

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 953 Educational Support Employee and Paraprofessional Teacher Certification

SPONSOR(S): Casello and others

TIED BILLS: None. **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 794

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
1) Education Quality Subcommittee	16 Y, 0 N	McDaniel	Sanchez
2) PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee			
3) Education & Employment Committee			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Florida's public school system enrolls approximately 2.8 million students in 4,400 public schools across the state. In the 2022-23 school year, these students were supported by 343,238 full-time personnel in administrative, instructional, and support positions, with 36.3 percent identifying as support staff. Examples of support staff include, but are not limited to, paraprofessionals, school psychologists, social workers, and technicians.

The bill establishes the Growing Teachers from Within Pilot Program within the DOE, subject to legislative appropriation. The pilot program's goal is to help school district employees who work in a public school but are not employed as instructional personnel obtain a teaching certificate, thereby helping to alleviate the state's growing teacher shortage.

School districts must submit an application to the DOE by October 1, 2023 to participate in the program. The Commissioner of Education must select up to three school districts for participation in the pilot program.

To be eligible to participate in the pilot program, an employee of a participating school district must be employed as an educational support employee or as an education paraprofessional and have received an associate degree or successfully completed 60 semester credit hours at a postsecondary institution, and commit to teach in the school district for a minimum of two years or a pro rata number of years after obtaining a teaching certificate.

Funds for the pilot program must be used for establishing a customized coursework schedule to allow for flexibility for participating school district employees to complete credit hours toward earning a bachelor's degree while maintaining employment with the school district and ultimately attaining a teacher certification; and financial support for tuition, credentials, technology, and instructional materials for participating school district employees.

The DOE is provided rulemaking authority to administer the pilot program. The pilot program will expire June 30, 2026.

The bill does not have a fiscal impact. See Fiscal Comments.

The bill has an effective date of July 1, 2023.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Present Situation

Florida's public school system enrolls approximately 2.8 million students in 4,400 public schools across the state.¹ In the 2022-23 school year, these students were supported by 343,238 full-time personnel in administrative, instructional, and support positions, with 36.3 percent identifying as support staff.² Examples of support staff include, but are not limited to, paraprofessionals, school psychologists, social workers, and technicians. Paraprofessionals represented 10% of Florida's full-time employed personnel in the 2022-23 year,³ and are typically hourly workers who are responsible for supporting students with disabilities, supervising individual or small group work, and helping with behavior management.⁴

A district school board may appoint paraprofessionals to assist members of the instructional staff in carrying out their duties and responsibilities.⁵ In Florida, paraprofessionals are not required to hold a teaching certificate.⁶

Educator Certification

In order for a person to serve as an educator in a traditional public school, charter school, virtual school, or other publicly operated school, the person must hold a certificate issued by the DOE.⁷ Persons seeking employment at a public school as a school supervisor, principal, teacher, library media specialist, counselor, athletic coach, or in another instructional capacity must be certified.⁸ The purpose of certification is to require school-based personnel to "possess the credentials, knowledge, and skills necessary to allow the opportunity for a high-quality education in the public schools."⁹

To be eligible for an educator certificate, an individual must meet the following eligibility requirements:¹⁰

- be at least 18 years of age;
- sign an affidavit attesting that the applicant will uphold the U.S. and State Constitutions;
- earn a bachelor's or higher degree from an accredited institution of higher learning¹¹ or from a nonaccredited institution identified by the DOE as having a quality program resulting in a bachelor's or higher degree;¹²

¹ Florida Department of Education, *About Us*, <https://www.fldoe.org/about-us/> (last visited Mar. 1, 2023).

² Florida Department of Education, *PK-12 Public School Data Publications and Reports – Full-Time Staff*, <https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/staff.stml> (last visited Mar. 1, 2023).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Education Week, *Paraprofessionals: As the 'Backbones' of the Classroom, They Get Low Pay, Little Support*, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/paraprofessionals-as-the-backbones-of-the-classroom-they-get-low-pay-little-support/2022/06> (last visited Mar. 1, 2023).

⁵ Section 1012.37, F.S.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Sections 1012.55(1) and 1002.33(12)(f), F.S.

⁸ Sections 1002.33(12)(f) (charter school teachers) and 1012.55(1), F.S. District school boards and charter school governing boards are authorized to hire non-certified individuals who possess expertise in a given field to serve in an instructional capacity. Rule 6A-1.0502, F.A.C.; ss. 1002.33(12)(f) and 1012.55(1)(c), F.S. Occupational therapists, physical therapists, audiologists, and speech therapists are not required to be certified educators. Rule 6A-1.0502(10) and (11), F.A.C.

⁹ Section 1012.54, F.S.; *see* rule 6A-4.001(1), F.A.C.

¹⁰ Section 1012.56(2)(a)-(f), F.S.

