

By the Committee on Education Pre-K - 12; and Senator Harrell

581-01914-26

2026206c1

A bill to be entitled

An act relating to students with autism spectrum disorder; amending s. 1004.85, F.S.; requiring certain program participants at educator preparation institutes to complete the autism micro-credential; requiring each educator preparation institute to offer training on teaching students with certain disabilities; creating s. 1009.636, F.S.; providing legislative findings; creating the Autism Educator Loan Forgiveness Program; providing eligibility requirements; providing criteria for loan repayment assistance; providing requirements for teachers to receive an annual payment; requiring the State Board of Education to adopt rules; amending s. 1012.22, F.S.; revising salary supplements a district school board must provide; revising which district school board duties collective bargaining may not preclude; amending s. 1012.551, F.S.; revising core curricula for teacher preparation programs; requiring a teacher preparation program to include the autism micro-credential; amending s. 1012.552, F.S.; providing that the Coaching for Educator Readiness and Teaching Certification Program must include completion of the autism micro-credential; amending s. 1012.585, F.S.; revising requirements for the renewal of a professional certificate; amending s. 1012.586, F.S.; providing that personnel certified in exceptional student education who complete the Autism Spectrum Disorder Endorsement are eligible for a stipend;

581-01914-26

2026206c1

amending s. 1012.98, F.S.; requiring a professional learning system to provide at least one autism-specific professional development opportunity; providing requirements for the professional development; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Paragraph (b) of subsection (3) of section 1004.85, Florida Statutes, is amended, and subsection (9) is added to that section, to read:

1004.85 Postsecondary educator preparation institutes.—

(3) Educator preparation institutes approved pursuant to this section may offer competency-based certification programs specifically designed for noneducation major baccalaureate degree holders to enable program participants to meet the educator certification requirements of s. 1012.56. An educator preparation institute choosing to offer a competency-based certification program pursuant to the provisions of this section must implement a program developed by the institute and approved by the department for this purpose. Approved programs shall be available for use by other approved educator preparation institutes.

(b) Each program participant must:

1. Meet certification requirements pursuant to s. 1012.56(1) by obtaining a statement of status of eligibility in the certification subject area of the educational plan and meet the requirements of s. 1012.56(2)(a)-(f) before participating in field experiences.

581-01914-26

2026206c1

2. Demonstrate competency and participate in field experiences that are appropriate to his or her educational plan prepared under paragraph (a). Beginning with candidates entering an educator preparation institute in the 2022-2023 school year, a candidate for certification in a coverage area identified pursuant to s. 1012.585(3)(f) must successfully complete all competencies for a reading endorsement, including completion of the endorsement practicum through the candidate's field experience, in order to graduate from the program.

3. Before completion of the program, fully demonstrate his or her ability to teach the subject area for which he or she is seeking certification by documenting a positive impact on student learning growth in a prekindergarten through grade 12 setting and, except as provided in s. 1012.56(7)(a)3., achieving a passing score on the professional education competency examination, the basic skills examination, and the subject area examination for the subject area certification which is required by state board rule.

4. For each participant who is certified in exceptional student education, complete the autism micro-credential created pursuant to s. 1004.551(1)(f).

(9) By August 1, 2027, as a condition for continued program approval, each educator preparation institute must offer instruction and training on evidence-based practices for teaching students with autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, other developmental disabilities, and emotional or behavioral disabilities, consistent with the uniform core curricula developed by the department.

Section 2. Section 1009.636, Florida Statutes, is created

581-01914-26

2026206c1

to read:

1009.636 Autism educator loan forgiveness program.—

(1) The Legislature finds that an adequate supply of special education teachers is critical to provide students who have a neurodevelopmental disability, such as autism spectrum disorder, with individualized education to foster essential social-emotional skills, provide positive interventions, and build life skills for independence. The Autism Educator Loan Forgiveness Program is created to recruit and retain qualified individuals to serve as special education teachers for students with autism spectrum disorder.

