

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 206

INTRODUCER: Senator Harrell

SUBJECT: Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

DATE: January 12, 2026

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>AP</u>	_____

I. Summary:

SB 206 modifies requirements for continuing education and inservice training for teaching students with developmental and emotional or behavioral disabilities. The bill:

- Requires, rather than authorizes, the State Board of Education (State Board) to adopt rules to implement such continuing education and inservice training.
- Requires a K-12 teacher who teaches a class in which at least 50 percent of the students have autism spectrum disorder to hold an Autism Spectrum Disorders Endorsement.
- Requires the State Board's rules to allow an exception to the Autism Spectrum Disorders Endorsement requirement if the teacher:
 - Holds an Endorsement in Severe or Profound Disabilities;
 - Has taught students with autism spectrum disorder for at least 3 years; and
 - Has been rated highly effective for the preceding 3-year period under requirements for personnel evaluation procedures.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

II. Present Situation:

Continuing Education and Inservice Training Related to Specified Disabilities

The Commissioner of Education (commissioner) is required to develop recommendations to incorporate instruction on autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, other developmental disabilities, and emotional or behavioral disabilities into continuing education or inservice training requirements for instructional personnel.¹ The recommendations must address the following topics:²

¹ Section 1012.582(1), F.S.

² Section 1012.582(1)(a)-(e), F.S.

- Early identification and intervention.
- Curriculum planning and instructional modifications, adaptations, strategies, and techniques.
- Use of available state and local resources.
- Use of positive behavior interventions and supports to de-escalate problem behaviors.
- Use of restraint techniques, positive behavior interventions and supports, and classroom behavior management strategies.

In developing the recommendations, the commissioner must consult with the State Surgeon General, the Director of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, and specified representatives from the education and disability communities, including regional autism centers.³ The Department of Education (DOE) must incorporate the recommended course curricula into existing continuing education or inservice training requirements for instructional personnel.⁴ The training requirements may not add to the total hours required for continuing education or inservice training as currently established by the DOE.⁵

The State Board of Education may adopt rules to implement the requirements for continuing education and inservice training for teaching students with developmental and emotional or behavioral disabilities.⁶ The commissioner reviewed related curricula and reported findings and recommendations for updates to legislative leadership on December 1, 2025.⁷

The report identifies statewide professional learning delivery mechanisms supporting instruction for students with disabilities, including:

- The BEESS⁸ Portal to Professional Learning Alternatives, which offers online courses for Florida educators.⁹
- IDEA-funded¹⁰ state projects, supported through IDEA funding, that provide direct services and facilitate professional development and learning for teachers and administrators, including examples such as the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities and the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System.¹¹
- Local education agency professional learning opportunities.¹²

³ Section 1012.582(2), F.S.

⁴ Section 1012.582(3), F.S.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Section 1012.582(4), F.S.

⁷ Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, *Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and Inservice Training in Florida: Findings and Recommendations* (Dec. 1, 2025).

⁸ Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services.

⁹ Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, *Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and Inservice Training in Florida: Findings and Recommendations* (Dec. 1, 2025), at 6.

¹⁰ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 20 U.S.C. ss. 1400 et seq.; see 20 U.S.C. s. 1411(a)(1) (authorizing Part B formula grants to states to assist in providing special education and related services to children with disabilities).

¹¹ Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, *Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and Inservice Training in Florida: Findings and Recommendations* (Dec. 1, 2025), at 6-7.

¹² Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, *Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and Inservice Training in Florida: Findings and Recommendations* (Dec. 1, 2025), at 8.

The report states that local education agencies reported employing 29,964 exceptional student education (ESE) teachers in 2024-25, which comprised 14.5 percent of the total teacher population (174,858).¹³

Autism Spectrum Disorders Endorsement

For SY 2024-25, 66,152 students were reported as eligible under the Autism Spectrum Disorder exceptionality.¹⁴

An Autism Spectrum Disorders endorsement requires a bachelor's or higher degree with certification in an exceptional student education area and completion of 12 semester hours that include:¹⁵

- Nature of autism spectrum disorder.
- Assistive and instructional technology and communication systems.
- Behavior management and positive behavior supports.
- Assessment and diagnosis.
- Field-based experience with students with autism spectrum disorder.

Severe or Profound Disabilities Endorsement

An endorsement in severe or profound disabilities requires a bachelor's or higher degree with certification in any area of special education and 12 semester hours in the education of students with profound disabilities, including coursework in atypical child development and assessment and interdisciplinary teaming.¹⁶ A qualified applicant must also complete one of several options that pair additional coursework with a supervised field-based experience. The options include coursework on the nature of autism and intervention strategies and a supervised field-based experience with students who are autistic.¹⁷

Adding Endorsements to a Florida Educator Certificate

The DOE issues a professional educator certificate for a period not to exceed five years to an applicant who meets statutory eligibility criteria.¹⁸

A school district may process, via the DOE website, applications for public school employees that include the addition of a subject coverage or endorsement to a valid Florida certificate.¹⁹ An addition may be based on completion of the applicable subject area testing requirements or

¹³ Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, *Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and Inservice Training in Florida: Findings and Recommendations* (Dec. 1, 2025), at 8.

