

**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.)

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

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BILL: SB 556

INTRODUCER: Senator Berman

SUBJECT: Requirements for a Standard High School Diploma

DATE: January 12, 2026

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Sabitsch	Bouck	ED	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
2.			CF	
3.			RC	

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**I. Summary:**

SB 556 allows a student with a disability to meet the required one credit of physical education for a standard high school diploma by participating in the Special Olympics.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2026.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Florida Graduation Requirements**

Florida's graduation requirements for receiving a standard high school diploma are outlined in statute.<sup>1</sup> Florida students entering grade nine may choose from one of five options to earn a standard diploma. The five options are:<sup>2</sup>

- 24-credit program.
- 18-credit program, Academically Challenging Curriculum to Enhance Learning or ACCEL.
- A Career and Technical Education (CTE) Pathway.
- An International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum.
- An Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) curriculum.

To be awarded a standard high school diploma under the 24-credit program requires students entering the ninth grade in 2023-2024 or later must earn the following credits:<sup>3</sup>

- Four credits in English Language Arts (ELA).
- Four credits in mathematics.

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<sup>1</sup> Sections 1003.4282, and 1002.3105, F.S.

<sup>2</sup> Florida Department of Education, Student Support Services, *Graduation Requirements*, <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/k-12-public-schools/ssss/graduation-requirements/> (last visited Jan. 10, 2026).

<sup>3</sup> Section 1003.4282(3), F.S.

- Three credits in science.
- Three credits in social studies.
- One credit in fine or performing arts, speech and debate, or career and technical education.
- One credit in physical education, which includes the integration of health.<sup>4</sup>
- Seven and one-half credits in electives.
- One-half credit in personal financial literacy.

Students may choose to substitute the required one credit in physical education through participation in an interscholastic sport at the junior varsity or varsity level for two full seasons, or completion of two years of marching band. Students may also satisfy one-half of the credit for physical education by completing one semester and earning a “C” or better in a marching band class, a physical activity class that requires participation in marching band activities, or a dance class.<sup>5</sup> Students may also substitute the required one credit in physical education through completion of two years of Reserve Officer Training Corps (R.O.T.C) class.

In each circumstance where students may choose a substitute for the one credit in physical education, Florida law does not allow the substitution to be used to satisfy the personal fitness requirement or the requirement for adaptive physical education under an individual education plan (IEP) or 504 plan.<sup>6</sup>

### **Special Olympics**

The mission of the Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.<sup>7</sup>

The origins of the Special Olympics can be traced to the first Camp Shriver that was founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver in the early 1960’s on her Maryland farm. Her vision was that through sports, the lives of people with intellectual disabilities would be transformed and public perceptions would be changed forever.<sup>8</sup>

The establishment of these camps gathered momentum that led to the first International Special Olympics Summer Games held at Soldier Field in Chicago as a joint venture between the Kennedy Foundation and the Chicago Park District. About 1,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities from the United States and Canada competed in the first Special Olympics International Summer Games in Chicago. The event was so successful that Eunice Kennedy

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<sup>4</sup> Section 1003.4282(3)(f), F.S.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Special Olympics, *About Page*, <https://www.specialolympics.org/about/mission> (last visited Jan. 6, 2026).

<sup>8</sup> Special Olympics, *Camp Shriver – The Beginning of a Movement*, <https://www.specialolympics.org/about/history/camp-shriver> (last visited Jan. 7, 2026).

Shriver soon pledged that more games would be held in 1970 and every two years thereafter in a "Biennial International Special Olympics."<sup>9</sup>

Today the Special Olympics has grown to be a worldwide organization with 256 national and state programs in 207 countries and jurisdictions. In 2024, there were 4,660,299 participants that included 3.8 million athletes with intellectual disabilities that were joined by over 800,000 unified partners (individuals without an intellectual disability who may or may not have another type of disability).<sup>10</sup>

Through the Special Olympics there are more than 30 Olympic-style individual and team sports that provide meaningful training and competition opportunities for persons with intellectual disabilities. Sports offered are varied and include such diverse activities as:<sup>11</sup>

- Alpine Skiing;
- Basketball;
- Bowling;
- Competitive Cheer;
- Cycling;
- Equestrian;
- Figure Skating;
- Judo;
- Kayaking; and
- Powerlifting.

The Special Olympics also supports Unified Sports, which joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding. Young people with disabilities do not often get a chance to play on their school sports teams. U.S. states are adopting the Unified Sports approach that Special Olympics pioneered. Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® programming is in more than 10,800 schools in 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Special Olympics in Florida***

The Special Olympics in Florida consists of 69,453 registered athletes and unified partners (2023) supported by 15,521 coaches and 45,225 volunteers. There are 23 different individual and team sports offered.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Special Olympics, *The Beginning of a Worldwide Movement*, <https://www.specialolympics.org/about/history/camp-shriver> (last visited Jan. 7, 2026).

<sup>10</sup> Special Olympics, *Global Reach Report* (2024), available at: <https://www.specialolympics.org/about/reports>.

<sup>11</sup> Special Olympics, *Sports*, <https://www.specialolympics.org/what-we-do/sports/sports-offered> (last visited January 7, 2026).

<sup>12</sup> Special Olympics, *Unified Sports*, <https://www.specialolympics.org/what-we-do/sports/unified-sports> (last visited Jan. 7, 2026).

<sup>13</sup> Special Olympics, *Florida Fact Sheet*, available at: <https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/leading-a-program/program-profiles/SONA/Florida-FactSheet-2024.pdf>.

Currently, there are 303 public high schools participating in the Special Olympics United Champion Schools and Developmental Sports Program that include 4,664 athletes and 1,144 unified partners. Additionally, there are 1,330 high school level programs taking place in Florida communities outside of public schools that include 4,664 athletes and 1,144 unified partners.<sup>14</sup>

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

SB 556 amends s. 1003.4282, F.S., to allow students with disabilities who participate in the Special Olympics to substitute that participation for the required one credit of physical education to earn a standard high school diploma.

The provision requires one year of participation in the Special Olympics as determined by the student's individual education plan (IEP) team.

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.

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<sup>14</sup> Email, Special Olympics Florida (January 6, 2026).

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 substantially amends s. 1003.4282 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.