



220472

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Senate	.	House
Comm: RCS	.	
01/29/2026	.	
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The Committee on Education Pre-K - 12 (Brodeur) recommended the following:

Senate Amendment (with title amendment)

Delete everything after the enacting clause
and insert:

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



220472

11 Fame. The Department of Management Services shall set aside an
12 area on the plaza level of the Capitol Building and shall
13 consult with the Florida Education Foundation and the
14 Commissioner of Education regarding the design and theme of the
15 area.

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

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

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

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

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

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

30 683.221 Florida Speech and Debate Week.—

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

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

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

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

39 (c) To inspire students statewide to participate in debate



220472

40 as a pathway to civic engagement.

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

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

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

47 1000.09 Competitive speech and debate.—

48 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS.—

49 (a) The Legislature finds that speech and debate
50 significantly improve literacy, critical thinking, research
51 ability, civic knowledge, and leadership for students of this
52 state.

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

59 (c) The Legislature further finds that the Florida Debate
60 Initiative, Inc., (FDI) has demonstrated statewide effectiveness
61 and is uniquely positioned to ensure continuity, equitable
62 access, quality programming, tournament infrastructure, and
63 instructional rigor. It is the intent of the Legislature to
64 establish a comprehensive statewide infrastructure, under FDI's
65 direction, that expands, supports, and elevates K-20 speech and
66 debate education.

67 (2) CREATION, DESIGNATION, AND RESPONSIBILITIES.—FDI is
68 designated as the official statewide speech and debate



220472

69 organization responsible for managing, developing, and expanding
70 K-20 speech and debate programs.

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

72 a. Manage the official Florida Speech and Debate League and
73 its regional teams.

74 b. Establish statewide competition rules, ballots, judging
75 standards, and tournament calendars.

76 c. Operate or supervise district, regional, and state
77 tournaments.

78 d. Train and certify coaches, judges, volunteers, and
79 tournament staff.

80 e. Provide statewide programmatic support, including
81 student programs, educator training, and public service
82 initiatives.

83 f. Maintain statewide data reporting and annual
84 accountability.

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

87 2. This paragraph may not be construed to prohibit schools,
88 districts, or students from participating in speech and debate
89 activities, leagues, or competitions not operated or supervised
90 by FDI.

91 (b) FDI may establish and maintain partnerships with school
92 districts, charter schools, state agencies, postsecondary
93 institutions, nonprofit organizations, private entities, and
94 national or international organizations to achieve the purposes
95 of this section.

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



220472

98 following:

99 (a) Student speech and debate programs.

100 (b) Student leadership and service programs.

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

102 (d) Educator training.

103 (e) Postsecondary and workforce internships.

104 (f) Operation of speech and debate tournaments.

105 (4) AUTHORIZED USES OF FUNDS.—FDI may expend program funds

106 on all of the following:

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

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

112 (c) Tournament operations, including logistics, staff,
113 judge training, technology, awards, and regional team
114 operations.

115 (d) Travel, lodging, training, and transportation for
116 participants.

117 (e) Public-private partnership development, including
118 sponsorship and philanthropic support.

119 (f) Memberships, affiliations, and participation fees
120 related to civics education, speech, debate, leadership, and
121 academic competition programs, provided such memberships advance
122 the purposes of this section.

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



220472

- 127 (a) Student participation in statewide programs, by
128 district and demographics.
- 129 (b) The number of active student teams in statewide speech
130 and debate programs.
- 131 (c) Competitive and educational outcomes of statewide
132 programs.
- 133 (d) A categorized summary of all expenditures.
- 134 (6) ENDORSEMENT IN SPEECH AND DEBATE.—Pursuant to s.
135 1012.56 and State Board of Education rule, a certified teacher
136 may earn an endorsement in speech and debate if he or she
137 demonstrates all of the following:
- 138 (a) Completion of coursework approved by the state board in
139 argumentation, rhetoric, communication, or debate instruction.
- 140 (b) Completion of professional development offered by the
141 FDI or equivalent professional development offered by a Florida
142 College System institution or state university.
- 143 (c) Competency, as determined by the board, in the rules,
144 events, and competitive standards of scholastic debate.
- 145 (7) REGIONAL TRAVELING DEBATE TEAMS.—The department shall
146 collaborate with FDI to establish regional traveling debate
147 teams to represent this state in national competitions. Teams
148 must be accessible to students at Title I and rural schools.
149 Teams must provide competitive training and coaching for speech
150 and debate.
- 151 (a) All travel costs may be covered through legislative
152 appropriation, public-private partnerships, and sponsorships.
- 153 (b) A school district may use school buses to transport
154 students to and from speech and debate competitions.
- 155 (8) DEBATE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM PILOT PROGRAM.—



220472

156 (a) The Debate Across the Curriculum Pilot Program is
157 created within the department, in collaboration with FDI. The
158 purpose of the pilot program is to develop and integrate
159 structured debate and argumentation into core academic subjects.
160 The pilot program must include curriculum development,
161 professional development, instructional materials, and program
162 evaluation.

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

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

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

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

173 1001.42 Powers and duties of district school board.—The
174 district school board, acting as a board, shall exercise all
175 powers and perform all duties listed below:

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

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

181 (b) Student participation rates.

182 (c) Competitive performance and public service engagement.

