

**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 Rules

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BILL: CS/CS/SB 7036

INTRODUCER: Rules Committee; Appropriations Committee on Pre-K - 12 Education; and Education Pre-K - 12 Committee

SUBJECT: Education

DATE: February 25, 2026

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
	<u>Brick</u>	<u>Bouck</u>		<b>ED Submitted as Comm. Bill/Fav</b>
1.	<u>Gray</u>	<u>Elwell</u>	<u>AED</u>	<b>Fav/CS</b>
2.	<u>Brick</u>	<u>Kruse</u>	<u>RC</u>	<b>Fav/CS</b>

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**Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:**

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

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**I. Summary:**

CS/CS/SB 7036 makes changes across K-12 and postsecondary education laws to update program requirements, expand instructional options, and clarify district responsibilities for student support and safety. The bill:

- Expands district and school operational authority to:
  - Expand the circumstances under which a district school board may declare an educational emergency by adding “persistently low-performing schools” as an additional trigger for existing personnel and compensation strategies.
  - Exempt district school boards from state agency rulemaking requirements when adopting rules with public input at a public meeting.
  - Clarify that a school district’s existing authority to reserve or withhold a portion of Title I funds for allowable districtwide education services includes STEM curricula, instructional materials, and related learning technologies supporting academic achievement in Title I schools, subject to federal allocation requirements.
  - Revise charter school renewal and dismissal provisions by clarifying that “exemplary academic programming” for purposes of eligibility for a 15-year renewal may include performance measured by school improvement ratings and by prohibiting academic-performance-based dismissal while a charter school is implementing a required improvement plan or corrective action plan.
  - Require each charter school to receive and respond to DOE monitoring questions.

- Clarifies school safety implementation by providing that, notwithstanding local ordinances or development orders, a school district or charter school may implement any combination of authorized safe-school officer options to meet district and charter school needs.
- Expands private school facilities and land use flexibility for schools enrolling 150 or fewer students by preempting local zoning approvals and allowing use of specified existing occupancies if state fire-code educational occupancy standards are met.
- Revises collective bargaining limitations by providing that collective bargaining may not preclude a school board from providing salary supplements or implementing required teacher salary increases and the related salary distribution plan.
- Revises district finance tools by:
  - Expanding allowable 1-year obligations to include educational plants, ancillary plants, and auxiliary facilities.
  - Revising the 1.5 mill discretionary levy authority by authorizing proceeds for district schools to be used for operational or capital purposes and deleting the per-student additional spending authority and related FEFP reduction penalty.
- Updates student carry, self-administration, and school supply provisions for epinephrine to apply to U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved epinephrine delivery devices, rather than limiting the statutes to auto-injectors.
- Modifies early learning programs and modifies specified student and provider eligibility provisions to:
  - Revise VPK attendance policy for district-operated programs by removing monthly parent verification and form retention requirements.
  - Refine Gold Seal Quality Care eligibility and termination by limiting which class I violations are disqualifying or terminable to those for which the provider is the primary cause, removing a discretionary exception process, and retaining a two-year reinstatement standard.
  - Expand eligibility for supplemental instruction in the VPK summer bridge program by increasing the performance threshold from the 10th percentile to the 25th percentile.
  - Expands DOE curriculum approval options for probationary VPK providers by including proprietary curricula and creating a 60-day, outside-cycle approval path for multi-site operators.
- Expands instruction standards, courses, and programs from kindergarten through adult education by:
  - Expanding required elementary instruction in the principles of agriculture and directs the Department of Education (DOE), in collaboration with partner agencies and entities, to develop standards, curriculum supports, training, and related resources.
  - Establishing a statewide framework for applied, career-relevant mathematics by creating “applied algebra” courses aligned to career clusters and requiring the DOE workgroup to identify and report corresponding mathematics pathways on specified timelines.
  - Authorizing a dance techniques course with a significant health and lifelong fitness component to satisfy the 1.0 credit in physical education or performing arts for a standard high school diploma.
  - Authorizing two years of marching band to satisfy both the physical education and performing arts credits required for high school graduation.

- Expanding flexibility in the Graduation Alternative to Traditional Education (GATE) program by authorizing certain online-provider agreements, adjusting age eligibility, and clarifying that adult secondary and career coursework need not be taken simultaneously.
- Expanding eligibility for institutions to receive startup grants to implement the GATE Program.
- Provides educators with additional preparation and certificate options by:
  - Revising educator preparation institute participation requirements by allowing coursework completion while a participant seeks a statement of eligibility and clarifying what that statement must reflect.
  - Requiring the State Board of Education (SBE) to maintain specified computer science subject area coverages and to adopt competencies and examinations, with deadlines for the DOE recommendations and exam availability.
- Updates school improvement and intervention requirements to:
  - Require a school district, when screening indicates characteristics of dyslexia or dyscalculia, to provide evidence-based interventions with progress monitoring; treat the indication as reasonable suspicion for exceptional student education evaluation purposes and promptly seek parental consent; and conduct screening, intervention, and evaluation activities concurrently as required by SBE rule.
  - Require that parent resources included in an individualized progress monitoring plan for a student with a substantial reading deficiency include information about the student's eligibility for the New Worlds Reading Initiative.
  - Provides additional parent notice and access related to IEP services by requiring notice when a scheduled related service is missed, requiring discussion of make-up services, providing parent access to service provider logs or progress notes upon request, and requiring districts to inform parents of this right at each IEP meeting.
  - Prohibit requiring student learning growth as the sole determinant when recruiting instructional personnel.
  - Require SBE rule timelines for approval of specified improvement and turnaround plans and for release of Title I school improvement funds, with release within 20 calendar days after plan approval.

The bill has an indeterminate fiscal impact on state revenues and expenditures. **See Section V., Fiscal Impact Statement.**

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

## II. Present Situation:

The present situation for the relevant portions of the bill is discussed under the Effect of Proposed Changes of this bill analysis.

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

#### District School Board Operations

##### *Present Situation*

##### District School Board Policymaking

District school boards derive their primary policymaking authority from the Florida Constitution, which grants them the power to operate, control, and supervise all free public schools within the district and to determine the local school tax rate.<sup>1</sup> The Administrative Procedures Act (APA) applies to district school boards only when they act pursuant to statutory authority rather than their constitutional authority.<sup>2</sup> Policies adopted under constitutional authority are subject to judicial review, typically in the local circuit court.<sup>3</sup>

The Legislature also identifies the general powers of district school boards. These include, for example, the authority to:

- Determine policies and programs necessary for the efficient operation and general improvement of the district school system, provided they align with state law and rule.
- Adopt rules under the APA to implement their statutory duties and supplement those established by the SBE and commissioner.
- Establish standards and policies that ensure every student has access to a comprehensive education program, including language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, health, physical education, foreign languages, and the arts, as outlined by state academic standards.<sup>4</sup>

When promulgating rules under the APA, district school boards are required to notify the public:

- By publication in a newspaper in the affected area or on a publicly accessible website;
- By mail to all persons who have made requests for advance notice of its proceedings and to organizations representing persons affected by the proposed rule; and
- By posting in appropriate places so that those particular classes of persons to whom the intended action is directed may be duly notified.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike state agencies, which must adhere to the APA, local government entities (including counties, municipalities, and special districts) are not subject to APA rulemaking procedures. Instead, they must comply with Florida's open government laws, including:

- Florida's Sunshine Law, which requires all meetings of local government boards to be open to the public, with reasonable notice provided.<sup>6</sup>
- Requirements for notices of public meetings to include information on how affected persons may appeal decisions made at the meeting.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> FLA. CONST. art. IX, s. 4(b).

<sup>2</sup> See s. 120.52(1)(a) and (6), F.S. See also *Escambia Cnty. Sch. Bd. v. Warren*, 337 So. 3d 496, 500-502 (Fla. 1st DCA 2022) (Tanenbaum, J., concurring).

<sup>3</sup> See *Escambia Cnty. Sch. Bd. v. Warren*, 337 So. 3d 496, 500-502 (Fla. 1st DCA 2022) (Tanenbaum, J., concurring).

<sup>4</sup> Section 1001.41, F.S.

<sup>5</sup> Section 120.81(1), F.S.

<sup>6</sup> Section 286.011, F.S.

<sup>7</sup> Section 286.0105, F.S.

- Requirements for public participation, which guarantee the public a reasonable opportunity to be heard before local governing bodies make decisions.<sup>8</sup>

Charter schools are not required to follow rulemaking procedures prescribed by the APA.<sup>9</sup>

### Educational Emergency

An educational emergency tool exists to free schools graded “D” or “F” from contract restrictions that limit a school’s ability to implement programs and strategies needed to improve student performance. A district school board may adopt salary incentives or other strategies addressing the selection, placement, compensation, and expectations of instructional personnel, and provide principals with the autonomy described for participating principals in the Principal Autonomy Program Initiative. An educational emergency exists in a school district if one or more schools in the district have a school grade of “D” or “F.”

Under an educational emergency, a district school board is not subject to collective bargaining restrictions regarding:

- Salary incentives that may differentiate based on a teacher’s certification, subject area taught, or grade level taught.
- Strategies adopted as a management right to assign high-quality teachers more equitably across schools in the district to low-performing schools.<sup>10</sup>

A principal of a school participating in the Principal Autonomy Program Initiative has additional authority and responsibilities. That authority includes the selection and placement of instructional personnel and deploying financial resources.<sup>11</sup>

Schools graded “D” or “F” may not be assigned a higher percentage than the district average of inexperienced teachers, teachers in need of improvement, or out-of-field teachers. District school boards may provide salary incentives to meet the assignment provisions applicable to schools graded “D” or “F,” and a collective bargaining agreement may not preclude providing sufficient incentives to meet those provisions.<sup>12</sup>

### Persistently Low-Performing Schools

A “persistently low-performing school” means a school:

- That has earned three grades lower than a “C” in at least 3 of the previous 5 years that the school received a grade and has not earned a grade of “B” or higher in the most recent 2 school years. That school closed within 2 years after submission of a notice of intent pursuant to the school improvement and SBE intervention statute.
- In the bottom 10 percent in at least 2 of the previous 3 years for student performance on the end-of-year administration of the coordinated screening and progress monitoring system for grade 3 English Language Arts or grade 4 mathematics.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Section 286.0114, F.S.

<sup>9</sup> Section 1002.33(16), F.S.

<sup>10</sup> Section 1001.42(21), F.S.

<sup>11</sup> Sections 1012.28(8) and 1011.6202, F.S.

<sup>12</sup> Section 1012.2315, F.S.

<sup>13</sup> Section 1002.333(1)(c), F.S.