¹¹ Section 1012.56(2)(c), F.S.; rule 6A-4.003(1), F.A.C. (approved accrediting agencies); *see also* 34 C.F.R. ss. 602.1-602.50; U.S. Department of Education, *Institutional Accrediting Agencies*, https://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation_pg3.html#RegionalInstitutional (last visited Mar. 9, 2023) (list of accrediting agencies approved by the U.S. Department of Education).

¹² Section 1012.56(2)(c), F.S.; rule 6A-4.003(2), F.A.C. (criteria for approval of nonaccredited institutions of higher learning). For initial certification, an applicant must attain at least a 2.5 overall grade point average on a 4.0 scale in the applicant's major field of study. Section 1012.56(2)(c), F.S.

- submit to fingerprinting and background screening and not have a criminal history that requires the applicant's disqualification from certification or employment;
- be of good moral character; and
- be competent and capable of performing the duties, functions, and responsibilities of a teacher.

In addition, each applicant must submit an application and the required fee to the DOE.¹³

An applicant seeking a professional certification must:

- meet the basic eligibility requirements for certification;¹⁴
- demonstrate mastery of general knowledge;¹⁵
- demonstrate mastery of subject area knowledge;¹⁶ and
- demonstrate mastery of professional preparation and education competence.¹⁷

A professional certificate is renewable for successive periods of 5 years¹⁸, but may be extended by:

- 1 year due to serious illness or injury of the applicant or other extraordinary extenuating circumstances; or
- a period of time equal to the active duty status for any person who volunteers or is called into wartime or required peacetime military service.

Teacher Preparation Programs

Teacher preparation programs are accountable for producing individuals with the competencies and skills necessary to achieve the state education goals.¹⁹ State-approved teacher preparation programs are offered by Florida public and private postsecondary institutions, public school districts, and private providers by which candidates for educator certification can, depending on the type of program, demonstrate mastery of general knowledge, professional preparation and education competence, and/or subject area knowledge for purposes of attaining an educator certificate.²⁰

There are various state-approved teacher preparation programs that individuals may use to receive the training needed to attain teaching credentials, including:²¹

- Initial Teacher Preparation programs: "traditional" teacher preparation programs require candidates to demonstrate mastery of subject area knowledge in one or more specific subject areas(s), mastery of general knowledge, and mastery of professional preparation and education competence. Program completers qualify for a professional educator certificate.²²
- Educator Preparation Institutes: alternative certification programs offered by postsecondary institutions and qualified private providers for baccalaureate degree holders. These programs provide professional preparation for career-changers and recent college graduates who do not already possess a Professional Educator Certificate and require mastery of general knowledge, mastery of subject area knowledge and mastery of professional preparation and education competence.
- District Professional Development Certification and Education Competency Programs: cohesive competency-based professional preparation certification programs offered by school districts,

¹³ Section 1012.56(1), F.S.; *see s.* 1012.59, F.S. The fee for initial certification is \$75 per subject area. Rule 6A-4.0012(1)(a)1. and 2., F.A.C.

¹⁴ Section 1012.56(2)(a)-(f), F.S.

¹⁵ Section 1012.56(2)(g) and (3), F.S.; Florida Department of Education, *General Knowledge*, <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/general-cert-requirements/general-knowledge.stml> (last visited Mar. 9, 2023).

¹⁶ Section 1012.56(2)(h) and (5), F.S.

¹⁷ Section 1012.56(2)(i) and (6), F.S.; Florida Department of Education, *Professional Preparation and Education Competence*, <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/general-cert-requirements/professional-preparation-edu-competenc.stml> (last visited Mar. 9, 2023).

¹⁸ Sections 1012.56(7)(a) and 1012.585, F.S.; rule 6A-4.0051(1), F.A.C.

¹⁹ Section 1004.04(1)(b), F.S.

²⁰ *See* Florida Department of Education, *Professional Development in Florida*, <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/professional-dev/> (last visited Mar. 9, 2023). *See also* rule 6A-5.066, F.A.C.; ss. 1004.04(3)(a) and 1004.85(1), F.S.

²¹ Florida Department of Education, *Educator Preparation*, <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/preparation> (last visited Mar. 9, 2023). *See also* rule 6A-5.066, F.A.C.

