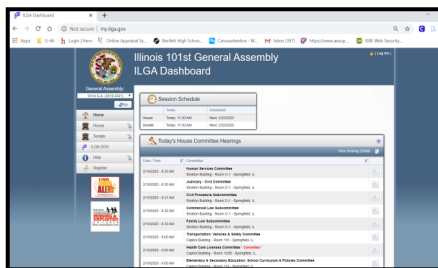




ADVOCACY COMMITTEE LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: FEBRUARY 20, 2020

The Illinois Communication and Theatre Association’s Advocacy Committee continues to monitor legislation that will impact our discipline. **This communique is provided for informational purposes only.** If you aren’t already an ICTA member, please consider joining. Visit illinoiscta.org for additional details.

The Senate Education Committee will hold its first hearing on Senate Bill 2510 next **Tuesday, February 25, 2020.** (If you are unfamiliar with SB 2510 and its potential impact on Illinois speech curriculum, read the “REVIEW” below.) To contact legislators and share your position **before that hearing**, consider filing a **witness slip**.



A witness slip is a person’s or group’s specific position on a particular bill. A witness slip must be filed online at the Illinois General Assembly’s “legislative dashboard” my.ilga.gov). You can file a witness slip on behalf of yourself, or an organization you represent. At the start of any legislative committee hearing, the Chairperson will read how many witness slips were filed regarding a piece of legislation. Those numbers “for” and “against” a bill will play a role in the direction of the hearing.

Filing a witness slip can seem complicated. However, the Illinois GOP created a bipartisan video on filing witness slips ([youtube.com/watch?v=pXiISTqBZB8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXiISTqBZB8)). You can find it on YouTube by searching “**IL House GOP Witness Slip.**” Additionally, the Illinois American Civil Liberties Union provides online instructions (aclu-il.org/en/iillinois-witness-slip-faq). Log on and scroll to the bottom of the page where there are .PDF instructions.

The deadline for witness slips is up to one hour before any Senate or House hearing. However, the Illinois General Assembly highly recommends that witness slips be filed one day before a specific hearing. This ensures that all witness slips are accounted for at the start of the committee hearing. (New witness slips must be filed before each subsequent hearing on any given bill. This is to say that, should you decide to fill out a witness slip before next Tuesday’s hearing, your witness slip will only be considered during that particular hearing. Bills may be the subject of several different hearings. As the ICTA Advocacy Committee monitors the bill, there will be email communiqes and social media posts informing ICTA members.)



REVIEW: The Illinois School Code currently requires that all students must complete one year of elective coursework chosen from music, art, foreign language, or vocational education to receive a high school diploma. The Illinois legislature is considering Senate Bill 2510, which would amend the School Code by adding “forensic speech” to that list of electives. SB 2510 is modeled after similar graduation requirements in 22 other states.

If you are unfamiliar with SB 2510, the bill reads: “As a prerequisite to receiving a high school diploma, each pupil must, in addition to other course requirements, successfully complete one year chosen from (a) music, (b) art, (c) foreign language, (d) vocational education, or (e) forensic speech (speech and debate). Any forensic speech course under this subdivision (6) may not be used to satisfy the course requirement under subsection (1).”

The Illinois State Board of Education uses “forensic speech” as an all-encompassing term, applicable to elective courses that “offer students the opportunity to use oral skills.” **SB 2510 would not make forensic speech a graduation requirement, nor would it mandate that all schools teach forensic speech courses. The bill would incentivize forensic speech electives and participation in speech and debate activities outside of the classroom. The bill specifies that speech- and debate-oriented courses can be taken as diploma-requisite elective credit.**

IF YOU DID NOT RECEIVE ICTA'S PREVIOUS LEGISLATIVE UPDATES:



“What criteria specifies a ‘forensic speech’ elective?”

ISBE uses “forensic speech” to describe electives that teach “oral skills” through “methods, aims, and styles,” including but not limited to “formal debate, Lincoln-Douglas debate, expository speaking, radio broadcasting, oral interpretation, and dramatic interpretation.” ISBE also states that participation in extracurricular speech and debate activities should be “encouraged” by forensic speech coursework.

“What is meant by the last line of the bill, regarding subdivision (6) and subsection (1)?”

The School Code provides that students must take four years of language arts courses. Individual school districts determine what specific classes their students must take in order to meet this four-year requirement. Some districts still require a speech- or debate-oriented course as part of that four-year cycle. The majority of Illinois high schools do not. The last line of SB 2510 ensures that these required speech- or debate-oriented courses cannot *also* be counted as “electives” to meet any new School Code provisions. In other words, it is a clause to safeguard students against “double-dipping.” (claiming that a required language arts course “also counts” toward the School Code’s elective course requirements).



Moreover, the last line of SB 2510 would “disincentivize” administrators who want to turn their required speech courses into electives, especially since most required public speaking courses do not match the description of “forensic speech.” (Obviously, districts can change course requirements at their discretion. However, they could not point to SB 2510 as their rationale. This is one of the reasons this bill earned the support of the Illinois Education Association.)

“I teach a speech course that my district requires. What would SB 2510 do in my circumstance?”



The bill, in and of itself, would not affect required classes. The bill would not require any revisions to your curriculum. It would not turn your required course into an elective course. Your district has already decided that speech should be a component of its four-year language arts requirements. SB 2510 would not change that.

“I teach a speech course that my district requires. I also teach speech and debate electives. What would this bill do in my circumstance?”



The bill, in and of itself, would not affect your required class. It would, however, make your electives considerably more attractive to students. Your electives would become an official component of the School Code, as applicable to earning a diploma as any other course specified by the State.

“My district does not have a required speech or debate course. But I do teach speech and debate electives. What would this bill do in my circumstances?”

If SB 2510 were to pass, students could choose to take your electives and have them count as State-specified credit toward earning their diploma. Specifically, your electives would carry the same weight as any of the other specific electives referenced in the school code.



“My district has neither a required speech or debate course, nor does my district have speech and debate electives. What would this bill do in my circumstances?”

SB 2510 would provide a significant incentive for your district to write and approve forensic speech curricula. This would require you, and your colleagues, to advocate for the creation of those courses. But having forensic speech specified in the school code would clearly stimulate productive discussions with your administrators and within your school district.

