

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

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HOUSE PRINCIPAL CLERK

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HOUSE BILL DRH30295-NHa-58

Short Title: Competitive Speech and Debate Grant Pilot. (Public)

Sponsors: Representative Willis.

Referred to:

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A PILOT PROGRAM FOR GRANTS FOR COMPETITIVE
3 SPEECH AND DEBATE TEAMS.

4 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

5 **SECTION 1.(a)** Program; Purpose. – To the extent funds are made available for the
6 purpose, there is established the Competitive Speech and Debate Team Grant Pilot Program
7 (Program). The purpose of the Program is to allow each public school serving students in grades
8 nine through 12 in North Carolina to form a speech and debate team and to allow the team to
9 participate in speech and debate competitions. The Program shall begin in the 2025-2026 school
10 year and conclude at the end of the 2028-2029 school year.

11 **SECTION 1.(b)** Eligibility. – Any public school unit that includes a school that
12 serves students in grades nine through 12 is eligible to apply to the Department of Public
13 Instruction for a grant to develop, maintain, or expand an educational and competitive speech
14 and debate team.

15 **SECTION 1.(c)** Applications; Criteria and Guidelines. – No later than August 1 of
16 each year that funds are made available for the Program, the Department shall develop and
17 publish criteria and guidelines for the application process for the Program in the upcoming school
18 year. The Department shall accept applications until September 30 of each school year.
19 Applications shall include, at a minimum, a proposed budget for the speech and debate team.

20 **SECTION 1.(d)** Award; Use of Funds. – The Department shall award grants to
21 selected applicants by October 31 of each year that funds are made available for the Program.
22 The Department shall determine the amount of each award up to a maximum of ten thousand
23 dollars (\$10,000) per team per school year and may only include two stipends, one lead team
24 coach stipend of up to two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500) and one assistant team coach
25 stipend of one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500). Funds may be used for any of the
26 following purposes:

- 27 (1) Provide stipends for coaches.
28 (2) Make payments associated with participation in a speech and debate league or
29 competition.
30 (3) Travel to and from speech and debate competitions.

31 **SECTION 1.(e)** Speech and debate teams receiving funds through the Program shall
32 participate in the Tarheel Forensic League and the National Speech and Debate Association.

33 **SECTION 1.(f)** Student Participation. – If a student is enrolled in a school that does
34 not offer a speech and debate team, the student is eligible to participate on the speech and debate
35 team at the school located geographically closest to where the student resides that does have a
36 team. A student joining a team under the authority of this section shall be responsible for



1 transportation to and from the school where the team meets. Nothing in this section prohibits a
2 school from enforcing guidelines for student participation in extracurricular activities, such as
3 academic performance requirements, nor does it prohibit a speech and debate team from
4 conducting a selection process for the team, so long as the student is able to participate in the
5 selection process as if the student was enrolled in that school.

6 **SECTION 1.(g) Reporting.** – No later than February 15 of each school year in which
7 funds are made available for the Program, the Department shall report the following information
8 to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee and the Fiscal Research Division:

- 9 (1) The public school units receiving grants and the amount of the grant.
- 10 (2) A description of how the grants were used.
- 11 (3) The public school units that applied for grants but did not receive one.
- 12 (4) The extent to which students participating in speech and debate programs
13 funded by the Program experienced measurable improvement in academic
14 performance.

15 **SECTION 2.** Two members shall be added to the board of directors of the Tarheel
16 Forensic League. One member shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon
17 recommendation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and one member shall be
18 appointed by the General Assembly upon recommendation of the President Pro Tempore of the
19 Senate. Appointed members shall serve four-year terms. No State employee or elected official
20 may serve as an appointed member of the board. Appointed members of the board may not be
21 compensated for their services. The amount of State funds that may be used to provide per diems
22 and allowances to a member of the board engaged in carrying out the purposes and requirements
23 of this Article shall not exceed the amount provided in G.S. 138-5.

24 **SECTION 3.** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of
25 Public Instruction the sum of five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) in nonrecurring funds per
26 fiscal year for the 2025-2026, 2026-2027, 2027-2028, and 2028-2029 fiscal years for the
27 Department to establish and administer the Competitive Speech and Debate Team Grant Pilot
28 Program as required by this act.

29 **SECTION 4.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2025, and applies beginning with
30 the 2025-2026 school year.