### Cost Accounting and Reporting for School Districts

School districts must account for all state, local, and federal funds on a school-by-school and district-aggregate basis using cost accounting and reporting guidelines specified in law. District reporting is required as prescribed in law or in a manual developed by the DOE.<sup>14</sup>

School districts are required to provide cost reporting on a district-aggregate basis, expenditures for inservice training, and categorical funds. School districts are required to report to the DOE on a school-by-school and district-aggregate basis expenditures for:

- Funds for the operation of schools under the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP).
- Total operational costs for administrative expenditures.
- Expenditures for classroom instruction.<sup>15</sup>

The DOE must categorize all public schools into appropriate groups based primarily on average full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment as reported and to calculate for all schools, districts and the entire state the average percentage of classroom expenditures for various reporting categories of expenditures. The DOE is required to develop a web-based fiscal transparency tool that displays and identifies the financial efficiency of each public school and district. The Commissioner of Education is required to report to the Legislature prior to the open of the regular session each year a district-by-district report of expenditures.<sup>16</sup>

Each district must expend a specified percentage of funds on programs that generated the funds. For example, a district must expend 90 percent of funds for kindergarten through grade 3, while districts must expend 95 percent of funds on juvenile justice programs.<sup>17</sup>

Charter schools are public schools for funding and reporting purposes and must report their financial information to their sponsor in accordance with law and the sponsor's reporting requirements.<sup>18</sup> District school boards are responsible for including charter school revenues and expenditures in the district's financial reports submitted to the DOE, and charter school financial data are included in the DOE's school-level fiscal transparency reporting.<sup>19</sup>

### Short-Term Loans for Education Capital Outlay

District school boards can create short-term obligations based on anticipated revenues without pledging district credit or requiring future tax levies. These obligations are limited to one year but may be extended annually with lender approval for up to a total of five years. These short-term obligations may be used only for the purchase of school buses, land, and equipment for educational purposes; the erection of, alteration to, or addition to educational facilities; and the adjustment of insurance on educational property on a 5-year plan, as provided by rules of the SBE. District school boards may only borrow money through this process if:

- The proposed obligation does not exceed one-fourth of the revenue received during the preceding year for the district school fund for operating expenses.

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<sup>14</sup> Section 1010.20(1), F.S.

<sup>15</sup> Section 1010.20(2), F.S.

<sup>16</sup> Section 1010.20(2), F.S.

<sup>17</sup> Section 1010.20(3), F.S.

<sup>18</sup> Section 1002.33(9)(g), (h), F.S.

<sup>19</sup> Section 1010.20, F.S.

- The school board adopts and includes in its minutes a resolution giving the nature of the obligations to be incurred, stating the plan of payment, and providing that such funds will be budgeted during the period of the loan from the current revenue to retire the obligations maturing during the year.
- The school board issues interest-bearing notes for the obligations that do not exceed the maximum rate for government bonds.<sup>20</sup>

### School Board Discretionary Millage Levy

Each district school board is authorized to levy up to a 1.5 mill discretionary ad valorem tax against the taxable value for public school purposes to fund specific needs as identified in law, including, for example:

- New construction, remodeling projects, sites and site improvement or expansion to new sites, existing sites, auxiliary facilities,<sup>21</sup> athletic facilities, or ancillary facilities.<sup>22</sup>
- Purchase, lease-purchase, and lease of school buses.
- Payments for educational facilities and sites due under a lease-purchase agreement.
- Payment of costs of leasing relocatable educational facilities, of renting or leasing educational facilities and sites, or of renting or leasing buildings or space within existing buildings.<sup>23</sup>

Current law also authorizes districts, subject to a per-student cap, to use a portion of proceeds from this levy for certain additional expenses such as specified vehicles and property and casualty insurance for educational and ancillary plants. Expenditures from the discretionary 1.5 mill levy are limited to the detailed list of allowed uses in statute. Violations of these expenditure provisions result in an equal dollar reduction in the district's Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) funds in the fiscal year following the audit citation.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Effect of Proposed Changes***

#### District School Board Policymaking

The bill amends s. 120.81, F.S., to remove district school boards from the APA rulemaking requirements, aligning their rulemaking procedures with those of other similarly situated local government entities. The bill clarifies that district school boards must adopt rules with public input at a public meeting, rather than through APA rulemaking procedures.

By removing APA rulemaking requirements, the bill creates consistency in how district school boards and other local governments adopt rules. Public notice and participation requirements will remain governed by Florida's Sunshine Law and related provisions, ensuring continued public access to school board policymaking processes. Legal challenges to school board rules would likely be brought in circuit court, similar to municipal or county rule challenges.

<sup>20</sup> Section 1011.14, F.S.

<sup>21</sup> "Auxiliary facility" means the spaces located at educational plants which are not designed for student occupant stations. Section 1013.01(1), F.S.

<sup>22</sup> "Ancillary plant" is comprised of the building, site, and site improvements necessary to provide such facilities as vehicle maintenance, warehouses, maintenance, or administrative buildings necessary to provide support services to an educational program. Section 1013.01(2), F.S.

<sup>23</sup> Section 1011.71(2), F.S.

<sup>24</sup> Section 1011.71(6), F.S.

### Educational Emergency

The bill amends s. 1001.42(21), F.S., to expand the circumstances under which a district school board may declare an “educational emergency” for purposes of implementing specified personnel-related strategies to improve student performance. Specifically, the bill expands the educational-emergency trigger to include schools that are “persistently low-performing schools” in addition to schools with a school grade of “D” or “F.”

### Cost Accounting and Reporting for School Districts

The bill modifies s. 1010.20, F.S., by requiring each charter school to receive and respond to monitoring questions from the DOE. The change removes the school district as an intermediary between the DOE and the individual charter school.

### Short-Term Loans for Education Capital Outlay

The bill modifies s. 1011.14, F.S., to expand the scope of capital outlay that district school boards are permitted to fund through the issuance of short-term debt instruments.

This bill authorizes district school boards to incur obligations not only for the construction and renovation of educational facilities but also for the development and enhancement of support and supplemental structures associated with the educational process, which include the entire educational plant, ancillary plants, and auxiliary facilities.

By broadening the permissible use of anticipated revenue for these additional categories of capital projects, the bill allows for a more comprehensive development of the educational environment, acknowledging the role of various facilities in delivering a full spectrum of educational services. The district school boards would remain bound by the existing fiscal constraints—namely, the limitation of indebtedness to no more than one-fourth of the district ad valorem tax revenue for operations for the preceding year and the requirement for a detailed resolution outlining the nature and plan of repayment for the obligations.

### School Board Discretionary Millage Levy

The bill amends s. 1011.71, F.S., by expanding the allowable uses of proceeds from the district discretionary 1.5 mill levy to include operating or capital purposes for both district schools and charter schools.

This may provide school districts with greater flexibility in using revenue from the discretionary 1.5 mill capital levy, allowing for more efficient student transportation options, investment in essential support facilities, and improved resource allocation to meet local needs.

Accordingly, the bill repeals the penalty provision in s. 1011.71(6), F.S., that requires an equal dollar reduction in a district’s FEFP funds in the fiscal year following an audit citation for expenditures that do not comply with the detailed use provisions in statute, as these specified uses have been removed.

## Private School Facilities

### *Present Situation*

A private school is defined in Florida law, as “an individual, association, copartnership, or corporation or department, division, or section of such organizations, that designates itself as an educational center that includes kindergarten or a higher grade” and is below the college level. Private elementary and secondary schools in Florida are not licensed, approved, accredited, or regulated by the Department of Education (DOE). Private schools are required to complete an online annual survey to provide information for inclusion in a statewide directory. A private school may be a parochial, religious, denominational, for-profit, or nonprofit school.<sup>25</sup>

While private schools operate outside of the public education system, there remain some requirements in Florida law that are imposed on private schools as well as areas of authorization. Those laws address the following areas:

- Participation in the annual private school survey.
- Background screening for each private school owner.
- Retention of student records.
- Maintenance of records of attendance and reports.
- Required school-entry health examinations.
- Student immunization and attendance records.
- Student participation in high school athletic programs at public schools.
- Educational and instructional materials.
- Services for exceptional student education services.
- Professional learning systems.
- Bus driver training purchase of school buses.
- Emergency procedures and medications.
- Facilities and safe school officers.<sup>26</sup>

Specifically related to facilities, private schools are permitted to use property owned or leased by a library, community service organization, museum, performing arts venue, theater, cinema, church facility, Florida College System institution or university or other similar public institutional facilities, or a facility recently used to house a school or childcare facility under the facilities preexisting zoning and land use designations. There are similar provisions regarding the purchase of the same types of facilities by private schools. The facilities used or purchased must meet state and local health, safety, and welfare laws, codes, and rules, including fire safety and building safety.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, private schools in certain counties may construct new temporary or permanent facilities on property that was owned by a church, library, theater, or school, that was recently used for the zoned purpose. The same applies to land that was owned by a Florida college System institution or university or land that was recently used to house a school or childcare facility. The new facility constructed by the private school is required to meet all

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<sup>25</sup> Section 1002.01(3), F.S.

<sup>26</sup> Section 1002.42, F.S.

<sup>27</sup> Section 1002.42(19), F.S.

applicable state and local health, safety, and welfare laws, codes, and rules, including fire safety and building safety.<sup>28</sup>

### Fire Prevention and Control

State law requires all municipalities, counties, and special districts with fire safety responsibilities to enforce the Fire Prevention Code as the minimum fire prevention code to operate uniformly among local governments and in conjunction with the Building Code. Each county, municipality, and special district with fire safety enforcement responsibilities must employ or contract with a fire safety inspector (certified by the State Fire Marshal) to conduct all fire safety inspections required by law.<sup>29</sup>

### Fire Protection Systems

A “fire protection system” is a system individually designed to protect the interior or exterior of a specific building or buildings, structure, or other special hazard from fire. A fire protection system includes, but is not limited to:<sup>30</sup>

- Water sprinkler systems;
- Water spray systems;
- Foam-water sprinkler systems;
- Foam-water spray systems;
- Carbon dioxide systems;
- Foam extinguishing systems;
- Dry chemical systems; and
- Halon and other chemical systems used for fire protection.

Fire protection systems also include any tanks and pumps connected to fire sprinkler systems, overhead and underground fire mains, fire hydrants and hydrant mains, standpipes and hoses connected to sprinkler systems, sprinkler tank heaters, air lines, and thermal systems used in connection with fire sprinkler systems.<sup>31</sup>

Fire protection systems must be installed in accordance with the Fire Prevention Code and the Building Code. Current law requires local governments to enforce the Fire Prevention Code and the Building Code including the permitting, inspecting, and approving the installation of a fire protection system.<sup>32</sup> Owners of fire protection systems must contract with a certified fire protection system contractor to regularly inspect such systems.<sup>33</sup>

### Fire Prevention Code

The State Fire Marshal is required to adopt by rule the Fire Prevention Code and must adopt or incorporate by reference specified codes, such as the current edition of the National Fire

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<sup>28</sup> Section 1002.42(c), F.S.

<sup>29</sup> Section 633.202, F.S.

<sup>30</sup> Section 633.102(11), F.S.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> See generally chs. 553 and 633, F.S.; Florida Fire Prevention Code 8<sup>th</sup> Edition (NFPA Standard 1), available at [florida-fire-prevention-code-8th-edition-nfpa-101-fl-sp.pdf](https://www.floridafire.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/florida-fire-prevention-code-8th-edition-nfpa-101-fl-sp.pdf) (last visited Feb. 9, 2026).

<sup>33</sup> Section 633.312, F.S.

