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1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to speech and debate education;
3 creating s. 265.0042, F.S.; creating the Florida
4 Speech and Debate Hall of Fame; requiring the
5 Department of Management Services to set aside an area
6 in the Capitol Building for the hall of fame;
7 requiring the department to consult with the Florida
8 Education Foundation and the Commissioner of
9 Education; providing the duties for the hall of fame;
10 requiring the hall of fame to convene a committee for
11 specified purposes; creating s. 683.221, F.S.;
12 designating Florida Speech and Debate Week annually in
13 February; providing purposes for the annual
14 observance; authorizing specified entities to observe
15 Florida Speech and Debate Week; creating s. 1000.09,
16 F.S.; providing legislative findings and intent;
17 establishing the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc.,
18 (FDI) as a statewide speech and debate organization
19 that performs certain functions in support of the
20 Florida Civics and Debate Initiative (FCDI) in the
21 Department of Education; providing the duties of FDI;
22 providing construction; authorizing FDI to establish
23 and maintain certain partnerships; specifying
24 activities for FDI and FCDI; providing authorized uses
25 of funds for FDI; requiring FDI to publish online and
26 submit annually by a specified date to the department
27 a specified report; specifying requirements for the
28 report; authorizing a certified teacher to earn an
29 endorsement in speech and debate; specifying

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30 requirements for the endorsement; requiring the
31 department to collaborate with FDI to establish
32 regional traveling debate teams; authorizing a school
33 district to use school buses to transport students to
34 speech and debate competitions; amending s. 1001.42,
35 F.S.; requiring each district school board annually to
36 publish online and submit to the department a report;
37 specifying requirements for the report; creating s.
38 1004.0983, F.S.; requiring the Board of Governors of
39 the State University System and the State Board of
40 Education to develop specified undergraduate and
41 graduate coursework, certificates, and micro-
42 credentials; authorizing the Board of Governors and
43 the State Board of Education to collaborate with FDI
44 to develop coursework; requiring the department to
45 approve specified dual enrollment courses; providing
46 an appropriation; providing an effective date.

47
48 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

49
50 Section 1. Section 265.0042, Florida Statutes, is created
51 to read:

52 265.0042 Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame.-

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

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

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

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

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

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

69 Section 2. Section 683.221, Florida Statutes, is created to
70 read:

71 683.221 Florida Speech and Debate Week.—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

86 Section 3. Section 1000.09, Florida Statutes, is created to
87 read:

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88 1000.09 Competitive speech and debate.-

89 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.-

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.

105 (d) It is the intent of the Legislature to establish a
106 comprehensive statewide infrastructure, under the Florida Debate
107 Initiative's direction, which expands, supports, and elevates K-
108 20 speech and debate education.

109 (2) CREATION, DESIGNATION, AND RESPONSIBILITIES.-In
110 alignment with, and in support of, the Department of Education
111 and the program it operates called the Florida Civics and Debate
112 Initiative (FCDI), the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc., (FDI) is
113 established as this state's nonprofit statewide speech and
114 debate organization that manages, develops, and expands K-20
115 civics, speech, and debate programs.

116 (a)1. FDI shall support and expand access to statewide

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117 civic literacy and speech and debate programs by undertaking the
118 following, which list is not exhaustive:

- 119 a. Educating and training coaches and students.
120 b. Training judges and volunteers.
121 c. Promoting educational competition opportunities.
122 d. Leading training and leadership development experiences.
123 e. Establishing competition standards.
124 f. Maintaining statewide data reporting.
125 g. Assisting the FCDI, upon request, in civics-focused
126 education, training, and programming initiatives.

127 2. This paragraph may not be construed to prohibit schools,
128 districts, or students from participating in civics, speech and
129 debate activities, leagues, or competitions not operated or
130 supervised by FDI.

131 (b) FDI may establish and maintain partnerships with school
132 districts, charter schools, state agencies, postsecondary
133 institutions, nonprofit organizations, private entities, and
134 national or international organizations to achieve the purposes
135 of this section, including collaborative efforts with FCDI. In
136 such collaboration:

137 1. FCDI and FDI shall jointly host and operate the annual
138 National Civics and Debate Championship known as The Great
139 Debate, a nationally recognized synthesis of civics education
140 and debate competition that challenges students' civic
141 knowledge, debate skills, and endurance through multi-day,
142 multi-event competition.