(2) To be eligible, an individual must:

(a)1. Have earned a master's or higher degree in special education or exceptional student education from an accredited institution and have an active student loan balance from completion of that degree, and hold a temporary or professional certificate; or

2. Have earned a bachelor's or higher degree from an accredited institution and have an active student loan balance from completion of that degree, hold a temporary or professional certificate, and hold the Autism Spectrum Disorder Endorsement or Severe or Profound Disabilities Endorsement; and

(b) Serve as the primary teacher in a public school classroom in which a majority of the students have autism spectrum disorder.

(3) Eligible participants may receive up to \$17,500 in total student loan repayment assistance over 5 years, disbursed in annual payments not to exceed \$3,500 per year. Payments must be made directly to the lender servicing the participant's

581-01914-26

2026206c1

117 student loan.

118 (4) In order for the department to release each annual
119 payment, a teacher must:

120 (a) Have completed a full year of service pursuant to
121 paragraph (2) (b) .

122 (b) Have received a rating of effective or highly effective
123 pursuant to s. 1012.34.

124 (c) Not have had any disciplinary action taken by the
125 school district or by the department against the teacher's
126 certificate.

127 (5) The State Board of Education shall adopt rules to
128 administer this section.

129 Section 3. Paragraph (c) of subsection (1) and paragraph
130 (a) of subsection (3) of section 1012.22, Florida Statutes, are
131 amended to read:

132 1012.22 Public school personnel; powers and duties of the
133 district school board.—The district school board shall:

134 (1) Designate positions to be filled, prescribe
135 qualifications for those positions, and provide for the
136 appointment, compensation, promotion, suspension, and dismissal
137 of employees as follows, subject to the requirements of this
138 chapter:

139 (c) *Compensation and salary schedules.*—

140 1. Definitions.—As used in this paragraph:

141 a. "Adjustment" means an addition to the base salary
142 schedule that is not a bonus and becomes part of the employee's
143 permanent base salary and shall be considered compensation under
144 s. 121.021(22) .

145 b. "Grandfathered salary schedule" means the salary

581-01914-26

2026206c1

146 schedule or schedules adopted by a district school board before
147 July 1, 2014, pursuant to subparagraph 4.

148 c. "Instructional personnel" means instructional personnel
149 as defined in s. 1012.01(2)(a)-(d), excluding substitute
150 teachers.

151 d. "Performance salary schedule" means the salary schedule
152 or schedules adopted by a district school board pursuant to
153 subparagraph 5.

154 e. "Salary schedule" means the schedule or schedules used
155 to provide the base salary for district school board personnel.

156 f. "School administrator" means a school administrator as
157 defined in s. 1012.01(3)(c).

158 g. "Supplement" means an annual addition to the base salary
159 for the term of the negotiated supplement as long as the
160 employee continues his or her employment for the purpose of the
161 supplement. A supplement does not become part of the employee's
162 continuing base salary but shall be considered compensation
163 under s. 121.021(22).

164 2. Cost-of-living adjustment.—A district school board may
165 provide a cost-of-living salary adjustment if the adjustment:

166 a. Does not discriminate among comparable classes of
167 employees based upon the salary schedule under which they are
168 compensated.

169 b. Does not exceed 50 percent of the annual adjustment
170 provided to instructional personnel rated as effective.

171 3. Advanced degrees.—A district school board may use
172 advanced degrees in setting a salary schedule for instructional
173 personnel or school administrators if the advanced degree is
174 held in the individual's area of certification.

581-01914-26

2026206c1

175 4. Grandfathered salary schedule.—

176 a. The district school board shall adopt a salary schedule
177 or salary schedules to be used as the basis for paying all
178 school employees hired before July 1, 2014. Instructional
179 personnel on annual contract as of July 1, 2014, shall be placed
180 on the performance salary schedule adopted under subparagraph 5.
181 Instructional personnel on continuing contract or professional
182 service contract may opt into the performance salary schedule if
183 the employee relinquishes such contract and agrees to be
184 employed on an annual contract under s. 1012.335. Such an
185 employee shall be placed on the performance salary schedule and
186 may not return to continuing contract or professional service
187 contract status. Any employee who opts into the performance
188 salary schedule may not return to the grandfathered salary
189 schedule.

190 b. In determining the grandfathered salary schedule for
191 instructional personnel, a district school board must base a
192 portion of each employee's compensation upon performance
193 demonstrated under s. 1012.34 and shall provide differentiated
194 pay for both instructional personnel and school administrators
195 based upon district-determined factors, including, but not
196 limited to, additional responsibilities, school demographics,
197 high-demand teacher needs areas, and level of job performance
198 difficulties.