Protection Association's Standard 1, Fire Protection Code.<sup>34</sup> Local governments are given an opportunity to submit local fire code amendments within a certain time which the State Fire Marshal is required to review to make specified determinations.<sup>35</sup> The State Fire Marshall must adopt a new code every three years, and any local amendments are only effective until the new adoption of the code occurs.<sup>36</sup> After the State Fire Marshal approves a local amendment and it is published on the State Fire Marshal's website, the local authority having jurisdiction to enforce the Fire Prevention Code may enforce the local amendment.<sup>37</sup> The State Fire Marshal may approve local amendments that address specified topics.<sup>38</sup>

Included in the Fire Code is the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Life Safety Code (NFPA 101) and NFPA Guide to Alternative Approaches to Life Safety (NFPA 101A).<sup>39</sup> The NFPA 101A provides a methodology for comparing the level of safety provided by an arrangement of safeguards that differ from those specified in the NFPA 101 to the level of safety provided in a building that conforms exactly with the NFPA 101. For some existing facilities, compliance with these requirements may require significant and costly improvements to the physical plant of the facility. Therefore, the Fire Safety Evaluation System as described in NFPA-101A, Alternative Approaches to Life Safety, has been accepted by federal and state agencies as an acceptable and cost effective alternative method of establishing compliance through equivalency. The NFPA 101A is intended to be used alongside NFPA 101 to facilitate equivalency requests using numerically based fire safety evaluation systems.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Effect of Proposed Changes***

The bill amends s. 1002.42(19), F.S., to expand private school land use and facility flexibility, by:

- Treating a private school enrolling 150 or fewer students, or located in the unincorporated area of a specified county, as a permitted use in commercial or mixed-use zoning districts without rezoning, a special exception, or a land use change.
- Preempting local mitigation requirements, conditions, performance standards, ordinances, rules, codes, or policies for those schools, except that a county or municipality may require proportionate mitigation measures necessary to address vehicular traffic and pedestrian safety.
- Limiting allowable local mitigation measures to impacts reasonably and directly attributable to the private school's operation at the site, and prohibiting mitigation measures that exceed in cost or scope those required of other allowable uses within the same zoning district.
- Authorizing a private school subject to traffic and pedestrian safety mitigation measures to submit a traffic study as an alternative to compliance, if the study demonstrates the school will not have a disproportionate impact compared to other allowable uses within the same zoning district.

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<sup>34</sup> Section 633.202(1) and (2), F.S.

<sup>35</sup> Section 633.202(3)(a), F.S.

<sup>36</sup> Section 633.202(3)(b), F.S.

<sup>37</sup> Section 633.202(5), F.S.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

<sup>39</sup> Rule 69A-3.012(1)(ggg) and (hhh), F.A.C.

<sup>40</sup> National Fire Protection Association, NFPA 101A, *Guide on Alternative Approaches to Life Safety* (2025), available at <https://www.nfpa.org/product/nfpa-101a-guide/p0101acode> (last visited Feb. 9, 2026).

- Authorizing an immediate circuit court action for injunctive relief if a local governing authority fails to comply with the permitted use requirements.

Such a school may operate in a facility that is subject to and complies with certain Florida Building Code occupancy classification, and is not subject to additional state or local health, safety, or welfare laws, codes, or rules beyond those applicable to the underlying class of facility.

For a small private school beginning operation in an existing facility, the local fire official shall use firesafety evaluation systems found in NFPA 101A: Guide on Alternative Approaches to Life Safety, as adopted by the Fire Code.

A private school enrolling 150 or fewer students opening inside, or moving operations to, an existing assembly, day care, mercantile, or business occupancy must meet standards for existing educational occupancy requirements for automatic sprinkler, detection, alarm, and communications systems and requirements for hazardous areas. Notwithstanding those requirements, automatic sprinkler systems must be provided for educational occupancies throughout all group E fire areas greater than 12,000 square feet and throughout every portion of educational buildings below the level of exit discharge, but is not required in any fire area or area below the level of exit discharge where every classroom throughout the building has at least one exterior exit door at ground level without intervening corridors, passageways, interior exit stairways or ramps, or exit passageways.

## **Charter Schools**

### ***Present Situation***

#### Charter Contracts and Renewal Terms

A sponsor and a charter school governing board must set the terms and conditions for operating a charter school in a written contract (a charter). A sponsor and a charter school governing board must use the standard charter contract adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE) rule, with limited flexibility to vary terms. A charter must be executed following a public hearing intended to ensure community input.<sup>41</sup>

#### Long-term Renewal Options

A sponsor may renew a charter when a program review demonstrates that required performance criteria have been accomplished and that grounds for nonrenewal have not been found. A charter school that meets the renewal conditions and received a school grade lower than “B” in the most recently graded school year must be renewed for at least 5 years, subject to specified exceptions.<sup>42</sup>

A charter school operating for at least 3 years and demonstrating exemplary academic programming and fiscal management is eligible for a 15-year charter renewal, subject to annual review and possible termination during the term. A sponsor must grant a 15-year renewal to a charter school that received a school grade of “A” or “B” in the most recently graded school year

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<sup>41</sup> Section 1002.33(7), F.S.

<sup>42</sup> Section 1002.33(7)(c), F.S.

and is not in a state of financial emergency or deficit position, as referenced in the charter school statute.<sup>43</sup>

#### School Grades and School Improvement Ratings

All public schools, including charter schools, receive a school grade under Florida's school grading system, using grades "A" through "F" as defined in SBE rule.<sup>44</sup> An alternative school may choose to receive either a school grade or a school improvement rating, and a charter school governing board makes that choice for a charter school that meets the definition of an alternative school under SBE rule.<sup>45</sup> An alternative school that receives a school improvement rating is rated using measures specified in statute and SBE rule, with outcomes categorized by rating level as defined in rule.<sup>46</sup>

#### Charter School Improvement Plan and Corrective Actions for Low Performance

A charter school that receives a school grade of "D" or "F" must appear before the sponsor to present information on its progress and must submit a charter school improvement plan to the sponsor. The Department of Education (DOE) must offer technical assistance to a charter school that earned a grade of "D" or "F." A charter school that earns three consecutive school grades below "C" must select and implement one or more specified corrective actions, subject to the sponsor's ability to waive the requirement upon certain showings.<sup>47</sup>

#### Enrollment Limitations and Dismissal Procedures

A charter school's admissions and dismissal procedures must not be based on a student's academic performance, except as authorized for certain enrollment-limitation circumstances.<sup>48</sup> A charter school may limit its enrollment process to specified student populations, including students who meet reasonable academic, artistic, or other eligibility standards included in the application and charter (or otherwise consistent with the school's mission for existing schools).<sup>49</sup>

A charter school using eligibility standards to limit enrollment must place a student on a progress monitoring plan for at least one semester before dismissing the student from the school.<sup>50</sup>

#### Corrective Action Plans Related to Financial Distress

A charter school meeting the statutory criteria for a financial emergency is subject to intervention requirements, which include development and implementation of a corrective action plan and related oversight steps.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

<sup>44</sup> Section 1008.34(2), F.S.

<sup>45</sup> Section 1008.34(3), F.S.

<sup>46</sup> Section 1008.341(2), F.S.

<sup>47</sup> Section 1002.33(9)(n), F.S.

<sup>48</sup> Section 1002.33(7)(a)7., F.S.

<sup>49</sup> Section 1002.33(10)(e)5., F.S.

<sup>50</sup> Section 1002.33(10)(e)5., F.S.

<sup>51</sup> Section 1002.345(2), F.S.

### ***Effect of Proposed Changes***

The bill amends s. 1002.33, F.S., to modify charter renewal and student dismissal provisions in the charter school statute by:

- Expanding the description of what may constitute “exemplary academic programming” for purposes of eligibility for a 15-year charter renewal to include academic performance measured by school improvement ratings.
- Prohibiting a charter school from dismissing a student based on academic performance while the school is implementing:
  - A charter school improvement plan required for certain low-performing charter schools; or
  - A corrective action plan related to financial distress.

### **Mathematics Education**

#### ***Present Situation***

##### Student Engagement in Mathematics

Student engagement in mathematics is a persistent challenge, particularly when students struggle to connect classroom content to real-world applications. A 2025 report by RAND reviewed reasons why student performance has not recovered to the pre-2019 student performance levels and had three key findings:

- About one-half of middle and high school students reported losing interest during their math lessons about half or more of the time.
- The students who are the most likely to maintain interest in math are the same ones who comprehend math, feel supported in math, are confident in their ability to do well in math, enjoy math, believe in the need to learn math, and see themselves as a math person.
- The students who are the most prone to disengage in math lessons want fewer online activities and more real-world applications in their math classes.<sup>52</sup>

Specifically, 55 percent of the least engaged students want fewer online activities compared with 17 percent of the most engaged students. Regarding real-world math problems, 54 percent of the least engaged students want more real-world math problems compared with 37 percent of the most engaged students.<sup>53</sup> The findings on students who are disengaged from mathematics complements other research on career and technical education (CTE), which finds that occupationally focused courses with real-world applications help engage disadvantaged students because the material is directly relevant to their future.<sup>54</sup>

Over the course of 10 weeks in the fall of 2023, the University of Florida (UF) Lastinger Center Listening Tour team traveled from the Panhandle to the Florida Keys to listen to students, educators, leaders and policymakers and gather their perspectives on mathematics education in

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<sup>52</sup> RAND, *Students Lose Interest in Math*, (2025), available at [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA3900/RRA3988-1/RAND\\_RRA3988-1.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA3900/RRA3988-1/RAND_RRA3988-1.pdf), (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* at 6

<sup>54</sup> *Id.* at 8

Florida. The Lastinger Center produced several briefs covering the following topics of mathematics education<sup>55</sup>

In the “Student Experience” brief, when students were asked what they would change about math class or what they wished for, students asked for opportunities to more actively engage with the mathematics content, collaborate with others, and for their mathematics experience to be fun.<sup>56</sup> Students also expressed a desire for less lecture and procedural practice, and more interaction with their peers to collaboratively solve problems.<sup>57</sup> Employers expressed a real need for students to enter the workforce with a core set of skills that can be tailored to a career of their choosing.<sup>58</sup>

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) researched the connection of incorporating mathematics instruction into CTE courses. In the study, SREB found that students in the classrooms of teachers who trained in the Math-in-CTE model performed significantly better on standardized math tests and community college math placement tests than students who received the regular CTE curriculum. Students also improved their math skills without losing the technical skills needed for college and career readiness.<sup>59</sup>

### Student Performance in Mathematics

On Florida’s Algebra I end-of-course (EOC) assessment, there is a significant difference in performance between students who take Algebra I prior to entering high school versus students who take Algebra I while in high school. On the Algebra I EOC administration in the Spring of 2025, approximately 81,000 grade 8 students participated in the Algebra I EOC assessment, with 83 percent of students passing. In the same administration, approximately 95,000 grade 9 students participated in the Algebra I EOC assessment, with 40 percent of students passing. The table below shows the passing rate by grade level on the Spring 2025 Algebra I EOC administration.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning, *Lastinger Listening Tour Math Summit*, <https://lastinger.ufl.edu/our-work/lastinger-listening-tours/2023-math-listening-tour/>, (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>56</sup> University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning, *Student Experiences in the Mathematics Classroom*, at 3 (2024), available at <https://lastinger.center.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Brief-1-Students-Experiences.pdf> (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>57</sup> University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning, *Student Experiences in the Mathematics Classroom*, at 4 (2024), available at <https://lastinger.center.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Brief-1-Students-Experiences.pdf> (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>58</sup> University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning, *Importance of School Mathematics Beyond High School*, at 3 (2024), available at <https://lastinger.center.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Brief-2-Beyond-High-School.pdf> (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>59</sup> Southern Regional Education Board, *Math-in-CTE Resources*, available at <https://www.sreb.org/nrccte-math-cte-resources>, (last visited Feb. 5, 2026)

<sup>60</sup> Florida Department of Education, *2025 Florida Assessment of Student Thinking and B.E.S.T. Assessments*, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/5668/urlt/33Spring25Alg1SS.xls>, (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

Grade	Number of Students	Percentage in Level 3 or Above
All Grades	231,744	60
03	1	*
04	1	*
05	6	*
06	190	100
07	24,772	95
08	81,379	83
09	95,760	40
10	26,764	28
11	2,035	27
12	732	27
AD	104	10

High School Graduation Requirements

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:

- Four credits in English Language Arts (ELA), and students must pass the grade 10 ELA assessment.
- Four credits in mathematics, and students must pass the Algebra I end-of-course assessment.
- Three credits in science.
- Three credits in social studies.
- One credit in fine or performing arts, speech and debate, or CTE.
- One credit in physical education, which includes the integration of health.
- Seven and one-half credits in electives.
- One-half credit in personal financial literacy.<sup>61</sup>

Students who earn an industry certification for which there is a statewide college credit articulation agreement approved by the SBE may substitute the certification for one mathematics credit. Substitution may occur for up to two mathematics credits, except for Algebra I and Geometry.

