

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based only on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Date: March 13, 1998 Revised: _____

Subject: Teach Tuition Reimbursement Program

	<u>Analyst</u>	<u>Staff Director</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Action</u>
1.	O'Farrell	O'Farrell	ED	Favorable
2.	_____	_____	WM	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

The bill would create the Project Teach Tuition Reimbursement Program to provide reimbursements for tuition and books to eligible public school personnel enrolled in degree granting programs that would lead to a state teaching certificate, or that would enable the employee to teach in areas of critical teacher shortage. The program would be funded by lottery proceeds through the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund. Employees receiving the reimbursements would be required to teach for at least 1 year in a public school after earning their degrees or pay the money back.

This bill amends section 24.121 of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

The Critical Teacher Shortage Program created by s. 240.4065, F.S., provides funding for several financial assistance programs designed to aid teachers and aspiring teachers in acquiring the professional training necessary to teach in critical teacher shortage subject areas as identified by the State Board of Education. Among those programs is the Critical Teacher Shortage Tuition Reimbursement Program created by s. 240.4064, F.S.

The tuition reimbursement program is open to full-time public school and developmental research school employees who are certified to teach in Florida. The tuition reimbursement is limited to courses in critical teacher shortage areas as identified by the State Board of Education. The courses must be in the following categories:

- Graduate-level courses leading to an advanced degree;

- Graduate-level courses leading to a new certification area; or
- State approved undergraduate courses leading to an advanced degree or new certification area.

The State Board of Education is charged with the responsibility of adopting the rules necessary to implement the tuition reimbursement program. Rule 6A-20.012, FAC., fulfills that responsibility and provides, in addition to the statutory requirements, that program participants must not be receiving tuition reimbursement from any other source, must not owe a repayment on any state or federal scholarship or grant, and must not be in default on any state or federal loan program unless satisfactory repayment arrangements have been made. School boards are responsible for advertising the reimbursement program to the teachers. Finally, the Department of Education is to make the reimbursement awards each academic term on a first come first served, funds available basis.

Program participants may receive tuition reimbursement for up to 9 semester hours per year, at a rate not to exceed \$78 per semester hour, for up to a total of 36 hours. The receipt of reimbursement is contingent upon the participant passing the approved course with an average of 3.0 or better on a 4.0 scale. So far in the 1997-98 school year, 582 tuition reimbursement awards have been made for a total of \$222,153. The Office of Student Financial Assistance in the Department of Education anticipates additional awards being made during the current school year.

Chapter 24, F.S., The Florida Public Education Lottery Act, provides that lottery revenue distributed through the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund will be used for public educational programs and purposes, including: endowment, scholarship, matching funds, direct grants, research and economic development related to education, salary enhancement, contracts with independent institutions to conduct programs consistent with the state master plan for postsecondary education, or any other program or purpose the Legislature may deem desirable.

Paragraph (e) of s. 24.121(4), F.S., provides that if revenue shortages force reductions in the estimated distributions from the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund, the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program shall be the last of the programs to experience a reduction.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The legislation under consideration would create the Project Teach Tuition Reimbursement Program. This would be a lottery funded program providing post-secondary tuition reimbursement that would be available to the following persons:

- School district and other public school instructional personnel and instructional specialists who are enrolled in qualified programs of study that will lead to an advanced degree in the employee's field of specialization or a program of study that will qualify the employee to teach in a critical teacher shortage area.

- School district and other public school educational support personnel enrolled in a qualified program of study that would result in a degree and the state certification necessary to teach in Florida.

The program is to be administered by the school district or other public school where the instruction personnel, instructional specialists, or support personnel are employed. The employers must advertise the program and its requirements.

In order to qualify for the program, personnel must be employed by the school district or other public school on a full-time basis. The reimbursement is to include the cost of tuition and books for each course in the qualified program of study for which the employee has earned an average of 3.0 on a 4.0 grading scale. The bill does not limit the enrollment of eligible employees to Florida institutions, public or private. School districts and other public schools would be required to establish procedures to document employee eligibility to receive reimbursements.

Employees receiving the reimbursement must agree to teach in a Florida public school for at least 1 year after completing the program of study. The employee can satisfy the teaching requirement if, after 2 years from the completion of the academic program, he or she has tried and been unsuccessful in securing a position within his or her school district or school.

An employee who doesn't complete the program of study within 5 years of receiving the first reimbursement payment, or who doesn't satisfy the 1 year teaching requirement after completing the course of study, must repay the school district or school an amount equal to the total sum of the reimbursement received. The school district or school's future share of Project Teach funds would be reduced by the amount of reimbursement repayments received from employees.

Funding for the program is to be allocated from the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund and distributed by the Department of Education. There would be two distributions per fiscal year, October 1 and March 1. School districts and other public schools would submit requests for the reimbursement funds on a form approved by the department. If the funds appropriated for the program are insufficient to cover the full reimbursement costs, the reimbursements would be prorated.

The bill would also amend s. 24.121, F.S., to provide that the Project Teach Tuition Reimbursement Program would receive annual funding from the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund. Along with the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program, the Project Teach program would be one of the last programs to receive reduced funding from the trust fund in the event revenue shortages force a reduction in distributions to programs funded by the trust.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The program being created would benefit school district and other public school employees who qualify for the tuition reimbursements.

C. Government Sector Impact:

Senate Bill 2500, the Senate version of the General Appropriations Act for 1998-1999, would appropriate \$11 million from the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund for the Project Teach Tuition Reimbursement Program.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
