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LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Senate . House

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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

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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.

(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. The committee must include at least one member or his or her designee from the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc.

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

683.221 Florida Speech and Debate Week.—

(1) February 1 through February 7 shall be annually 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

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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:

1000.09 Competitive speech and debate.—

(1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS.—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

f. Maintain statewide data reporting and annual accountability.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(c) Competitive and educational outcomes of statewide programs.

(d) A categorized summary of all expenditures.

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

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

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

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

(7) REGIONAL TRAVELING DEBATE TEAMS.—The department shall collaborate with FDI to establish regional traveling debate teams to represent this state 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.

(8) DEBATE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM PILOT PROGRAM.—

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

(b) This subsection expires June 30, 2027.

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

(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.

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(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, 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

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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.

(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 9. 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, Florida Statutes.

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

(a) The sum of $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) The sum of $250,000 in recurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to support the Florida Debate Initiative, Inc.’s responsibilities assigned under s.

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

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

(2) The sum of $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) The sum of $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) The sum of $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.

(5) For the 2027-2028 fiscal year:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And the title is amended as follows:

Delete everything before the enacting clause and insert:

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

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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 earn an endorsement in speech and debate; specifying requirements for the endorsement; requiring the department to collaborate with FDI to establish regional traveling debate teams; requiring that teams be accessible to students at specified schools; requiring teams to provide certain training and coaching; providing for coverage of travel costs; authorizing a school district to use school buses to

transport students to and from speech and debate competitions; creating the Debate Across the Curriculum Pilot Program within the department, in collaboration with FDI; providing the purpose of the pilot program; requiring the pilot program to include certain elements; providing an appropriation; providing for expiration of the pilot program; requiring FDI to establish and operate a charter school for a certain purpose; amending s. 1001.42, F.S.; requiring each district school board to annually 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; requiring the institute to enter into a formal partnership with FDI; amending s. 1003.4282, F.S; requiring that students complete at least one-half credit in speech and debate as a requirement for high school graduation, beginning in a specified school year; 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

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effective date.