Mathematics Pathways

In 2023, the Legislature required the Department of Education (DOE) to convene a workgroup, no later than December 1, 2024, to:

- Identify best practices in CTE pathways from middle school to high school to aid middle school students in career planning and facilitate their transition to high school programs. The career pathway must be linked to postsecondary programs.
- Establish three mathematics pathways for students enrolled in secondary grades by aligning mathematics courses to programs, postsecondary education, and careers. The workgroup

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<sup>61</sup> Section 1003.4282(3), F.S.

must collaborate to identify the three mathematics pathways and the mathematics course sequence within each pathway which align to the mathematics skills needed for success in the corresponding academic programs, postsecondary education, and careers.<sup>62</sup>

The DOE gathered a workgroup to discuss and determine three mathematics pathways for students enrolled in grades K-12 by aligning mathematics courses to Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, postsecondary education and careers. The workgroup consisted of teacher-experts across the state selected through an application process and approved by the DOE. The workgroup met regularly to gather information and provide data for each of the mathematics pathways. Based on workgroup collaboration, the Bureau of Standards and Instructional Support within the DOE recommends the three pathways, that are tentatively scheduled to be adopted by rule in the Fall of 2026:

- Algebraic Thinking - Students will engage in mathematics courses that provide a strong foundation for success within various fields including engineering, health sciences, information technology and energy.
- Statistical Thinking - Students will engage in mathematics courses that provide a strong foundation for success within various fields including finance, marketing, business administration and education.
- Quantitative Thinking - Students will engage in mathematics courses that provide a strong foundation for success within various fields including human services, education, communication, public safety and manufacturing.<sup>63</sup>

#### Artificial Intelligence in Education

Artificial intelligence (AI) provides opportunities to customize and accelerate learning for students and reduce teacher workload.<sup>64</sup> However, school districts in Florida implement AI differently and are using different AI tools for educators and students. For example, in Hillsborough County School District, educators and students are using Amira Learning as their main AI tool for instruction, whereas the Pinellas County School District not only uses Amira Learning but several other AI tools. The top general AI tools being used by school districts are Microsoft Copilot, Canva, and Magicschool.ai and the top AI tools being used by students are Gemini for students, Khanmigo, Canva and Microsoft Copilot.<sup>65</sup>

In 2024, the Legislature passed HB 1361, which created the Florida Tutoring Advantage, administered by the UF Lastinger Center for Learning to support school districts with tutoring programs that include virtual tutoring and automated tutoring software for students in kindergarten through grade 5.<sup>66</sup> A school district may receive grant funds for subscription fees and professional learning to support and accelerate learning for students in grades 6 through 12 during the school day. Grant recipients must select an AI platform that:

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<sup>62</sup> Chapter 2023-87, s.22 Laws of Fla. *see also* s. 1003.4282(10), F.S.

<sup>63</sup> Email, Florida Department of Education, Governmental Relations (Jan. 13, 2026) (on file with the Senate Committee on Education Pre-K-12).

<sup>64</sup> Section 1002.321(3), F.S.

<sup>65</sup> Dr. Maya Israel, University of Florida, *Overview of AI in Florida Schools*, Presentation to the Student Academic Success Subcommittee, The Florida House of Representatives (Dec. 10, 2025), *available at* <https://www.flhouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loaddoc.aspx?MeetingId=14953&PublicationType=Committees&DocumentType=Meeting%20Packets> (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).

<sup>66</sup> Chapter 2024-162, s. 9, Laws of Fla.

- Uses large language models based on GPT-4, its equivalent, or a successor, and is on a closed system.
- Provides professional learning to teachers.
- Provides one-on-one tutoring aligned to the Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) Standards for reading and mathematics.
- Provides standards-aligned lesson plans and provides insights on student progress. Provides district- and school-level reporting and parental access to artificial intelligence interactions.<sup>67</sup>

### *Effect of Proposed Changes*

#### CTE Credit

The bill amends s. 1003.4282(10), F.S., to revise the DOE’s workgroup requirement for career and mathematics pathways by removing an obsolete convening deadline and specifying additional workgroup duties and deliverables related to applied algebra-based mathematics pathways. Specifically, the bill:

- Removes the requirement that the DOE convene the workgroup “no later than December 1, 2024.”
- Requires the workgroup, in establishing three mathematics pathways for students in secondary grades, to:
  - Incorporate the applied algebra courses established under s. 1003.4936, F.S., which align the Florida Standards for Algebra I with CTE standards and benchmarks for each designated career cluster;
  - Include in each mathematics pathway at least one course sequence beginning with an applied algebra course aligned to a specific career cluster, and identify additional mathematics courses that build on the algebraic reasoning, modeling, and quantitative skills introduced through industry-relevant applications, including, as needed, plans to create new mathematics courses to complete a pathway;
  - Offer flexibility and the ability for students to move between pathways, as necessary; and
  - Create clear links between precollege and college-level mathematics pathways and support progression into postsecondary academic programs, state college CTE programs, career center programs, industry certification programs, and high-skill, high-wage occupations.
- Establishes deadlines for identifying the mathematics pathways that incorporate applied algebra courses created in the bill by September 1, 2027, and September 1, 2028, as applicable. The bill requires the workgroup to submit the identified pathways to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

#### Applied Algebra for CTE

The bill creates s. 1003.4936, F.S., to require the DOE to develop “applied algebra” courses aligned to CTE career clusters and to authorize districts to use those courses in lieu of Algebra I for specified purposes. Specifically, the bill:

- Establishes legislative findings regarding the importance of algebra, the purpose of applied algebra courses, and the intended outcomes, including improved relevance and engagement,

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<sup>67</sup> Section 1002.321(3), F.S.

alignment to workforce needs, and preparation for the Algebra I end-of-course (EOC) assessment.

- Requires the DOE to develop an applied algebra course for each established CTE career cluster.
- Requires each applied algebra course to:
  - Integrate relevant CTE program standards and benchmarks with the Florida Standards for Algebra I;
  - Provide rigorous, career-relevant applications in authentic industry problems, processes, or settings;
  - Prepare students to take the statewide, standardized Algebra I EOC assessment; and
  - Qualify as a mathematics credit that satisfies the Algebra I requirement for high school graduation and for middle grades promotion.
- Requires the DOE to develop courses on specified timelines:
  - The DOE must develop and make available for district adoption in the 2027-2028 school year the following career clusters:
    - Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources.
    - Architecture and Construction.
    - Business Management and Administration.
    - Energy.
    - Engineering and Technology Education.
    - Finance.
    - Health Science.
    - Information Technology.
    - Manufacturing.
    - Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics.
  - The DOE must develop and make available for district adoption in the 2028-2029 school year the following career clusters:
    - Arts, Audio-Visual Technology, and Communications.
    - Education and Training.
    - Government and Public Administration.
    - Hospitality and Tourism.
    - Human Services.
    - Law, Public Safety, and Security.
    - Marketing, Sales, and Service.
- Authorizes school districts, in grades 6 through 12, to offer one or more applied algebra courses in lieu of Algebra I, and provides that successful completion satisfies the Algebra I credit requirement for high school graduation or middle grades promotion.
- Requires the DOE to collaborate with the Board of Governors of the State University System to ensure each applied algebra course is accepted as a mathematics credit for state university admissions.
- Requires the DOE to provide professional development, instructional resources, and technical assistance to support district implementation.

### Artificial Intelligence Tool to Support Mathematics Instruction

The bill requires the DOE to collaborate with the UF Lastinger Center for Learning to recommend to the Legislature an individualized, adaptive artificial intelligence tool to support mathematics instruction in kindergarten through grade 12. The DOE must submit its recommendations to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 1, 2026. The recommendations must:

- Ensure that recommended tools align to the Florida academic standards and prepare students for state assessments.
- Consider alternate mathematics sequencing and grade-level progression, and alternate funding models to support individualized progression through content.
- Evaluate the extent to which tools provide real-time diagnostic assessments, individualized learning pathways, adaptive sequencing of content, and immediate, personalized feedback to students.
- Evaluate the applicability of the tool to progress monitoring tools, district learning management systems, suggested interventions, small-group instructional supports, and professional development that enables teachers to integrate the tools into classroom instruction.
- Provide for student data privacy and transparency in data collection and retention.
- Consider statewide and district-level costs.

### **Statewide Coordinated Screening and Progress Monitoring System**

#### ***Present Situation***

A statewide coordinated screening and progress monitoring (CSPM) system is required for use in non-public and public school Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK) and public schools. The system must:

- Measure student progress in early literacy skills, early mathematics skills, and the English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics standards to inform instruction.
- Provide screening and diagnostic capabilities.
- Identify students with substantial deficiencies in reading or mathematics.
- Identify students with characteristics of dyslexia or dyscalculia.<sup>68</sup>

Results must be provided to teachers within one week after completion of the assessment period and to parents within two weeks after administration of the progress monitoring assessment.<sup>69</sup> A student identified by the CSPM system as having characteristics of dyslexia or dyscalculia must undergo further screening.<sup>70</sup>

The statewide CSPM program is implemented as the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST), administered in three progress monitoring windows each school year, using

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<sup>68</sup> Section 1008.25(9)(a), F.S.

<sup>69</sup> Section 1008.25(9)(b)-(c), F.S.

<sup>70</sup> Section 1008.25(9)(a), F.S.

Renaissance Star assessments in VPK through grade 2 and Cambium testing and reporting systems for grades 3 through 10 ELA Reading and grades 3 through 8 Mathematics.<sup>71</sup>

#### Student Progression and Monitoring Plans

Each district school board adopts and implements a comprehensive program for student progression that addresses promotion, retention, remediation, and the use of assessment results to identify and assist students who are not meeting performance expectations.<sup>72</sup>

A student who is not meeting district or state requirements for satisfactory performance in ELA or mathematics must be covered by at least one of the following:

- A federally required student plan (for example, an individual education plan (IEP)).
- A schoolwide system of progress monitoring for all students, subject to specified exemptions.
- An individualized progress monitoring plan.<sup>73</sup>

A student with a substantial deficiency in reading or a substantial deficiency in mathematics must be covered by a federally required student plan, an individualized progress monitoring plan, or both, as necessary. An individualized progress monitoring plan must be developed within 45 days after the CSPM results become available.