²² Rule 6A-5.066(1)(r), F.A.C.

charter schools, and charter management districts by which the instructional staff can satisfy the mastery of professional preparation and education competence requirements.²³ In addition to completing the district program, candidates must demonstrate mastery of general knowledge²⁴ and subject area knowledge.²⁵

Grow Your Own Teacher Programs

Grow Your Own (GYO) Teacher Programs are typically partnerships between educator preparation programs, school districts, and community organizations that recruit and prepare local community members to enter the teaching profession and teach in their communities. While definitions of programs vary by state and local context, most often the program is leveraged as a strategy for solving teacher shortages.²⁶ Paraprofessionals or educational support employee pathways are offered in 39 states plus the District of Columbia, with the majority being developed at the school district level.²⁷ Paraprofessionals and support employees are often selected by their building administrator to enroll in a GYO program due to their significant instructional experience, knowledge of the district, and interest in becoming a licensed teacher.²⁸

A report on GYO Teacher Programs nationwide found 49 states plus the District of Columbia has at least one program for high school students, paraeducators, community members, non-certified school staff, or some combination.²⁹ The number of program types offered vary widely, with nine states³⁰ having one type of program and nine states³¹ having more than five program types.

The School District of Lee County in Florida offers Grow Your Own Teacher Tier II Scholarships to currently enrolled Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) or Florida South Western State College (FSW) students in their last two years of college.³² Scholarship recipients are non-education majors planning to change their major to education, with an emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics, Elementary, or Exceptional Student Education. The scholarships are valid for two years and, upon graduation, the recipient must teach for the School District of Lee County for three years.

Effect of Proposed Changes

Contingent upon a legislative appropriation, the bill creates the Growing Teachers from Within Pilot Program within in the DOE. The purpose of the pilot program is to assist school district employees who work in a public school but are not employed as instructional personnel by removing barriers to their obtaining a teaching certificate in order to help alleviate the growing teacher shortage.

To participate in the pilot, school districts must submit an application to the DOE by October 1, 2023. The Commissioner of Education must select up to three school districts for participation in the pilot program:

²³ Section 1012.56(8)(a), F.S.

²⁴ See Florida Department of Education, *General Knowledge*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/general-cert-requirements/general-knowledge.shtml> (last visited Mar. 9, 2023).

²⁵ Florida Department of Education, *Subject Area Knowledge*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/general-cert-requirements/subject-area-knowledge.shtml> (last visited Mar. 9, 2023).

²⁶ New America, *A 50 State Scan of Grow Your Own Teacher Policies and Programs*, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/grow-your-own-teachers/findings/> (last visited Mar. 14, 2023).

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.* Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, North Dakota, New Hampshire, Ohio, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia were identified in the report as having one Grow Your Own Teacher Program. *Id.*

³¹ *Id.* Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, New York, Oregon, and South Carolina were identified in the report as having more than five Grow Your Own Teacher Programs. *Id.*

³² The School District of Lee County, *FY23 Grow Your Own Teacher Scholarship Program*, <https://www.leeschools.net/our-district/departments/human-resources/recruitment/scholarship-opportunities/grow-your-own-scholarships> (last visited Mar. 14, 2023). In 2019, the Legislature appropriated a nonrecurring sum of \$356,832 for Fiscal Year 2019-2020 from the General Revenue Fund to DOE.

- one county with a population less than 100,000;
- one county with a population between 100,000 and 500,000; and
- one county with a population exceeding 500,000.

To be eligible to participate in the pilot program, an employee of a participating school district must be employed as an educational support employee or as an education paraprofessional and have received an associate degree or successfully completed 60 semester credit hours at a postsecondary institution, and commit to teach in the school district for a minimum of two years or a pro rata number of years after obtaining a teaching certificate.

Funds appropriated for the pilot program must be used for establishing a customized coursework schedule to allow for flexibility for participating school district employees to complete credit hours toward earning a bachelor's degree while maintaining employment with the school district and ultimately attaining a teacher certification; and, financial support for tuition, credentials, technology, and instructional materials for participating school district employees.

Participating school districts must submit a report to the Commissioner of Education by June 1 of each year for the duration of the pilot program that includes, but is not limited to, detailing findings regarding the pilot program's implementation and whether it is meeting the intended goal of serving as a recruitment tool and a strategy to retain school district employees in order to alleviate the growing teacher shortage in this state.

The DOE is provided rulemaking authority to administer the pilot program. The Commissioner must coordinate with state universities in proximity of the selected pilot school districts to assist in the department's administration of the pilot program.

The pilot program will expire June 30, 2026.

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Creating the Growing Teachers from Within Pilot Program within the Department of Education, contingent upon legislative appropriation; providing a purpose for the pilot program; requiring school districts to apply to the department by a specified date in order to participate in the pilot program; requiring the Commissioner of Education to select participating school districts based on specified criteria to participate in the pilot program; requiring the commissioner to coordinate with certain state universities; specifying eligibility requirements for participation by school employees in the pilot program; requiring that funding for the pilot program be used in a specified manner; requiring participating school districts to submit a report to the commissioner on an annual basis; authorizing the State Board of Education to adopt rules; providing for expiration.

Section 2. Provides an effective date.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

See FISCAL COMMENTS.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

The pilot program is subject to a legislative appropriation.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

None.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

The Department of Education is provided rulemaking authority to adopt rules to implement the Growing Teachers from Within Pilot program.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

None.