

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

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HOUSE BILL 671

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

Sponsors: Representatives Willis, Cotham, Biggs, and T. Brown (Primary Sponsors).
For a complete list of sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly web site.

Referred to: Education - K-12, if favorable, Appropriations, if favorable, Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House

April 3, 2025

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A PILOT PROGRAM FOR GRANTS FOR COMPETITIVE SPEECH AND DEBATE TEAMS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION 1.(f) Student Participation. – If a student is enrolled in a school that does not offer a speech and debate team, the student is eligible to participate on the speech and debate



1 team at the school located geographically closest to where the student resides that does have a
2 team. A student joining a team under the authority of this section shall be responsible for
3 transportation to and from the school where the team meets. Nothing in this section prohibits a
4 school from enforcing guidelines for student participation in extracurricular activities, such as
5 academic performance requirements, nor does it prohibit a speech and debate team from
6 conducting a selection process for the team, so long as the student is able to participate in the
7 selection process as if the student was enrolled in that school.

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

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

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

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

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