

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Education Pre-K -12

BILL: SB 102

INTRODUCER: Senator Gaetz

SUBJECT: Exceptional Student Education

DATE: February 17, 2025

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Brick</u>	<u>Bouck</u>	<u>ED</u>	<u>Pre-meeting</u>
2.	_____	_____	<u>AED</u>	_____
3.	_____	_____	<u>FP</u>	_____

I. Summary:

SB 102 establishes a workforce credential program for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to enhance their employment opportunities upon graduation. The program, administered by the Florida Department of Education (DOE), must be developed and implemented by January 31, 2026.

The program allows students to earn badges that signify the acquisition of specific workforce skills aligned with employer needs. Each badge requires students to demonstrate five distinct skills or behaviors, including workplace safety, and must be validated by two instructional staff members specializing in exceptional student education.

To evaluate the program's effectiveness, the bill mandates that the DOE submit an annual report from 2026 through 2030 with participation and outcomes data.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.

II. Present Situation:

Autism and Workforce Challenges

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain.¹ As individuals with ASD transition to adolescence and adulthood, they may face challenges in developing and maintaining friendships, communicating with peers and adults, or understanding what behaviors are expected in school or on the job.² These challenges can make

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *About Autism Spectrum Disorder*, <https://www.cdc.gov/autism/about/index.html> (last visited Feb. 13, 2025).

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *About Autism Spectrum Disorder*, <https://www.cdc.gov/autism/about/index.html> (last visited Feb. 13, 2025).

it difficult to secure and sustain competitive employment, even for those with strong technical skills.³

Research indicates that employees with ASD have many skills that can contribute a great deal to the workforce. Despite possessing valuable skill sets, individuals with ASD face higher unemployment and underemployment rates compared to the general population.⁴ Research suggests that targeted training, employer-recognized credentials, and structured workforce support can significantly enhance employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, including ASD.⁵

General Workforce Inclusion Initiatives

The Employment First Act

The Employment First Act prioritizes employment as the preferred outcome for individuals with disabilities by reducing barriers to workforce participation and ensuring access to meaningful employment opportunities.⁶ To achieve this, the Act promotes:⁷

- Integration of individuals with disabilities into the workforce by improving employment systems; and
- A collaborative effort between state agencies and organizations to achieve better employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Florida's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program provides training and employment support for individuals with disabilities, helping them achieve meaningful, competitive employment. Through initiatives like the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014,⁸ VR emphasizes career pathways and skills-based training, ensuring individuals with disabilities can develop the skills needed to succeed in the workforce.⁹

Expanding workforce credential programs tailored for students with ASD is a key step in aligning training with employer needs, increasing employment opportunities, and promoting economic independence.¹⁰

³ Kate Jackson, *Autism in the Technology Workplace*, *Social Work Today*, Vol. 13, No. 6, p. 8 (Nov./Dec. 2013), available at <https://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/111113p8.shtml>.

⁴ A.J. Griffiths et al., *Developing Employment Environments Where Individuals with ASD Thrive: Using Machine Learning to Explore Employer Policies and Practices*, *Brain Sci.*, Vol. 10, No. 9, p. 632 (Sept. 11, 2020), available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7564237/>.

⁵ Florida Department of Education, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, and CareerSource Florida, *2024-2028 WIOA Combined Plan*, available at <https://careersourceflorida.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-2028-WIOA-Combined-Plan.pdf>, at 426-507.

⁶ Section 413.80(2), F.S.

⁷ Section 413.80(3), F.S.

⁸ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Pub. L. No. 113-128, 128 Stat. 1425 (codified at 29 U.S.C. §§ 3101–3361).

⁹ Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, *About Us*, <https://www.rehabworks.org/about/about-us.html> (last visited Feb. 13, 2025).

¹⁰ Golden Steps ABA, *Impact of Autism and Vocational Training*, <https://www.goldenstepsaba.com/resources/autism-and-vocational-training> (last visited Feb. 13, 2025).