199 5. Performance salary schedule.—By July 1, 2014, the
200 district school board shall adopt a performance salary schedule
201 that provides annual salary adjustments for instructional
202 personnel and school administrators based upon performance
203 determined under s. 1012.34. Employees hired on or after July 1,

581-01914-26

2026206c1

2014, or employees who choose to move from the grandfathered salary schedule to the performance salary schedule shall be compensated pursuant to the performance salary schedule once they have received the appropriate performance evaluation for this purpose.

a. Base salary.—The base salary shall be established as follows:

(I) The base salary for instructional personnel or school administrators who opt into the performance salary schedule shall be the salary paid in the prior year, including adjustments only.

(II) Instructional personnel or school administrators new to the district, returning to the district after a break in service without an authorized leave of absence, or appointed for the first time to a position in the district in the capacity of instructional personnel or school administrator shall be placed on the performance salary schedule.

b. Salary adjustments.—Salary adjustments for highly effective or effective performance shall be established as follows:

(I) The annual salary adjustment under the performance salary schedule for an employee rated as highly effective must be at least 25 percent greater than the highest annual salary adjustment available to an employee of the same classification through any other salary schedule adopted by the district.

(II) The annual salary adjustment under the performance salary schedule for an employee rated as effective must be equal to at least 50 percent and no more than 75 percent of the annual adjustment provided for a highly effective employee of the same

581-01914-26

2026206c1

classification.

(III) A salary schedule shall not provide an annual salary adjustment for an employee who receives a rating other than highly effective or effective for the year.

c. Salary supplements.—In addition to the salary adjustments, each district school board shall provide for salary supplements for activities that must include, but are not limited to:

(I) Assignment to a Title I eligible school.

(II) Assignment to a school that earned a grade of "F" or three consecutive grades of "D" pursuant to s. 1008.34 such that the supplement remains in force for at least 1 year following improved performance in that school.

(III) Certification and teaching in high-demand teacher needs areas. Statewide high-demand teacher needs areas shall be identified by the State Board of Education under s. 1012.07. However, the district school board may identify other areas of high-demand needs within the school district for purposes of this sub-sub-subparagraph and may remove areas identified by the state board which do not apply within the school district.

(IV) Assignment of additional academic responsibilities.

(V) Completion of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Endorsement.

If budget constraints in any given year limit a district school board's ability to fully fund all adopted salary schedules, the performance salary schedule shall not be reduced on the basis of total cost or the value of individual awards in a manner that is proportionally greater than reductions to any other salary schedules adopted by the district. Any compensation for

581-01914-26

2026206c1

longevity of service awarded to instructional personnel who are on any other salary schedule must be included in calculating the salary adjustments required by sub-subparagraph b.

(3)(a) *Collective bargaining.*—Notwithstanding provisions of chapter 447 related to district school board collective bargaining, collective bargaining may not preclude a district school board from carrying out its constitutional and statutory duties related to the following:

1. Providing incentives to effective and highly effective teachers.

2. Implementing intervention and support strategies under s. 1008.33 to address the causes of low student performance and improve student academic performance and attendance.

3. Implementing student discipline provisions required by law, including a review of a student's abilities, past performance, behavior, and needs.

4. Implementing school safety plans and requirements.

5. Implementing staff and student recognition programs.

6. Distributing correspondence to parents, teachers, and community members related to the daily operation of schools and the district.

7. Providing any required notice or copies of information related to the district school board or district operations which is readily available on the school district's website.

8. The school district's calendar.

9. Providing incentives to exceptional student education teachers who complete the Autism Spectrum Disorder Endorsement, in addition to any stipend funded in the General Appropriations Act for completion of the endorsement, and who serve as the

581-01914-26

2026206c1

primary teacher in a classroom in which a majority of the students have autism spectrum disorder.