At a minimum, an individualized progress monitoring plan must include:

- The student's identified reading or mathematics skill deficiency.
- Goals and benchmarks for growth in reading or mathematics.
- The measures used to evaluate and monitor progress.
- For a substantial reading deficiency, the evidence-based literacy instruction grounded in the science of reading that will be provided.
- Strategies, resources, and materials to be provided to the parent to support the student's progress.
- Any additional services that the teacher deems available and appropriate to accelerate the student's skill development.<sup>74</sup>

#### Reading and Mathematics Deficiencies

Reading and mathematics deficiencies, and characteristics of dyslexia or dyscalculia, may be identified using screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, or assessment data; statewide assessments; or teacher observations. Once a student is identified as having a substantial

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<sup>71</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST), 2025–26 Statewide Assessment Administration Schedule (Progress Monitoring)*, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/file/5663/2526StatewideAssessmentSched.pdf> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026); Florida Department of Education, *Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST), 2025–26 Grades K–2 Fact Sheet*, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/file/20102/2526FASTK2FS.pdf> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026); and Florida Department of Education, *Coordinated Screening & Progress Monitoring System Overview (Mar. 21, 2022)*, at 6, 9, 19, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/file/7506/FOILStatewideAssessment.pdf> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

<sup>72</sup> Section 1008.25(2), F.S.

<sup>73</sup> Section 1008.25(4)(b), F.S.

<sup>74</sup> Section 1008.25(4)(c), F.S.

deficiency in early literacy skills, reading, or mathematics, the applicable interventions must begin immediately.<sup>75</sup>

For a student who exhibits characteristics of dyslexia, as defined in SBE rule, dyslexia-specific interventions must be provided.<sup>76</sup> Appropriate, evidence-based interventions must be initiated upon receipt of documentation from a licensed psychologist demonstrating that the student has been diagnosed with dyslexia or dyscalculia, and initiation may not wait for completion of an exceptional student education eligibility evaluation.<sup>77</sup>

Written parent notification is required when a student has been identified as having a substantial deficiency in reading or mathematics and must include specified information about the deficiency, current services, proposed interventions, and home-based supports and resources as applicable. After the initial notification, written progress updates must be provided at least monthly and must include an explanation of any additional interventions implemented when progress is insufficient, with additional meetings and supports provided upon request.<sup>78</sup>

The reading intervention and parent notification requirements apply to students in public school VPK through grade 3.<sup>79</sup> The mathematics intervention and parent notification requirements apply to students in public school VPK through grade 4.<sup>80</sup>

#### Evaluation and IEP Timelines

Each district school board must provide exceptional student education and include professional services for diagnosis and evaluation.<sup>81</sup> The initial evaluation process is triggered when the school district has reasonable suspicion that a student may have a disability and need special education and related services.<sup>82</sup> Response-to-intervention strategies may not be used to delay or deny an evaluation for a child suspected of having a disability.<sup>83</sup>

A full and individual initial evaluation must be conducted before the initial provision of exceptional student education, and either a parent or the school district may initiate a request for an initial evaluation.

When a parent requests, or when the school district suspects that a student may have a disability, parental consent for an evaluation must be requested within 30 days, unless the parent and school agree otherwise in writing, or the district rejects the parent's request.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Section 1008.25(5)(a) and (6)(a), F.S.

<sup>76</sup> Section 1008.25(5)(a), F.S.; Rule 6A-6.053(7), F.A.C.

<sup>77</sup> Section 1008.25(5)(a) and (6)(a), F.S.

<sup>78</sup> Section 1008.25(5)(d) and (6)(c), F.S.

<sup>79</sup> Section 1008.25(5)(a), F.S.; Rule 6A-6.053(5), F.A.C.

<sup>80</sup> Section 1008.25(6)(a), F.S.; Rule 6A-6.0533(7), F.A.C.

<sup>81</sup> Section 1003.57(1)(a)-(b), F.S.

<sup>82</sup> 34 C.F.R. s. 300.111(c)(1); *Leigh Ann H. v. Riesel Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 18 F.4th 788, 796 n.6 (5th Cir. 2021) (citing *Krawietz ex rel. Parker v. Galveston Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 900 F.3d 673, 676 (5th Cir. 2018)).

<sup>83</sup> Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, *OSEP Memorandum 11-07, "A Response to Intervention (RTI) Process Cannot Be Used to Delay-Deny an Evaluation for Eligibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)"* (Jan. 21, 2011).

<sup>84</sup> Rule 6A-6.0331(3), F.A.C.

Before a school district requests an initial evaluation for a K-12 student suspected of having a disability, school personnel must document one of the following determinations in the student's educational record:

- General education intervention procedures have been implemented and the data indicate that the student may be a student with a disability who needs special education and related services.
- The evaluation was initiated at parent request and the general education intervention activities will be completed concurrently with the evaluation, but before the determination of the student's eligibility for special education and related services.
- The nature or severity of the student's areas of concern makes the general education intervention procedures inappropriate in addressing the student's immediate needs.<sup>85</sup>

Initial evaluations must be completed within 60 calendar days after receipt of parental consent, excluding specified school holidays and breaks and summer vacation, and subject to specified exceptions and extensions.<sup>86</sup> An IEP must be developed within 30 days after a determination that the child needs special education and related services, and services must be made available as soon as possible following IEP development.<sup>87</sup>

#### New Worlds Reading Initiative

A student in prekindergarten through grade 5 who meets specified reading-related criteria must be provided books through the New Worlds Reading Initiative. A school district must notify the parent of an eligible student that the student is eligible to receive books at no cost through the initiative and must provide an application form. A student's eligibility continues until promotion to grade 6 or until the parent opts out.<sup>88</sup>

#### ***Effect of Proposed Changes***

##### Student Progression and Monitoring Plans

The bill modifies s. 1008.25, F.S., to require a school district to take specified actions when the statewide coordinated screening and progress monitoring system, or a district-approved screening instrument, indicates that a student exhibits characteristics of dyslexia or dyscalculia.

When a student exhibits characteristics of dyslexia or dyscalculia, the district must ensure the student is covered by the progress monitoring plan already required for students who need intervention supports. The plan must include evidence-based interventions specific to the identified characteristics of dyslexia or dyscalculia. The interventions must be aligned, as appropriate, with the required reading intervention framework and the required mathematics intervention framework for students with the specific learning disabilities.

The bill also requires the district to treat the screening indication as reasonable suspicion that the student may be a student with a disability for purposes of the initial evaluation process for

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<sup>85</sup> Rule 6A-6.0331(3)(d), F.A.C.

<sup>86</sup> Rule 6A-6.0331(3)(g), F.A.C.

<sup>87</sup> 34 C.F.R. s. 300.323(c).

<sup>88</sup> Section 1003.485(6), F.S.

exceptional student education, and to promptly seek parental consent to conduct an initial evaluation consistent with SBE rule and applicable federal law.

In addition, the bill requires screening activities and required intervention procedures to occur concurrently with the evaluation process and prohibits using those activities or procedures to delay or deny an appropriate evaluation to determine eligibility for exceptional student education and related services.

The bill retains the requirement for further screening when the statewide coordinated screening and progress monitoring (CSPM) system indicates that a student exhibits characteristics of dyslexia or dyscalculia. The bill adds a further screening requirement when the system is not capable of identifying characteristics of dyslexia or dyscalculia and a student meets performance thresholds established by SBE rule.

The bill specifies that further screening is used to refine instructional planning and parent communication and is not a prerequisite to the intervention and evaluation obligations in the bill. The bill requires further screening activities to occur concurrently with required interventions and the evaluation process and prohibits using screening activities to delay or deny an appropriate evaluation.

The bill requires the SBE to adopt rules establishing timelines, performance thresholds, and parental notification requirements for further screening required under the CSPM system provisions governing identification of characteristics of dyslexia or dyscalculia.

The bill amends s. 1003.5716, F.S., to increase parent notice and access when a related service in a student's individualized education program (IEP) is not provided as scheduled, by:

- Requiring a school district to notify the parent or guardian in writing or by electronic means within 10 school days after a related service identified in the student's IEP is not provided as scheduled.
- Requiring the notice to explain the reason the related service was not provided and discuss a plan for make-up services.
- Authorizing a parent or guardian, upon request, to access all service provider logs or progress notes within 15 school days after the related service is provided.
- Requiring the school district to inform parents of the right to access service provider logs or progress notes at each IEP meeting.

#### New Worlds Reading Initiative

The bill revises the minimum content of an individualized progress monitoring plan by requiring that the parent resources included in the plan contain information about the student's eligibility for the New Worlds Reading Initiative.

## School Improvement

### *Present Situation*

#### Equity in School-Level Funding

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA),<sup>89</sup> as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015,<sup>90</sup> is a federal funding program to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps.<sup>91</sup> For the 2024-2025 fiscal year, Florida received approximately \$1.09 billion for Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title I programs.<sup>92</sup>

Part A of Title I focuses on improving basic programs operated by local educational agencies, including district school boards and eligible charter schools within the school district.<sup>93</sup>

District school boards must allocate Title I-A funds first to serve schools in areas with poverty rates of at least 75 percent, or 50 percent for high schools.<sup>94</sup> If funds remain, the school board may serve schools in rank order according to the percentage of children from low-income families in the area, but a school board may serve schools in areas with a poverty rate of less than 35 percent only if the per student allocation of state and local funds is 125 percent greater than the per student amount received under Title I-A.<sup>95</sup>

Prior to the allocation of Title I funds to eligible schools, Florida law authorizes a district school board to withhold funds only as follows:

- One percent for parent involvement, in addition to the one percent the district must reserve under federal law for allocations to eligible schools for parent involvement;
- A necessary and reasonable amount for administration which includes the district's indirect cost rate, not to exceed a total of ten percent;
- A reasonable and necessary amount to provide:
  - Homeless programs;
  - Delinquent and neglected programs;
  - Prekindergarten programs and activities;
  - Private school equitable services; and
  - Transportation for foster care children to their school of origin or choice programs; and
- A necessary and reasonable amount, not to exceed one percent, for eligible schools to provide educational services in accordance with the approved Title I plan.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Pub. L. No. 89-10, 79 Stat. 27 (Apr. 11, 1965).

<sup>90</sup> Pub. L. 114-95, 129 Stat 1802 (Dec. 10, 2015).

<sup>91</sup> 20 U.S.C. s. 6301.

<sup>92</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Finance Data Base: Fiscal Year 2024-2025*, at 8 available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7507/urlt/StateTotalBUD2425.pdf>, (last visited Feb. 6, 2025).

<sup>93</sup> 20 U.S.C. s. 6311, et seq. Local educational agencies are public boards of education and include district school boards. 34 C.F.R. s. 303.23. *See also* s. 1011.69(2), F.S., specifying that an eligible school includes a charter school that is eligible to receive Title I funds.

<sup>94</sup> 20 U.S.C. s. 6313(a)(3).

<sup>95</sup> 34 C.F.R. s. 200.78(b).

<sup>96</sup> Section 1011.69(4), F.S.