Workforce Credentialing and Training Programs

Florida Ready to Work

Florida Ready to Work provides foundational employability skills training in areas such as communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving, which are critical for individuals entering the workforce, including students with autism. The program offers stackable credentials that serve as a recognized measure of work-readiness across multiple industries.¹¹

As a state-supported workforce training initiative, Florida Ready to Work illustrates how targeted skills training can help individuals, including those with disabilities, prepare for competitive employment.¹²

Workforce Education

Workforce education includes career and technical training designed to prepare individuals, including adults with disabilities, for employment. Workforce education programs provide opportunities for individuals to gain job-specific skills and increase employability and economic self-sufficiency.¹³

Programs that support this goal include:¹⁴

- Adult general education programs designed to improve the employability skills of the state's workforce.
- Career certificate programs, which offer training in specialized fields leading to occupational credentials.
- Applied technology diploma programs, which provide hands-on technical training.
- Apprenticeship and preapprenticeship programs, which combine classroom instruction with real-world work experience.
- Continuing workforce education courses, which help individuals develop and refine job-related skills.

Get There Initiative

The Get There initiative, launched by the Florida Department of Education (DOE), promotes short-term, high-value Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs available through Florida College System institutions and technical colleges. These programs offer training in advanced manufacturing, transportation and logistics, healthcare, and information technology.¹⁵

One-Stop Delivery System

Florida's one-stop delivery system provides workforce training and employment support services that can help individuals transition into meaningful employment. These services include career

¹¹ Florida Ready to Work, *Answering Florida Employers' Demands*, <https://www.floridareadytowork.com/> (last visited Feb. 13, 2025).

¹² Florida Ready to Work, *Answering Florida Employers' Demands*, <https://www.floridareadytowork.com/> (last visited Feb. 13, 2025).

¹³ Sections 1004.02(3) and (25) and 1004.92(1), F.S.

¹⁴ Section 1011.80(1), F.S.

¹⁵ Florida Department of Education, *Get There, About Us*, <https://gettherefl.com/about-us/> (last visited Feb. 13, 2025).

counseling, job placement assistance, employability skills training, and technical training leading to industry-recognized certifications.¹⁶

Career Education Services for Students with Disabilities

Florida provides career education services for students with disabilities through a structured sequence of courses designed to develop employability skills, technical training, and industry certification opportunities. This program is individualized through a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP)¹⁷ or other accommodations plan and allows students to gain the skills necessary for competitive employment in occupations aligned with their training.¹⁸

The curriculum integrates competency-based applied learning, including instruction in:¹⁹

- Workplace safety;
- Job-seeking and employability skills;
- Self-advocacy and career planning; and
- Technical skills in industry-specific fields.

Students may earn multiple credits as they progress through career education courses, with their achievements documented through the Occupational Completion Point system. Some students may also participate in on-the-job training opportunities.²⁰

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

SB 102 creates s. 1003.5717, F.S., establishing a workforce credential program for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The bill requires the Florida Department of Education (DOE) to develop and implement this program by January 31, 2026, with the goal of assisting students with ASD in securing employment upon graduation.

The program must allow students to earn badges that indicate they have acquired specific skills that meet employer needs. Each badge must require the student to demonstrate five discrete skills or behaviors, including, but not limited to, workplace safety. Additionally, each badge must be validated by two instructional staff members who specialize in exceptional student education.

Beginning in 2026 and continuing through 2030, the bill requires the DOE to prepare an annual report by January 31 of the following year detailing the program's operations. At a minimum, the report must include:

- The badges offered by the program;
- Data on post-graduation student employment;

¹⁶ Section 445.009(1), F.S.

¹⁷ The Individual Education Plan is the primary vehicle for communicating the school district's commitment to addressing the unique educational needs of a student with a disability. Florida Department of Education, *Developing Quality Individual Education Plans* (2015), available at <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7690/urlt/0070122-qualityieps.pdf>, at 9.

¹⁸ Florida Department of Education, *2024-25 CTE Curriculum Frameworks*, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/career-adult-edu/career-tech-edu/curriculum-frameworks/2024-25-frameworks/additional-cte-programs-courses.stml>, download "Career Education Services for Students with Disabilities (9603100) (RTF)."

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

- Student participation rates; and
- Any other outcome data deemed necessary by the DOE.

The workforce credential program established by the bill may provide students with ASD valuable skills that are aligned with employer needs, potentially enhancing their employability upon graduation.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2025.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

This bill does not have a fiscal impact on state revenues or expenditures.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill creates section 1003.5717 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