Section 4. Paragraph (g) of subsection (2) of section 1012.551, Florida Statutes, is amended, and subsection (4) is added to that section to read:

1012.551 Teacher preparation core principles, standards, and content.—

(2) The uniform core curricula for each state-approved teacher preparation program must meet, at a minimum, the following standards:

(g) Must include strategies for differentiated instruction to meet student needs, including English language learners and students with disabilities, while maintaining grade-level expectations. The strategies must also include specific training aligned with evidence-based practices for supporting students with autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, other developmental disabilities, and emotional or behavioral disabilities applicable across all levels of support.

(4) Each state-approved teacher preparation program using the uniform core curricula developed pursuant to this section must include the autism micro-credential created pursuant to s. 1004.551(1)(f), which shall count for at least 1 semester hour toward completion of the program.

Section 5. Paragraph (g) is added to subsection (2) of section 1012.552, Florida Statutes, to read:

1012.552 The Coaching for Educator Readiness and Teaching (CERT) Certification Program.—

(2) PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS.—A CERT program must include all of the following:

581-01914-26

2026206c1

(g) Required successful completion of the autism micro-credential created pursuant to s. 1004.551(1)(f) for a candidate certification in exceptional student education.

Section 6. Paragraph (e) of subsection (3) of section 1012.585, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

1012.585 Process for renewal of professional certificates.—

(3) For the renewal of a professional certificate, the following requirements must be met:

(e) Beginning July 1, 2014, an applicant for renewal of a professional certificate must earn a minimum of one college credit or the equivalent inservice points in the area of instruction for teaching students with disabilities. The requirement in this paragraph may not add to the total hours required by the department for continuing education or inservice training. Beginning August 1, 2027:

1. Instruction for teaching students with disabilities must include autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, other developmental disabilities, and emotional or behavioral disabilities.

2. An applicant certified in exceptional student education must earn the autism micro-credential created pursuant to s. 1004.551(1)(f), which must count toward 3 college credits or the equivalent inservice points. Once earned, an applicant is not required to earn the micro-credential for additional renewal periods.

Section 7. Subsection (3) is added to section 1012.586, Florida Statutes, to read:

1012.586 Additions or changes to certificates; duplicate certificates; reading endorsement pathways.—

581-01914-26

2026206c1

349 (3) Personnel certified in exceptional student education
350 who complete the Autism Spectrum Disorder Endorsement are
351 eligible for a stipend as specified in the General
352 Appropriations Act.

353 Section 8. Paragraph (b) of subsection (5) of section
354 1012.98, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

355 1012.98 School Community Professional Learning Act.—

356 (5) The Department of Education, school districts, schools,
357 Florida College System institutions, and state universities
358 share the responsibilities described in this section. These
359 responsibilities include the following:

360 (b) Each school district shall develop a professional
361 learning system as specified in subsection (4). The system shall
362 be developed in consultation with teachers, teacher-educators of
363 Florida College System institutions and state universities,
364 business and community representatives, and local education
365 foundations, consortia, and professional organizations. The
366 professional learning system must:

367 1. Be reviewed and approved by the department for
368 compliance with s. 1003.42(3) and this section. Effective March
369 1, 2024, the department shall establish a calendar for the
370 review and approval of all professional learning systems. A
371 professional learning system must be reviewed and approved every
372 5 years. Any substantial revisions to the system must be
373 submitted to the department for review and approval. The
374 department shall establish a format for the review and approval
375 of a professional learning system.

376 2. Be based on analyses of student achievement data and
377 instructional strategies and methods that support rigorous,

581-01914-26

2026206c1

relevant, and challenging curricula for all students. Schools and districts, in developing and refining the professional learning system, shall also review and monitor school discipline data; school environment surveys; assessments of parental satisfaction; performance appraisal data of teachers, managers, and administrative personnel; and other performance indicators to identify school and student needs that can be met by improved professional performance.

3. Provide inservice activities coupled with follow-up ~~follow-up~~ support appropriate to accomplish district-level and school-level improvement goals and standards. The inservice activities for instructional and school administrative personnel shall focus on analysis of student achievement data; ongoing formal and informal assessments of student achievement; identification and use of enhanced and differentiated instructional strategies that emphasize rigor, relevance, and reading in the content areas; enhancement of subject content expertise; integrated use of classroom technology that enhances teaching and learning; classroom management; parent involvement; and school safety.

