and maintain specified statewide programs; providing authorized uses of funds for FDI; requiring FDI to publish online and submit annually by a specified date to the Department of Education a specified report; specifying requirements for the report; authorizing a certified teacher to

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30       earn an endorsement in speech and debate; specifying  
31       requirements for the endorsement; requiring the  
32       department to collaborate with FDI to establish  
33       regional traveling debate teams; requiring that teams  
34       be accessible to students at specified schools;  
35       requiring teams to provide certain training and  
36       coaching; providing for coverage of travel costs;  
37       authorizing a school district to use school buses to  
38       transport students to and from speech and debate  
39       competitions; creating the Debate Across the  
40       Curriculum Pilot Program within the department, in  
41       collaboration with FDI; providing the purpose of the  
42       pilot program; requiring the pilot program to include  
43       certain elements; providing an appropriation;  
44       providing for expiration of the pilot program;  
45       requiring FDI to establish and operate a charter  
46       school for a certain purpose; amending s. 1001.42,  
47       F.S.; requiring each district school board to annually  
48       publish online and submit to the department a report;  
49       specifying requirements for the report; amending s.  
50       1002.37, F.S.; requiring the Florida Virtual School to  
51       establish the Institute for Speech and Debate  
52       Innovation; providing duties of the institute;  
53       requiring the institute to enter into a formal  
54       partnership with FDI; amending s. 1003.4282, F.S;  
55       requiring that students complete at least one-half  
56       credit in speech and debate as a requirement for high  
57       school graduation, beginning in a specified school  
58       year; creating s. 1004.0983, F.S.; requiring the Board

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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.

(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.

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

90       (3) The hall of fame shall convene a committee to establish  
91 procedures to nominate and select individuals to be featured.  
92 The committee must include at least one member or his or her  
93 designee from the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc.

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

96       683.221 Florida Speech and Debate Week.—

97       (1) February 1 through February 7 shall be annually  
98 designated as "Florida Speech and Debate Week."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

113       1000.09 Competitive speech and debate.—

114       (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS.—

115       (a) The Legislature finds that speech and debate  
116 significantly improve literacy, critical thinking, research

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117 ability, civic knowledge, and leadership for students of this  
118 state.

119 (b) The Legislature also finds that this state's civics and  
120 debate expansion has become a national model, increasing access  
121 to this instruction in all regions. Sustaining and improving  
122 upon this success requires a permanent statewide organization  
123 with specialized expertise, program capacity, and year-round  
124 operational support.

125 (c) The Legislature further finds that the Florida Debate  
126 Initiative, Inc., (FDI) has demonstrated statewide effectiveness  
127 and is uniquely positioned to ensure continuity, equitable  
128 access, quality programming, tournament infrastructure, and  
129 instructional rigor. It is the intent of the Legislature to  
130 establish a comprehensive statewide infrastructure, under FDI's  
131 direction, that expands, supports, and elevates K-20 speech and  
132 debate education.

133 (2) CREATION, DESIGNATION, AND RESPONSIBILITIES.—FDI is  
134 designated as the official statewide speech and debate  
135 organization responsible for managing, developing, and expanding  
136 K-20 speech and debate programs.

137 (a)1. FDI shall do all of the following:

138 a. Manage the official Florida Speech and Debate League and  
139 its regional teams.

140 b. Establish statewide competition rules, ballots, judging  
141 standards, and tournament calendars.

142 c. Operate or supervise district, regional, and state  
143 tournaments.

144 d. Train and certify coaches, judges, volunteers, and  
145 tournament staff.

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146 e. Provide statewide programmatic support, including  
147 student programs, educator training, and public service  
148 initiatives.

149 f. Maintain statewide data reporting and annual  
150 accountability.

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

153 2. This paragraph may not be construed to prohibit schools,  
154 districts, or students from participating in speech and debate  
155 activities, leagues, or competitions not operated or supervised  
156 by FDI.

157 (b) FDI may establish and maintain partnerships with school  
158 districts, charter schools, state agencies, postsecondary  
159 institutions, nonprofit organizations, private entities, and  
160 national or international organizations to achieve the purposes  
161 of this section.

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

165 (a) Student speech and debate programs.

166 (b) Student leadership and service programs.

167 (c) Competitive speech and debate training for students.

168 (d) Educator training.

169 (e) Postsecondary and workforce internships.

170 (f) Operation of speech and debate tournaments.

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

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

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

178 (c) Tournament operations, including logistics, staff,  
179 judge training, technology, awards, and regional team  
180 operations.

181 (d) Travel, lodging, training, and transportation for  
182 participants.

183 (e) Public-private partnership development, including  
184 sponsorship and philanthropic support.

185 (f) Memberships, affiliations, and participation fees  
186 related to civics education, speech, debate, leadership, and  
187 academic competition programs, provided such memberships advance  
188 the purposes of this section.