In accordance with federal law and the district’s approved Title I plan, districts may use Title I funds to provide a wide range of supplemental academic services and supports in eligible schools, including evidence-based interventions and enrichment in core subjects such as reading, mathematics, and science, as well as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) activities that are designed to improve student achievement.<sup>97</sup>

### School Improvement and Turnaround

Florida’s system of improving low-performing schools is referred to as “school improvement” (SI). Under SI, the lowest-performing schools receive more comprehensive, state-provided intervention and support than schools that are closer to meeting student achievement goals.<sup>98</sup> Intervention and support is required for traditional public schools earning a letter grade of “D,” or “F.”<sup>99</sup> Upon receipt of its first grade of “D,” a school is considered a Tier I SI school in need of support and intervention from the school district and the DOE.<sup>100</sup> Intensive intervention and support strategies must be applied through turnaround plans to schools earning two consecutive grades of “D” or a grade of “F.”<sup>101</sup>

The DOE requires that a school that has been identified as an SI school must meet the following educator staff requirements:

- Provide a literacy coach who has a record of effectiveness as an English Language Arts teacher or coach with a value-added model (VAM) rating of Highly Effective or Effective.
- Provide a mathematics coach who has a record of effectiveness as a mathematics teacher or coach with a VAM rating of Highly Effective or Effective.
- Staff the SI school so that the percentage of instructional personnel with a VAM rating that is below effective is less than the district average if the district has more than five total schools and less than the state average, if the district has five or fewer schools.<sup>102</sup>

Through section 1003 of Title I, the United States Department of Education administers three grants specifically targeted to improving student performance at schools in need of improvement:

- Unified School Improvement Grant (UniSIG) grant – In the 2023-24 school year, Florida’s state allocation was \$72,623,399. The UniSIG grant is allocated to school districts to serve traditional and charter Title I public schools implementing comprehensive support and improvement activities to support the schools SI plan and provide resources to raise student achievement in the lowest-performing schools.
- UniSIG Supplemental Teacher and Administrator Allocation (STAA) - In the 2023-24 school year, Florida’s state allocation was \$30,000,000. The UniSIG STAA grant allocates funding for districts to recruit teachers, to schools in need of improvement, who have a rating of highly effective or effective according to VAM. Educators who teach grades K-3,

<sup>97</sup> See, e.g., 20 U.S.C. ss. 6314(b), 6315(b).

<sup>98</sup> Section 1008.33, F.S.; see rule 6A-1.099811, F.A.C. School Improvement requirements were originally established under the 2002 reauthorization of ESEA, otherwise known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (Jan. 8, 2002).

<sup>99</sup> Section 1008.33(3), F.S.

<sup>100</sup> Rule 6A-1.099811(3)(a), F.A.C.

<sup>101</sup> Section 1008.33(4), F.S.

<sup>102</sup> Rule 6A-1.099811, F.A.C. VAM is a statistical model used for the purpose of determining an individual teacher’s contribution to student learning growth, only educators teaching ELA and Math in Grades 4-10, Algebra 1 and Geometry receive a VAM score.

exceptional student education (ESE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) certified teachers, and science teachers are often not eligible for the STAA award because they do not earn a VAM score.

- UniSIG Closing Achievement Gaps Between Subgroups and All Students (CAGSS) In the 2023-24 school year, Florida's allocation was \$98,193,480. The UniSIG CAGSS support Local Educational Agencies that are serving low-performing subgroups of students in schools implementing targeted and comprehensive support and improvement activities.<sup>103</sup>

### ***Effect of Proposed Changes***

#### **Equity in School-Level Funding**

The bill modifies s. 1011.69, F.S., to specify that the education services for which a school district may withhold a portion of Title I funds prior to allocation include the provision of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) curricula, instructional materials, and related learning technologies that support academic achievement in Title I schools. Such technologies may include drones, coding, animation, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, data science, the engineering design process, mobile development, and robotics. Such withholding must comply with allocation levels required in federal law.

#### **School Improvement and Turnaround**

The bill modifies s. 1008.33, F.S., to require the DOE to adopt, in rule, a timeline for approving a district's turnaround plan and a timeline for the release of the UniSIG funding, which should not exceed 20 calendar days after the school improvement plan has been approved by the DOE. The bill also prohibits the use of VAM<sup>104</sup> as the sole determinant in recruiting instructional personnel to provide school districts with greater flexibility in staffing schools identified as in need of improvement.

### **Epinephrine Use and Supply in Schools**

#### ***Present Situation***

A student who has experienced or is at risk for life-threatening allergic reactions may carry an epinephrine auto-injector and self-administer epinephrine by auto-injector while in school, participating in school-sponsored activities, or in transit to or from school or school-sponsored activities, when parental and physician authorization has been provided to the school.

Public and private schools may obtain a supply of epinephrine auto-injectors through purchase from a wholesale distributor or through an arrangement with a wholesale distributor or manufacturer, and the supply must be maintained in a secure location on the school's premises.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Email, Florida Department of Education, Division of Public Schools, (Sept. 19, 2023) (on file with Senate Committee on Education Pre-K-12).

<sup>104</sup> VAM is a statistical model used for the purpose of determining an individual teacher's contribution to student learning growth, only educators teaching ELA and Math in Grades 4-10, Algebra 1 and Geometry receive a VAM score.

<sup>105</sup> Sections 1002.20(3)(i) and 1002.42(17)(a), F.S.

A school district, county health department, and public-private partner, and their employees and volunteers, are indemnified by the parent of an authorized student for liability relating to the student's use of an epinephrine auto-injector.<sup>106</sup>

A physician-developed protocol governs administration by school personnel trained to recognize an anaphylactic reaction and administer an epinephrine auto-injection. The school supply may be provided to and used by a student authorized to self-administer epinephrine by auto-injector or by trained school personnel.<sup>107</sup>

Liability protections apply to the school district or private school and its employees and agents and the physician who provides the standing protocol for school epinephrine auto-injectors. Those protections apply to injuries arising from use of an epinephrine auto-injector administered by trained school personnel who:

- Follow the adopted protocol; and
- Have a professional opinion that the student is having an anaphylactic reaction.<sup>108</sup>

A written authorization from a physician and the student's parent or guardian is required for a student to carry an epinephrine auto-injector and self-administer epinephrine by auto-injector. An individualized health plan is developed for a student with life-threatening allergies and includes an emergency action plan, with annual development coordinated by the school nurse in collaboration with:

- The student;
- The parent or guardian;
- the health care provider; and
- School personnel.<sup>109</sup>

For schools serving students in kindergarten through grade 8, training is provided to an adequate number of school personnel and contracted personnel on prevention and response to allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis. Training content includes:

- Recognition of anaphylaxis signs and symptoms; and
- Administration of a United States Food and Drug Administration-approved epinephrine delivery device with appropriate weight-based dosing.<sup>110</sup>

### ***Effect of Proposed Changes***

#### **Epinephrine Use and Supply**

The bill amends ss. 1002.20(3)(i) and 1002.42(17), F.S., to update terminology and broaden statutory references for student carry, self-administration, and school supply of epinephrine to encompass U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved epinephrine delivery devices in public and private schools, rather than limiting those provisions to epinephrine auto-injectors.

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<sup>106</sup> Section 1002.20(3)(i), F.S.

<sup>107</sup> Sections 1002.20(3)(i) and 1002.42(17)(a), F.S.

<sup>108</sup> Sections 1002.20(3)(i) and 1002.42(17)(b), F.S.

<sup>109</sup> Rule 6A-6.0251(2), F.A.C.

<sup>110</sup> Rule 6A-6.0251(4), F.A.C.

## Voluntary Prekindergarten Program

### *Present Situation*

#### Accountability Timeline and Student Supports

Since the inception of the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program, public schools have been instrumental in delivering the program. Public schools deliver both the 540 hour school year VPK program<sup>111</sup> and the 300 hour summer VPK program.<sup>112</sup> Historically, public schools comprise just over 20 percent of the overall VPK programs during the entire program year.<sup>113</sup>

Public schools are required to contract through the early learning coalitions (ELCs) and are subject to the same requirements as non-public programs in terms of implementing instructional standards, personnel requirements, and program accountability. While both public schools and private providers offer the school year prekindergarten program, public school districts are required to offer the summer VPK program, consisting of 300 hours of instruction, to any parent who enrolls his or her child in the program. School districts may meet this requirement by contracting with private prekindergarten providers.<sup>114</sup>

Beginning with the 2022-2023 program year, each private prekindergarten provider and public school participating in the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program must participate in the statewide coordinated screening and progress monitoring program. The coordinated screening and progress monitoring results are used by the DOE to identify student learning gains, index development learning outcomes upon program completion relative to specified performance standards and representative norms, and inform a private prekindergarten provider's and public school's performance metric.<sup>115</sup>

For the 2020-2021 program year, the DOE calculated a kindergarten readiness rate for each private prekindergarten provider and public school participating in the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program based upon learning gains and the percentage of students assessed as ready for kindergarten. For the 2021-2022 school year, each school district administered the statewide kindergarten screening then in use to each kindergarten student within the first 30 school days, and private schools were authorized to administer the statewide kindergarten screening to each kindergarten student in a private school who was enrolled in the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program. Learning gains for the 2020-2021 program year were determined using a value-added measure based on growth demonstrated by specified preassessment and postassessment results. A provider could not be newly placed on probationary status, and a provider that was currently on probationary status could only be removed from such status if the provider earned the minimum rate determined by the DOE. The methodology for calculating a provider's readiness rate could not include students who were not administered the statewide kindergarten screening.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Section 1002.63(1), F.S.

<sup>112</sup> Section 1002.61(1), F.S.

<sup>113</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Division of Early Learning Annual Report 2023-2024*, available at: <https://www.fldoe.org/file/20628/2324-DEL-AnnualReport.pdf> (last visited Dec. 3, 2025).

<sup>114</sup> Section 1002.53(6), F.S.

<sup>115</sup> Section 1002.68(1)(a), F.S.

<sup>116</sup> Section 1002.68(3)(a), F.S.

For the 2021-2022 program year, kindergarten screening results were prohibited from use in the calculation of readiness rates, and a private prekindergarten provider or public school that fails to meet the minimum kindergarten readiness rate for that program year is subject to probation requirements.<sup>117</sup>

Supports for students in the VPK program are provided through a summer bridge program to address early literacy deficiencies demonstrated on the final administration of the coordinated screening and progress monitoring system. Students who score below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile are required to be referred to the local school district and may be eligible to receive early literacy skill instructional support through the summer bridge program that consists of four hours of daily instruction for a total of at least one hundred hours of instruction.<sup>118</sup>

A private prekindergarten provider and a public school participating in the VPK program may select or design the curriculum used to implement the program.<sup>119</sup> A provider or public school that fails to meet the minimum change in ability is subject to additional curriculum limitations.<sup>120</sup>

A private prekindergarten provider's and public school's curriculum must be developmentally appropriate and must:<sup>121</sup>

- Prepare a student for early literacy and provide instruction in early math skills.
- Develop students' background knowledge through a content-rich and sequential knowledge-building early literacy curriculum.
- Enhance age-appropriate progress in attaining the performance standards adopted by the DOE.
- Support student learning gains through differentiated instruction measured by the coordinated screening and progress monitoring program.

The DOE must adopt procedures for the review and approval of curricula used by private prekindergarten providers and public schools that fail to meet the minimum change-in-ability scores.<sup>122</sup> DOE must administer the review and approval process and maintain a list of the curricula approved through that process. Each approved curriculum must meet the developmentally appropriate curriculum requirements described above.<sup>123</sup>

### Gold Seal Quality Care Program

The Gold Seal Quality Care (Gold Seal) program was established in 1996 to acknowledge child care facilities and family day care homes that have gone above the required minimum licensing standards to become accredited by recognized agencies whose standards reflect quality in the level of care and supervision provided to children. The designation offered certain tax

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<sup>117</sup> Section 1002.68(3)(b), F.S.

<sup>118</sup> Section 1008.25(5)(b), F.S.

<sup>119</sup> Section 1002.67(2)(a), F.S.

<sup>120</sup> Section 1002.67(2)(a), F.S.

<sup>121</sup> Section 1002.67(2), F.S.

<sup>122</sup> Section 1002.67(2)(c), F.S.

