

THE FLORIDA CIVICS & DEBATE INITIATIVE

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Florida Civics & Debate Initiative (FCDI)?

- On January 27, 2020, Governor DeSantis announced a \$5 million grant from the Marcus Foundation to support civics education through speech and debate with the creation of the Florida Civics & Debate Initiative (FCDI). This grant, in addition to the \$925,000 funding Governor DeSantis included in Florida's 2020-2021 budget, will support the goals of the FCDI to enhance students' creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills by establishing competitive speech and debate teams in every Florida school district. The first phase of this multi-year initiative includes 60 schools across 28 school districts in Florida, with the goal of expanding into all Florida school districts by 2023. To view the list of schools participating visit: www.floridaeducationfoundation.org/fcdi.
- The FCDI plans to work collaboratively with all existing speech and debate organizations in Florida.
- In addition to growing new programs, the FCDI will be sponsoring an annual National Civics & Debate Championship beginning in 2021. Stay tuned for details about this exciting opportunity!

How will the FCDI grow speech and debate programs in Florida?

- The FCDI is organized into six regions based on the regional boundaries of our current Florida Forensic League, the governing body for local and state speech and debate competitions in Florida. The regions include:
 - South Florida Debate Initiative
 - Gulf Coast Debate Initiative
 - Southeast Florida Debate Initiative
 - Central Florida Debate Initiative
 - Northeast Florida Debate Initiative
 - Florida Panhandle Debate Initiative
- To continue expanding the FCDI program across the state, there are six regional ambassadors who support the new programs, and are responsible for training, recruiting, mentoring new coaches and operating monthly tournaments.
- Coaches will receive professional development, funding to offset transportation costs, curricular resources, a stipend, and membership in the National Speech and Debate Association.
- Each year the FCDI will expand: Sixty new middle and high school programs will be created in year one, 40 additional programs in year two, and 40 more in year three.

Why should I support speech and debate at my school? What are the benefits of speech and debate?

- Debate develops civic-minded individuals who are able to critically analyze issues from multiple perspectives, to develop thoughtful solutions to problems and to hone their voices as participants in our democracy.
- There is no membership fee to join the FCDI. We charge \$3 per student entry for each competition. There is no meal fee. Research shows that debate students score higher on standardized tests than non-debate students (Mezuk, 2010).
- Research shows that colleges view debate as a prime activity for admissions (Luong, 2000). Students can earn Bright Futures service hours through debate participation.
- Click here to learn more about Bright Futures requirements [HERE](#).
- Speech and debate is the most effective way for students to develop both hard and soft skills that prepare them for academic and career success. Debate has so many cross-curricular applications that debate students significantly increased their GPAs over non-debaters (Collier, 2004). Debate participation increases at-risk students' chances of graduating high school by 70% (Mezuk, 2009). Debate offers one of the best returns on an investment a school board or district can make.

As a district or school leader, how can I support debate at my school?

- As a district and school leader, it is important to actively recruit and support debate teachers and coaches. Coaching involves not only the ability to motivate students, but having a deep understanding of subject matter, and learning the rules surrounding speech and debate events. Coaches also have to learn the rules of each competitive league and must master numerous administrative aspects of participating in competitions.
- Districts and school administrations can offer debate as a co-curricular activity. Teacher coaches are required to have a Language Arts and Social Studies certification.
- Districts and school administrations can defray the costs of competition, including registration fees and transportation.
- Most importantly, support your speech and debate students, attend debate tournaments and celebrate the successes of your team!

My school was not selected to participate. How can my school still be involved?

- The Florida Civics & Debate Initiative is a three-year project. The FCDI will select 40 additional schools in the second year of expansion, (2021-22) and another 40 schools in the third year (2022-23). Interested schools should apply to participate for the 2021-2022 school year. . A link to the applications will be available in early spring.
- All schools are welcome to participate in FCDI Regional Tournaments. You can review and share our calendar at <https://www.floridaeducationfoundation.org/fcdi>.

How do I start a debate team at my school?