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

193 (a) Student participation in statewide programs, by  
194 district and demographics.

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

197 (c) Competitive and educational outcomes of statewide  
198 programs.

199 (d) A categorized summary of all expenditures.

200 (6) ENDORSEMENT IN SPEECH AND DEBATE.—Pursuant to s.  
201 1012.56 and State Board of Education rule, a certified teacher  
202 may earn an endorsement in speech and debate if he or she  
203 demonstrates all of the following:

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

206       (b) Completion of professional development offered by the  
207 FDI or equivalent professional development offered by a Florida  
208 College System institution or state university.

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

211       (7) REGIONAL TRAVELING DEBATE TEAMS.—The department shall  
212 collaborate with FDI to establish regional traveling debate  
213 teams to represent this state in national competitions. Teams  
214 must be accessible to students at Title I and rural schools.  
215 Teams must provide competitive training and coaching for speech  
216 and debate.

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

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

221       (8) DEBATE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM PILOT PROGRAM.—

222       (a) The Debate Across the Curriculum Pilot Program is  
223 created within the department, in collaboration with FDI. The  
224 purpose of the pilot program is to develop and integrate  
225 structured debate and argumentation into core academic subjects.  
226 The pilot program must include curriculum development,  
227 professional development, instructional materials, and program  
228 evaluation.

229       (b) This subsection expires June 30, 2027.

230       (9) (a) FLORIDA SPEECH AND DEBATE ACADEMY.—FDI shall  
231 establish and operate a charter school under s. 1002.33 named  
232 the Florida Speech and Debate Academy.



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(b) The charter school shall provide a rigorous academic program emphasizing civics education, leadership development, speech, debate, rhetoric, and public service.

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 publish 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.—

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

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

(b) Create artificial intelligence-based coaching tools,

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digital judging tutorials, and analytics dashboards.

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

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

(e) Coordinate and operate with the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc., and enter a formal partnership to coordinate curriculum, instructional resources, competition preparation, and statewide access to speech and debate programming.

Section 7. Paragraph (i) is added to subsection (3) of section 1003.4282, Florida Statutes, to read:

1003.4282 Requirements for a standard high school diploma.—

(3) STANDARD HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA; COURSE AND ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS.—

(i) One-half credit in speech and debate.—Beginning with students entering grade 9 in the 2028-2029 school year, a student must successfully complete at least one-half credit in speech, debate, argumentation, or rhetoric as a requirement for high school graduation.

Section 8. 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.

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291 (c) Tournament management and adjudication.

292 (d) Public speaking pedagogy.

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

296 Section 9. The Department of Education shall approve  
297 courses developed pursuant to s. 1004.0983, Florida Statutes,  
298 for inclusion in dual enrollment programs under s. 1007.271,  
299 Florida Statutes.

300 Section 10. (1) For the 2026-2027 fiscal year:

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

306 (b) The sum of \$250,000 in recurring funds is appropriated  
307 from the General Revenue Fund to support the Florida Debate  
308 Initiative, Inc.'s responsibilities assigned under s.  
309 1000.09(7), Florida Statutes, including for regional traveling  
310 debate teams to support their training, coaching, lodging, and  
311 competition costs.

312 (c) The sum of \$1 million in nonrecurring funds is  
313 appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of  
314 Education for the Debate Across the Curriculum Pilot Program  
315 under s. 1000.09(8), Florida Statutes.

316 (2) The sum of \$700,000 in recurring funds is appropriated  
317 from the General Revenue Fund to school districts for travel  
318 costs to attend speech and debate competitions pursuant to s.  
319 1000.09, Florida Statutes.

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

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

329       (5) For the 2027-2028 fiscal year:

330       (a) The sum of \$3.8 million in recurring funds is  
331 appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Speech  
332 and Debate Academy under s. 1000.09(9), Florida Statutes, for  
333 teachers and teacher assistants.

334       (b) The sum of \$1.5 million in recurring funds is  
335 appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Speech  
336 and Debate Academy under s. 1000.09(9), Florida Statutes, for  
337 other instructional personnel.

338       (c) The sum of \$708,000 in recurring funds is appropriated  
339 from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Speech and Debate  
340 Academy under s. 1000.09(9), Florida Statutes, for the  
341 administration.

342       (d) The sum of \$991,000 in recurring funds is appropriated  
343 from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Speech and Debate  
344 Academy under s. 1000.09(9), Florida Statutes, for the operation  
345 and maintenance of facilities.

346       (e) The sum of \$256,000 in recurring funds is appropriated  
347 from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Speech and Debate  
348 Academy under s. 1000.09(9), Florida Statutes, for materials,

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349 supplies, and capital outlay.

350 (f) The sum of \$485,000 in recurring funds is appropriated  
351 from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Speech and Debate  
352 Academy under s. 1000.09(9), Florida Statutes, for food service.

353 Section 11. This act shall take effect January 1, 2027.