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



220472

185 (e) Resources needed to expand the program.
186 Section 6. Present subsection (11) of section 1002.37,
187 Florida Statutes, is redesignated as subsection (12), and a new
188 subsection (11) is added to that section, to read:
189 1002.37 The Florida Virtual School.—
190 (11) The Florida Virtual School shall establish the
191 Institute for Speech and Debate Innovation. The institute shall
192 do all of the following:
193 (a) Develop an online curriculum, micro-credentials, and
194 instructional modules for speech and debate.
195 (b) Create artificial intelligence-based coaching tools,
196 digital judging tutorials, and analytics dashboards.
197 (c) Produce virtual reality and augmented reality
198 simulations for competitive practice.
199 (d) Ensure equitable access for districts lacking onsite
200 coaching capacity.
201 (e) Coordinate and operate with the Florida Debate
202 Initiative, Inc., and enter a formal partnership to coordinate
203 curriculum, instructional resources, competition preparation,
204 and statewide access to speech and debate programming.
205 Section 7. Paragraph (i) is added to subsection (3) of
206 section 1003.4282, Florida Statutes, to read:
207 1003.4282 Requirements for a standard high school diploma.—
208 (3) STANDARD HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA; COURSE AND ASSESSMENT
209 REQUIREMENTS.—
210 (i) One-half credit in speech and debate.—Beginning with
211 students entering grade 9 in the 2028-2029 school year, a
212 student must successfully complete at least one-half credit in
213 speech, debate, argumentation, or rhetoric as a requirement for



220472

214 high school graduation.

215 Section 8. Section 1004.0983, Florida Statutes, is created
216 to read:

217 1004.0983 Speech and debate training pathways.—The Board of
218 Governors and the State Board of Education shall develop
219 undergraduate and graduate coursework, certificates, and micro-
220 credentials in speech and debate education, coaching, and
221 tournament operations.

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

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

224 (b) Coaching methods and competitive event instruction.

225 (c) Tournament management and adjudication.

226 (d) Public speaking pedagogy.

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

230 Section 9. The Department of Education shall approve
231 courses developed pursuant to s. 1004.0983, Florida Statutes,
232 for inclusion in dual enrollment programs under s. 1007.271,
233 Florida Statutes.

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

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

240 (b) The sum of \$250,000 in recurring funds is appropriated
241 from the General Revenue Fund to support the Florida Debate
242 Initiative, Inc.'s responsibilities assigned under s.



220472

243 1000.09(7), Florida Statutes, including for regional traveling
244 debate teams to support their training, coaching, lodging, and
245 competition costs.

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

250 (2) The sum of \$700,000 in recurring funds is appropriated
251 from the General Revenue Fund to school districts for travel
252 costs to attend speech and debate competitions pursuant to s.
253 1000.09, Florida Statutes.

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

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

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

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

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



220472

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

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

280 (e) The sum of \$256,000 in recurring funds is appropriated
281 from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Speech and Debate
282 Academy under s. 1000.09(9), Florida Statutes, for materials,
283 supplies, and capital outlay.

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

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

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289 ===== T I T L E A M E N D M E N T =====

290 And the title is amended as follows:

291 Delete everything before the enacting clause
292 and insert:

293 A bill to be entitled
294 An act relating to speech and debate education;
295 providing a short title; creating s. 265.0042, F.S.;
296 creating the Florida Speech and Debate Hall of Fame;
297 requiring the Department of Management Services to set
298 aside an area on a specified level in the Capitol
299 Building; requiring the department to consult with the
300 Florida Education Foundation and the Commissioner of



220472

301 Education for a certain purpose; providing the duties
302 of the hall of fame; requiring the hall of fame to
303 convene a committee for specified purposes; requiring
304 the committee to include at least one member or his or
305 her designee from the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc;
306 creating s. 683.221, F.S.; designating Florida Speech
307 and Debate Week annually in February; providing
308 purposes for the annual observance; authorizing
309 specified entities to observe Florida Speech and
310 Debate Week; creating s. 1000.09, F.S.; providing
311 legislative findings and intent; designating the
312 Florida Debate Initiative, Inc., (FDI) as the official
313 statewide speech and debate organization; providing
314 the duties of FDI; providing construction; authorizing
315 FDI to establish and maintain certain partnerships;
316 requiring FDI to implement and maintain specified
317 statewide programs; providing authorized uses of funds
318 for FDI; requiring FDI to publish online and submit
319 annually by a specified date to the Department of
320 Education a specified report; specifying requirements
321 for the report; authorizing a certified teacher to
322 earn an endorsement in speech and debate; specifying
323 requirements for the endorsement; requiring the
324 department to collaborate with FDI to establish
325 regional traveling debate teams; requiring that teams
326 be accessible to students at specified schools;
327 requiring teams to provide certain training and
328 coaching; providing for coverage of travel costs;
329 authorizing a school district to use school buses to



220472

330 transport students to and from speech and debate
331 competitions; creating the Debate Across the
332 Curriculum Pilot Program within the department, in
333 collaboration with FDI; providing the purpose of the
334 pilot program; requiring the pilot program to include
335 certain elements; providing an appropriation;
336 providing for expiration of the pilot program;
337 requiring FDI to establish and operate a charter
338 school for a certain purpose; amending s. 1001.42,
339 F.S.; requiring each district school board to annually
340 publish online and submit to the department a report;
341 specifying requirements for the report; amending s.
342 1002.37, F.S.; requiring the Florida Virtual School to
343 establish the Institute for Speech and Debate
344 Innovation; providing duties of the institute;
345 requiring the institute to enter into a formal
346 partnership with FDI; amending s. 1003.4282, F.S.;
347 requiring that students complete at least one-half
348 credit in speech and debate as a requirement for high
349 school graduation, beginning in a specified school
350 year; creating s. 1004.0983, F.S.; requiring the Board
351 of Governors of the State University System and the
352 State Board of Education to develop specified
353 undergraduate and graduate coursework, certificates,
354 and micro-credentials; authorizing the Board of
355 Governors and the State Board of Education to
356 collaborate with FDI to develop coursework; requiring
357 the department to approve specified dual enrollment
358 courses; providing appropriations; providing an



220472

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effective date.