143 2. FCDI shall lead specific civics immersion events,
144 including FCDI Day at the Capitol and the Great American Civics
145 Challenge, which includes the Ronald Reagan Presidential Debates

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146 and the We The People Civics Showdown.

147 3. FDI shall provide logistical support, debate tournament
148 operations support, and tournament coordination support for The
149 Great Debate and other collaborative initiatives to advance
150 statewide speech and debate opportunities.

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

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

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

158 (c) Tournament operations, including logistics, staff,
159 judge training, technology, awards, and regional team
160 operations.

161 (d) Travel, lodging, training, and transportation for
162 participants, including local, state, and national travel to
163 competitions hosted by FDI, FCDI, or other civics, speech, and
164 debate organizations.

165 (e) Public-private partnership development, including
166 sponsorship and philanthropic support.

167 (f) Memberships, affiliations, and participation fees
168 related to civics education, speech, debate, leadership, and
169 academic competition programs, provided such memberships,
170 affiliations, and participation advance the purposes of this
171 section.

172 (4) REPORTING.—FDI shall make publicly available online and
173 submit, no later than December 31 of each year, an annual report
174 to the Department of Education which includes all of the

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175 following:

176 (a) Student participation in statewide FDI programs, by
177 district and demographics.

178 (b) The number of active student teams in statewide FDI
179 speech and debate programs.

180 (c) Competitive and educational outcomes of statewide FDI
181 programs.

182 (d) A categorized summary of all expenditures.

183 (5) ENDORSEMENT IN SPEECH AND DEBATE.—Pursuant to s.
184 1012.56 and State Board of Education rule, a certified teacher
185 may earn an endorsement in speech and debate if he or she
186 demonstrates all of the following:

187 (a) Completion of coursework approved by the board in
188 argumentation, rhetoric, communication, or debate instruction.

189 (b) Completion of professional development offered by FDI
190 or equivalent professional development offered by a Florida
191 College System institution or state university.

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

194 (6) REGIONAL TRAVELING DEBATE TEAMS.—The department shall
195 collaborate with FDI to establish regional traveling debate
196 teams to represent Florida in national competitions. Teams must
197 be accessible to students at Title I and rural schools. Teams
198 must provide competitive training and coaching for speech and
199 debate.

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

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

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204 Section 4. Present subsection (29) of section 1001.42,
205 Florida Statutes, is redesignated as subsection (30), and a new
206 subsection (29) is added to that section, to read:

207 1001.42 Powers and duties of district school board.—The
208 district school board, acting as a board, shall exercise all
209 powers and perform all duties listed below:

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

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

215 (b) Student participation rates.

216 (c) Competitive performance and public service engagement.

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

219 (e) Resources needed to expand the program.

220 Section 5. Section 1004.0983, Florida Statutes, is created
221 to read:

222 1004.0983 Speech and debate training pathways.—The Board of
223 Governors and the State Board of Education shall develop
224 undergraduate and graduate coursework, certificates, and micro-
225 credentials in speech and debate education, coaching, and
226 tournament operations.

227 (1) Coursework may include all of the following:

228 (a) Rhetoric, argumentation, and communication theory.

229 (b) Coaching methods and competitive event instruction.

230 (c) Tournament management and adjudication.

231 (d) Public speaking pedagogy.

232 (2) The Board of Governors and the State Board of Education

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233 may collaborate with the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc., to
234 develop coursework.

235 Section 6. The Department of Education shall approve
236 courses developed pursuant to s. 1004.0983, Florida Statutes,
237 for inclusion in dual enrollment programs under s. 1007.271,
238 Florida Statutes.

239 Section 7. For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the sum of \$2.4
240 million in recurring funds is appropriated from the General
241 Revenue Fund to support the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc.'s
242 responsibilities assigned under s. 1000.09(1), Florida Statutes,
243 including administrative, programmatic, and tournament operation
244 duties.

245 Section 8. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.