4. Provide inservice activities and support targeted to the individual needs of new teachers participating in the professional learning certification and education competency program under s. 1012.56(8)(a).

5. Include a professional learning catalog for inservice activities, pursuant to rules of the State Board of Education, for all district employees from all fund sources. The catalog must be updated annually by September 1, must be based on input from teachers and district and school instructional leaders, and

581-01914-26

2026206c1

must use the latest available student achievement data and research to enhance rigor and relevance in the classroom. Each district inservice catalog must be aligned to and support the school-based inservice catalog and school improvement plans pursuant to s. 1001.42(18). Each district inservice catalog must provide a description of the training that middle grades instructional personnel and school administrators receive on the district's code of student conduct adopted pursuant to s. 1006.07; integrated digital instruction and competency-based instruction and CAPE Digital Tool certificates and CAPE industry certifications; classroom management; student behavior and interaction; extended learning opportunities for students; and instructional leadership. District plans must be approved by the district school board annually in order to ensure compliance with subsection (1) and to allow for dissemination of research-based best practices to other districts. District school boards shall submit verification of their approval to the Commissioner of Education no later than October 1, annually. Each school principal may establish and maintain an individual professional learning plan for each instructional employee assigned to the school as a seamless component to the school improvement plans developed pursuant to s. 1001.42(18). An individual professional learning plan must be related to specific performance data for the students to whom the teacher is assigned, define the inservice objectives and specific measurable improvements expected in student performance as a result of the inservice activity, and include an evaluation component that determines the effectiveness of the professional learning plan.

6. Include inservice activities for school administrative

581-01914-26

2026206c1

personnel, aligned to the state's educational leadership standards, which address updated skills necessary for instructional leadership and effective school management pursuant to s. 1012.986.

7. Provide for systematic consultation with regional and state personnel designated to provide technical assistance and evaluation of local professional learning programs.

8. Provide for delivery of professional learning by distance learning and other technology-based delivery systems to reach more educators at lower costs.

9. Provide for the continuous evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of professional learning programs in order to eliminate ineffective programs and strategies and to expand effective ones. Evaluations must consider the impact of such activities on the performance of participating educators and their students' achievement and behavior.

10. For all grades, emphasize:

a. Interdisciplinary planning, collaboration, and instruction.

b. Alignment of curriculum and instructional materials to the state academic standards adopted pursuant to s. 1003.41.

c. Use of small learning communities; problem-solving, inquiry-driven research and analytical approaches for students; strategies and tools based on student needs; competency-based instruction; integrated digital instruction; and project-based instruction.

Each school that includes any of grades 6, 7, or 8 shall include in its school improvement plan, required under s. 1001.42(18), a

581-01914-26

2026206c1

description of the specific strategies used by the school to implement each item listed in this subparagraph.

11. Provide training to reading coaches, classroom teachers, and school administrators in effective methods of identifying characteristics of conditions such as dyslexia and other causes of diminished phonological processing skills; incorporating instructional techniques into the general education setting which are proven to improve reading performance for all students; and using predictive and other data to make instructional decisions based on individual student needs. The training must help teachers integrate phonemic awareness; phonics, word study, and spelling; reading fluency; vocabulary, including academic vocabulary; and text comprehension strategies into an explicit, systematic, and sequential approach to reading instruction, including multisensory intervention strategies. Such training for teaching foundational skills must be based on the science of reading and include phonics instruction for decoding and encoding as the primary instructional strategy for word reading. Instructional strategies included in the training may not employ the three-cueing system model of reading or visual memory as a basis for teaching word reading. Such instructional strategies may include visual information and strategies which improve background and experiential knowledge, add context, and increase oral language and vocabulary to support comprehension, but may not be used to teach word reading. Each district must provide all elementary grades instructional personnel access to training sufficient to meet the requirements of s. 1012.585(3)(f).

12. Provide at least one autism-specific professional

581-01914-26

2026206c1

development opportunity annually for instructional personnel and school-based administrators. The professional development must be developed and delivered in coordination with the district's assigned Center for Autism and Related Disabilities and must include evidence-based practices for supporting students with autism spectrum disorder across all levels of need, including academic instruction, behavioral supports, communication strategies, and inclusive practices.

Section 9. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.