<sup>123</sup> Section 1002.67(2)(c), F.S.

exemptions, higher reimbursement rates for School Readiness providers, and eligibility to participate in the state VPK program.<sup>124</sup>

A child care facility, large family child care home, or family day care home must meet additional criteria to obtain and maintain designation as a Gold Seal Quality Care provider.

A child care provider must not have had any class I violations, as defined by rule of the Department of Children and Families, within the 2 years preceding its application for Gold Seal designation. A class I violation is grounds for termination of the Gold Seal designation until the provider has no class I violations for a period of 2 years.

Notwithstanding the class I violation lookback and termination standard for Gold Seal designation, the DOE may recommend to the SBE that a provider maintain its Gold Seal Quality Care status if, through a formal process, the DOE determines the provider has been in business for at least 5 years and has no other class I violations recorded. The SBE's determination regarding the provider's status is final.<sup>125</sup>

### *Effect of Proposed Changes*

#### Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program Accountability and Student Supports

The bill removes the requirement in s. 1002.71, F.S., that each district school board's attendance policy must require parents to sign monthly attendance forms and retain those forms for two years. The school district will be required to certify attendance on the single point of entry system that is used for payment of VPK program attendance. The revision offers flexibility to school districts to utilize existing attendance tracking methods without duplication due to required forms.

The bill amends s. 1002.68, F.S., to revise VPK provider eligibility consequences and early literacy supports tied to coordinated screening and progress monitoring.

Specifically, the bill:

- Limits the VPK participation prohibition for a public school or private prekindergarten provider that fails to meet the minimum program assessment composite score for contracting to the consecutive program year, rather than applying until the provider later meets the minimum score.
- Deletes expired provisions relating to the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 program years that addressed the calculation and use of kindergarten readiness rates and screening results.

The bill amends s. 1008.25, F.S., to expand eligibility for early literacy instructional support through the VPK summer bridge program by increasing the final screening percentile threshold from below the 10th percentile to below the 25th percentile.

The bill amends s. 1002.67, F.S., to revise VPK curriculum selection and approval requirements, by:

<sup>124</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Gold Seal Quality Care Program*, <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/early-learning/providers/gold-seal.stml> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

<sup>125</sup> Section 1002.945(4), F.S.

- Requiring the curriculum selection limitation and DOE curriculum review and approval procedures to apply when a private prekindergarten provider or public school fails to meet the minimum performance metric score or designation rather than the minimum change-in-ability standard.
- Revising DOE’s curriculum review and approval process by:
  - Requiring DOE to maintain a list of approved curricula available for purchase.
  - Requiring the review and approval process to include both curricula available for purchase and proprietary curricula not available for purchase.
- Authorizing DOE to review and approve, outside the regular review and approval process, a proprietary or commercially available curriculum used by a private provider or a public school district operating VPK in more than five distinct locations, and requiring DOE to:
  - Approve or deny the submitted curriculum and associated materials within 60 days after receipt of the request.
  - Decline a request submitted within 120 days before the opening of the regular review process.
  - Include on the approved list any curriculum approved under the outside-process pathway that is available for purchase.

#### Gold Seal Quality Care Eligibility and Termination Criteria

The bill amends s. 1002.945(4), F.S., to narrow which class I violations affect a provider’s Gold Seal Quality Care designation and to delete an existing discretionary exception process.

Specifically, the bill:

- For applications to be designated Gold Seal status limits the two-year lookback disqualification so that a child care provider is ineligible for a Gold Seal designation only if it has had a class I violation for which the Department of Children and Families determines the provider is the primary cause of the violation within the 2 years preceding the application.
- Limits termination authority so that commission of a class I violation is grounds for termination of the Gold Seal designation only when the Department of Children and Families determines the provider is the primary cause of the violation.
- Removes the authority of the DOE to recommend that the SBE allow a provider to maintain Gold Seal status if the DOE determines through a formal process that the provider has been in business for at least 5 years and has no other class I violations recorded.
- Retains the current reinstatement standard by providing that a terminated provider may regain eligibility after having no such disqualifying class I violations for a period of 2 years.

### **Agricultural Education**

#### *Present Situation*

##### Required Instruction

The mission of Florida’s Early Learning-20 education system is to allow its students to increase their proficiency by allowing them the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills through rigorous and relevant learning opportunities.<sup>126</sup> Each district school board must provide appropriate instruction to ensure that students meet SBE adopted standards in the following

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<sup>126</sup> Section 1000.03(4), F.S.

subject areas: reading and other language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign languages, health and physical education, and the arts.<sup>127</sup>

Instructional staff of public schools, subject to the rules of the SBE and the district school board, must provide instruction in:

- The history and content of the Declaration of Independence.
- The history, meaning, significance, and effect of the provisions of the Constitution of the United States.
- The arguments in support of adopting our republican form of government.
- Flag education, including proper flag display and flag salute.
- The elements of civil government.
- The history of the United States.
- The history of the Holocaust.
- The history of African Americans.
- The elementary principles of agriculture.
- The effects of alcoholic and intoxicating liquors and beverages and narcotics.
- Kindness to animals.
- The history of the state.
- The conservation of natural resources.
- Comprehensive age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate K-12 instruction on health education and life skills.
- The study of Hispanic contributions to the United States.
- The study of women's contributions to the United States.
- The nature and importance of free enterprise to the United States economy.
- Civic and character education.
- The sacrifices that veterans and Medal of Honor recipients have made serving the country.<sup>128</sup>

#### Agricultural Education in Florida

To help support students interested in the agricultural industry in Florida, the DOE created nine middle school courses focused on careers in the agricultural field, ranging from the “Exploration of Agriscience” to the “Introduction to Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.” At the secondary level, the DOE created 18 courses and programs ranging from “Agricultural Biotechnology” to “Food Science Applications.”<sup>129</sup> In 2022-2023 school year, there were 640 Secondary CTE Programs in Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. Florida standards and benchmarks related to agriculture are limited to ancient and modern society, and do not address agriculture in Florida. The following are current benchmarks related to the impact agriculture has had on society:

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<sup>127</sup> Section 1003.42(1), F.S.

<sup>128</sup> Section 1003.42(2), F.S.

<sup>129</sup> Florida Department of Education, *2025-26 CTE Curriculum Frameworks: Agriculture Food & Natural Resources*, <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/career-adult-edu/career-tech-edu/curriculum-frameworks/2025-26-frameworks/>, (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

- Compare the lifestyles of hunter-gatherers with those of settlers of early agricultural communities.<sup>130</sup>
- Explain how the physical landscape has affected the development of agriculture and industry in the ancient world.<sup>131</sup>
- Describe how the developments of agriculture and metallurgy related to settlement, population growth, and the emergence of civilization.<sup>132</sup>
- Describe the agricultural and technological innovations that led to industrialization in Great Britain and its subsequent spread to continental Europe, the United States and Japan.<sup>133</sup>

### ***Effects of Proposed Changes***

#### **Required instruction: Elementary Principles of Agriculture**

The bill amends s. 1003.42(2)(j), F.S., to expand and specify the required instruction in the elementary principles of agriculture and to direct the DOE to develop supporting standards and curriculum resources. Specifically, the bill:

- Requires that the agriculture component include, at a minimum:
  - The history of agriculture nationally and in Florida;
  - The economic and societal impact of agriculture; and
  - The various agricultural industry sectors.
- Requires the DOE, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS), to prepare and offer standards and a curriculum for the agriculture instruction required by the bill.
- Authorizes the DOE to seek input from state or nationally recognized agricultural educational organizations in developing the standards and curriculum.
- Authorizes the DOE to contract with state or nationally recognized agricultural educational organizations to develop training for instructional personnel and grade-appropriate classroom resources to support the developed curriculum.

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<sup>130</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Florida's State Academic Standards Social Studies 2024* (2024) at 56, available at [https://cpalmsmediaproduct.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/docs/standards/best/ss/ss\\_standardsbook\\_bc\\_240417\\_finalada.pdf](https://cpalmsmediaproduct.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/docs/standards/best/ss/ss_standardsbook_bc_240417_finalada.pdf), (last visited Feb. 6, 2026). This standard is included in Grade 6 World History.

<sup>131</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Florida's State Academic Standards Social Studies 2024* (2024) at 64, available at [https://cpalmsmediaproduct.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/docs/standards/best/ss/ss\\_standardsbook\\_bc\\_240417\\_finalada.pdf](https://cpalmsmediaproduct.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/docs/standards/best/ss/ss_standardsbook_bc_240417_finalada.pdf), (last visited Feb. 6, 2026). This standard is included in Grade 6 Geography.

<sup>132</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Florida's State Academic Standards Social Studies 2024* (2024) at 56, available at [https://cpalmsmediaproduct.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/docs/standards/best/ss/ss\\_standardsbook\\_bc\\_240417\\_finalada.pdf](https://cpalmsmediaproduct.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/docs/standards/best/ss/ss_standardsbook_bc_240417_finalada.pdf), (last visited Feb. 6, 2026). This standard is included in Grade 6 World History.

<sup>133</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Florida's State Academic Standards Social Studies 2024* (2024) at 132, available at [https://cpalmsmediaproduct.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/docs/standards/best/ss/ss\\_standardsbook\\_bc\\_240417\\_finalada.pdf](https://cpalmsmediaproduct.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/docs/standards/best/ss/ss_standardsbook_bc_240417_finalada.pdf), (last visited Feb. 6, 2026). This standard is included in Grades 9-12 World History.

## Florida Graduation Requirements

### *Present Situation*

Florida's graduation requirements for receiving a standard high school diploma are outlined in statute.<sup>134</sup> Florida students entering grade nine may choose from one of five options to earn a standard diploma. The five options are:<sup>135</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>136</sup>

- Four credits in English Language Arts (ELA).
- Four credits in mathematics.
- 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>137</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. Participation in two years of marching band may satisfy one credit of physical education or one credit in fine or performing arts. 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>138</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>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Sections 1003.4282, and 1002.3105, F.S.

<sup>135</sup> Florida Department of Education, Student Support Services, *Graduation Requirements*, <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/k-12-public-schools/sss/graduation-requirements/> (last visited Jan. 10, 2026).

<sup>136</sup> Section 1003.4282(3), F.S.

<sup>137</sup> Section 1003.4282(3)(f), F.S.

<sup>138</sup> *Id.*

<sup>139</sup> *Id.*

### ***Effect of Proposed Changes***

The bill amends s. 1003.4282, F.S., to allow the completion of two years of marching band to satisfy the one-credit requirement in physical education and the one-credit requirement in fine or performing arts to earn a standard high school diploma, rather than just one credit in either physical education or fine or performing arts.

The bill allows completion of 1.0 credit with a grade of “C” or better in a dance techniques course, a significant component of which is activities designed to maintain or improve health-related fitness and lifelong fitness, to satisfy the one-credit requirement in physical education or the one-credit requirement in performing arts.

### **Graduation Alternative to Traditional Education Program**

#### ***Present Situation***

Created within the DOE, the Graduation Alternative to Traditional Education (GATE) Program offers a unique opportunity for students who have left high school to get back on track. Designed for students aged 16 to 21, GATE provides a pathway to earn valuable career education credentials while also completing a standard high school diploma or its equivalent.