- To start a team an interested coach or teacher should consult with their school principal. After receiving the administration's approval, identify an adult or teacher interested in being a coach. Connect with local debate leaders, like our Regional Ambassadors, to learn more about competition opportunities in your area and how to prepare to compete. To connect with a FCDI Regional Ambassador, visit <https://www.floridaeducationfoundation.org/fcdi> or call Beth Eskin at 407-929-6712.

My student will be attending one of the participating schools. How can he/she get involved?

- Students who attend one of the schools participating in the FCDI should connect with the coach at that school. Coaches will be recruiting team members once school starts. If you need to be connected with your coach, contact Beth Eskin, Director of the FCDI, at elizabeth.eskin@fldoe.org.

We already have an active debate team. Can we compete at your tournaments?

- Absolutely! The FCDI provides additional competition opportunities to all teams in each region. In addition, varsity students who meet the criteria can also judge at most of our tournaments. To compete or find out more information about upcoming events, visit <https://www.floridaeducationfoundation.org/fcdi> or call Beth Eskin at 407-929-6712.

What plans are you making to address the COVID-19 pandemic?

- The debate community has successfully transitioned to online competitions during this pandemic. FCDI coach professional development and competitor/judge workshops will be virtual. We anticipate holding virtual tournaments and will continue to update our calendar at <https://www.floridaeducationfoundation.org/fcdi> with in-person or virtual events.

How are debate topics chosen?

- Debate topics are established by the National Speech and Debate Association. Each debate event has a Wording Committee that works diligently to develop balanced topics. You can find current topics at <https://www.speechanddebate.org/topics/>.

What do academic debates look like?

- Academic debates involve one to three students representing each side of a topic and are typically held in classrooms with a judge and other observers. Students study, research, train, and prepare to debate both sides of an issue. Prior to the debate, students research evidence to support their arguments. Each speech segment of the debate has a time limit and purpose. Discourse is civil.

Do I have to have any experience to join a debate team?

- No experience is necessary to join a debate team. However, a willingness to learn is essential. Debate is a rigorous and exhilarating activity. Preparing to compete takes time. Students need to be willing to invest their time and commitment to learning the art of debate.

What competitive events do you offer?

- There are three main categories of competitive events: debate, speech, and interpretation. Each category offers several options to appeal to everyone. Students who like clash (dissenting opinions or opposition) may choose to compete in a debate event. Students who like to express their ideas without dissent may choose to compete in a speech event. Students who enjoy acting may choose to compete in interpretation events.

How much does it cost to participate in a debate tournament?

- There is no membership fee to join the FCDI. We charge \$3 per student entry for each competition. There is no meal fee.
- There are membership fees to join other leagues (a prerequisite to being able to compete in those leagues), but many leagues offer discounts for new programs. The charge to compete in other tournaments can be \$15 to \$30 (not including meals) for each student and judge.

What do I need to compete at a debate tournament?

- Apart from preparing your performance, you will dress in “business attire;” however, that does not mean you need to buy a new suit. It does mean that you should avoid wearing jeans or athletic attire.

Can students be in other activities and still participate in speech and debate?

- Yes. One of the many wonderful benefits of participating in a debate program is that you can prepare for much of your competition on your own schedule. However, most teams do require attendance at certain practices. Because tournaments are offered almost every weekend, you also have flexibility to plan around other obligations you may have.

What else should I know about debate?

- Debate is a 3-season academic sport. Competitions run from September through June and some students attend debate camp in the summer.
- Debate is not an ensemble activity or a “team sport” per se. However, students represent their schools and teams are limited in the number of entries per event. Students select one or two events from a menu of 10 to 12 different speech, interpretation (modified acting), and debate events in which to compete. Parents and alumni volunteer to judge.
- Teams may compete locally with the FCDI, statewide with the Florida Forensic League (FFL), nationally with the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA), and at national circuit tournaments hosted by colleges and universities across the country. Florida also has active Catholic Forensic Leagues (CFL) that offer local competitions. Most teams that belong to all of these leagues and more competitive teams compete as often as possible.
- Students have the opportunity to join the National Speech and Debate Association, the nation’s oldest and largest speech and debate honor society.
- Students can earn Bright Futures service hours by competing.