¹⁴ Florida Department of Education reports 66,152 students eligible under the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) exceptionality, based on Final Survey 2 for SY 2024-25. Florida Department of Education, *Exceptional Student Data by Exceptionality by Race/Ethnicity, 2024-25, Final Survey 2* (Excel spreadsheet) (ASD worksheet, FLORIDA row, Total column), available at <https://www.fl DOE.org/core/fileparse.php/7584/ur1/MPES2425.xlsx>.

¹⁵ Rule 6A-4.01796, F.A.C.

¹⁶ Rule 6A-4.01793, F.A.C.

¹⁷ Rule 6A-4.01793(2)(c)1., F.A.C.

¹⁸ Section 1012.56(7)(a), F.S.

¹⁹ Section 1012.586(1)(a), F.S.

completion of the requirements of an approved school district program or the inservice components for an endorsement.²⁰

For 2023-24, district-reported certification data show 2,614 Autism Spectrum Disorders certifications and 169 Severe or Profound Disabilities certifications; certifications are counted once per teacher per certification area.²¹

Personnel Evaluation Procedures and Ratings

Each district school superintendent must establish procedures for evaluating the performance of duties and responsibilities of instructional, administrative, and supervisory personnel employed by the school district.²²

The DOE must approve each school district's instructional personnel and school administrator evaluation systems and must monitor district implementation for compliance with statutory requirements.²³ Evaluation systems must differentiate among four levels of performance:²⁴

- Highly effective.
- Effective.
- Needs improvement, or developing for certain instructional personnel in the first three years of employment.
- Unsatisfactory.

A performance evaluation must be conducted for each employee at least once a year, and a newly hired classroom teacher must be observed and evaluated at least twice in the first year of teaching in the district.²⁵ A performance evaluation must include, at minimum, specified summative components and minimum weighting provisions, including:²⁶

- Student performance, which must comprise at least one-third of the evaluation.
- Instructional practice for instructional personnel, which must comprise at least one-third of the evaluation.
- Instructional leadership for school administrators, which must comprise at least one-third of the evaluation.
- Additional performance indicators beyond the required student performance and instructional practice or instructional leadership components.

Statewide, districts reported 157,905 classroom teachers received an evaluation in 2023-24, and 114,950 of those teachers (72.8 percent) were rated highly effective.²⁷

²⁰ Section 1012.586(1)(a), F.S.

²¹ Florida Department of Education, *Identification of High Demand Teacher Needs Areas for 2025-26* (report) (explaining that certifications are counted once per teacher per subject area and providing certification subject code totals) (p. 2; Appendix C, pp. 69-70 (subject code 1066, Severe or Profound Disabilities; subject code 1078, Autism Spectrum Disorders)), available at <https://www.fl DOE.org/core/fileparse.php/20808/ur1/17-2.pdf>.

²² Section 1012.34(1)(a), F.S.

²³ Section 1012.34(1)(b), F.S.

²⁴ Section 1012.34(2)(e), F.S.

²⁵ Section 1012.34(3)(a), F.S.

²⁶ Section 1012.34(3)(a)1.-4., F.S.

²⁷ Florida Department of Education, 2023-24 District Educator Evaluation Ratings (Excel spreadsheet) (Classroom Teachers - % by Dist worksheet, Statewide Total row), available at <https://www.fl DOE.org/file/7503/2324DistEduEvalRate.xlsx>.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

SB 206 amends s. 1012.582, F.S., relating to continuing education and inservice training for teaching students with developmental and emotional or behavioral disabilities. The bill:

- Requires, rather than authorizes, the State Board of Education (State Board) to adopt rules to implement requirements for continuing education and inservice training for teaching students with developmental and emotional or behavioral disabilities.
- Requires a K-12 teacher who teaches a class in which at least 50 percent of the students have autism spectrum disorder to hold an Autism Spectrum Disorders Endorsement. It is unclear if a mid-year addition of a student with autism which brings a class above the 50 percent threshold would result in noncompliance with the rule.
- Requires the State Board's rules to allow an exception to the Autism Spectrum Disorders Endorsement requirement if the teacher:
 - Holds an Endorsement in Severe or Profound Disabilities;
 - Has taught students with autism spectrum disorder for at least 3 years; and
 - Has been rated highly effective for the preceding 3-year period under requirements for personnel evaluation procedures.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

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:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 1012.582 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.