Through the GATE program, students can enroll in a CTE program and an Adult Secondary Education (ASE) program simultaneously. Eligible ASE programs include Adult High School or GED® Preparation. Participants will work towards earning both a high school diploma and a credential from a Career Education Program on the Master Credential list in their chosen career field. Students have up to three years to complete the GATE Program.<sup>140</sup>

To be eligible for participation in the GATE Program, a student must:

- Not have earned a standard high school diploma or a high school equivalency diploma before enrolling in the GATE Program.
- Have been withdrawn from high school.
- Be a resident of the state for tuition purposes.
- Be 16 to 21 years of age at the time of initial enrollment, and if 16 or 17 years of age, have withdrawn from school enrollment pursuant to certain requirements and safeguards.<sup>141</sup>
- Select the adult secondary education program and career education program of his or her choice at the time of admission to the GATE Program, provided that the career education program is included on the Master Credentials List. The student must remain in their chosen pathway after enrollment, except that, if necessary, the student may enroll in an adult basic education program prior to enrolling in the adult secondary education program.
- Maintain a 2.0 grade point average (GPA) for CTE coursework.
- Complete the adult secondary education program and the career education program within three years unless the institution determines that an extension is warranted due to extenuating circumstances.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Section 1004.933, F.S. and Florida Department of Education, Adult Education, *Graduation Alternative to Traditional Education (GATE) Program*, <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/career-adult-edu/adult-edu/gate.stml> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

<sup>141</sup> Section 1003.21(1), F.S.

<sup>142</sup> Section 1004.933(4), F.S.

### GATE Startup Grant Program

DOE administers the GATE Startup Grant Program and determines eligibility and distributes grant awards, subject to legislative appropriation. The grant program is intended to support startup and implementation of the GATE Program.

An eligible institution for the GATE Startup Grant Program includes a school district career center, a charter technical career center, or a Florida College System institution that offers the GATE Program. DOE may solicit proposals only from institutions that do not offer programs meeting the requirements of the GATE Program.<sup>143</sup>

An institution solicited under the grant program must be located in or serve a rural area of opportunity designated by the Governor.<sup>144</sup> The Governor may designate a rural community, or a region composed of rural communities, as a rural area of opportunity under the statutory definition in Section 288.0656(2)(d), Florida Statutes.<sup>145</sup>

DOE must prioritize grant proposals that co-locate adult basic education, adult secondary education, and career education programs, or that allow program completion through distance learning. An applicant may not receive more than 10 percent of the total amount appropriated for the grant program.

DOE must make the grant application available to potential applicants no later than August 15, 2024. A grant proposal must include specified program, enrollment, credential, cost, outreach, and implementation information. A credential associated with the proposed career education program must be included on the Master Credentials List.<sup>146</sup>

Grant funds may be used for planning activities and other expenses associated with creation of the GATE Program, including certain instructional, personnel, and student services costs. Grant funds may not be used for indirect costs.<sup>147</sup>

### *Effects of Proposed Changes*

#### Graduation Alternative to Traditional Education (GATE) Program

The bill amends s. 1004.933, F.S., to expand program delivery options for participating institutions and to revise eligibility and program participation requirements for students in the GATE Program. Specifically, the bill:

- Authorizes an eligible institution to enter into an agreement with an online provider for the adult education or career instruction portion of the program if the provider's content and services align with the state career and adult education curriculum frameworks.
- Revises the age eligibility requirement by providing that a student must be at least 16 years of age at the time of initial enrollment, rather than limiting eligibility to students ages 16 through 21, while retaining the requirement that a 16- or 17-year-old must have withdrawn from school enrollment pursuant to specified withdrawal safeguards.

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<sup>143</sup> Section 1011.804, F.S.

<sup>144</sup> Section 1011.804(3), F.S.

<sup>145</sup> Section 288.0656(2)(d), F.S.

<sup>146</sup> Sections 445.004(4) and 1011.804(5)(d), F.S.

<sup>147</sup> Section 1011.804(6), F.S.

- Clarifies program participation by providing that a student is not required to enroll in adult secondary education and career education program coursework simultaneously.

### GATE Startup Grant Program

The bill amends s. 1011.804, F.S., to revise eligibility, application administration, and allowable costs under the GATE Startup Grant Program by:

- Replacing the existing rural eligibility reference with a cross-reference to the statutory definition of “rural area of opportunity” in s. 288.0656(2)(d), F.S.
- Clarifying that an institution “serves” a rural area of opportunity when its service area includes one or more counties or municipalities included within a rural area of opportunity, and specifying that an institution’s principal place of business, main campus, or administrative offices need not be located in a rural area of opportunity to satisfy the service requirement.
- Authorizing DOE to award grants to:
  - An institution that does not offer programs meeting the requirements of the GATE Program to support startup and implementation activities.
  - An institution that offers programs meeting the requirements of the GATE Program, limited to costs authorized for the program and excluding new construction, structural expansion, and major renovation.
- Revising the application availability deadline from a single date to an annual requirement applicable to each year in which funds are appropriated for the program.
- Requiring a grant proposal to include documentation identifying the counties or municipalities in the institution’s service area that fall within a rural area of opportunity.
- Expanding allowable direct costs by authorizing grant funds for GATE Program implementation expenses and specified startup-related costs, including minor facility modifications necessary to install or operate instructional equipment and marketing and outreach activities to recruit and enroll eligible students.

## **Eligibility for Educator Certification**

### ***Present Situation***

#### Teacher Preparation Programs

Teacher preparation programs are accountable for producing individuals with the competencies and skills necessary to achieve the state education goals. State-approved teacher preparation programs are offered by Florida public and private postsecondary institutions, public school districts, and private providers, through 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.<sup>148</sup>

There are various state-approved teacher preparation programs that individuals may use to receive the training needed to attain an educator certificate, including:

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<sup>148</sup> Section 1004.04, F.S. See Florida Department of Education, *Educator Preparation*, <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/preparation> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026). See also Rule 6A-5.066, F.A.C.

- Initial Teacher Preparation programs in public and private colleges and universities that require candidates to demonstrate mastery of subject area knowledge<sup>149</sup> in one or more specific subject areas, mastery of general knowledge,<sup>150</sup> and mastery of professional preparation and education competence. Program completers qualify for a professional educator certificate.
- Educator Preparation Institutes (EPIs) that offer alternative certification programs 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, subject-area knowledge, and professional preparation and education competence.
- District professional learning certification and education competency programs. Such programs are cohesive competency-based professional preparation certification programs offered by school districts, charter schools, and charter management districts, through which instructional staff can satisfy the mastery of professional preparation and education competence requirements. In addition to completing the district program, candidates must demonstrate mastery of general knowledge and subject area knowledge.<sup>151</sup>

#### Educator Preparation Institute Participant Criteria

Each EPI participant must:

- Meet certification application requirements, including obtaining a statement of eligibility, established in law, and meet all basic eligibility requirements for an educator certificate before participating in field experiences. Generally, a student must receive a statement of eligibility for a certificate prior to enrollment in an EPI.
- Demonstrate competency and participate in field experiences that are appropriate to the participant's educational plan, including completion of all competencies for a reading endorsement when seeking certification in a certificate area that includes reading instruction or interventions in kindergarten through grade six.
- 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.
- Achieve a passing score on the professional education competency examination,<sup>152</sup> the General Knowledge Test, and the subject area examination for the subject area certification, as required by the SBE rule.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Subject Area Knowledge*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/general-cert-requirements/subject-area-knowledge.shtml> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

<sup>150</sup> Florida Department of Education, *General Knowledge*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/general-cert-requirements/general-knowledge.shtml> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

<sup>151</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Educator Preparation*, <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/preparation> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026). *See also* Rule 6A-5.066, F.A.C.

<sup>152</sup> Section 1012.56(7)(a)3., F.S. An individual who completes an educator preparation institute and is rated highly effective by his or her performance evaluation is not required to take or achieve a passing score on the professional education competency examination in order to be awarded a professional certificate.

<sup>153</sup> Section 1004.85(3)(b), F.S.

Educator Certification

To serve as an educator in a traditional public school, charter school, virtual school, or other publicly operated school, a person must hold a certificate issued by the DOE.<sup>154</sup> 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.”<sup>155</sup>

To be eligible for an educator certificate, a person must meet the following basic eligibility requirements:

- 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 learning or from a non-accredited institution identified by the DOE as having a quality program resulting in a bachelor’s or higher degree and have attained at least a 2.5 overall grade point average in the applicant’s major field of study;<sup>156</sup>
- 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.<sup>157</sup>

***Effect of proposed Changes***Postsecondary Educator Preparation Institutes: Eligibility

The bill amends s. 1004.85(3)(b), F.S., to revise the requirements for participants in competency-based certification programs offered by educator preparation institutes by clarifying what a statement of status of eligibility must reflect and by allowing earlier enrollment and coursework completion while a participant seeks that statement. Specifically, the bill:

- Revises the requirement related to obtaining a statement of status of eligibility by specifying that the statement must determine that the participant is eligible for a certificate in the certification subject area of the participant’s educational plan.
- Authorizes an educator preparation institute to allow a program participant to enroll in and complete coursework while the participant is working to obtain the required statement of status of eligibility indicating eligibility for a certificate in the certification subject area of the educational plan.

**Instructional Personnel*****Present Situation***Salary Schedules and Collective Bargaining

District school boards are required to designate positions to be filled, prescribe qualifications for those positions, and provide for the appointment, compensation, promotion, suspension, and

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<sup>154</sup> Sections 1012.55(1) and 1002.33(12), F.S.

<sup>155</sup> Section 1012.54, F.S. See Rule 6A-4.001(1), F.A.C

<sup>156</sup> Rule 6A-4.003(2), F.A.C.

<sup>157</sup> Section 1012.56(2), F.S.

dismissal of employees. Additionally, school districts are required to develop a compensation and salary schedule that includes:

- A grandfathered salary schedule for employees hired before July 1, 2014, which must base a portion of compensation on performance under the district's evaluation system and provide differentiated pay for instructional personnel and school administrators based on district-determined factors such as additional responsibilities, school demographics, high-need areas, and job difficulty.
- A performance salary schedule for employees hired on or after July 1, 2014, or employees who opt out of the grandfathered schedule, which must provide annual salary adjustments for instructional personnel and school administrators based on their performance evaluations.<sup>158</sup>

In addition to establishing grandfathered and performance salary schedules, district school boards must provide salary adjustments and supplements consistent with law. A salary adjustment is an increase to an employee's base salary that becomes part of permanent compensation, while a supplement is an annual addition to base salary that does not become part of the continuing base salary but is treated as compensation for retirement purposes.<sup>159</sup>

School districts are prohibited from using advanced degrees in setting a salary schedule for instructional personnel or school administrators hired on or after July 1, 2011, unless the advanced degree is held in the individual's area of certification and is only a salary supplement.<sup>160</sup>

School districts engage in collective bargaining with employee unions, but certain responsibilities cannot be negotiated away. Collective bargaining agreements cannot prevent a school district from exercising its authority regarding:

- Providing incentives to effective and highly effective teachers.
- Implementing intervention and support strategies to address low student performance and improve academic outcomes and attendance.
- Implementing student discipline policies, including reviewing a student's abilities, past performance, behavior, and needs.
- Implementing school safety plans and requirements.
- Implementing staff and student recognition programs.
- Distributing correspondence to parents, teachers, and the community related to daily school and district operations.
- Providing any required notices or copies of information related to district school board or district operations, which is readily available on the school district's website.
- The school district's calendar.<sup>161</sup>

#### Classroom Teacher and Other Instructional Personnel Salary Increase Allocation

The Legislature annually provides an FEFP allocation to support school district and charter school compliance with the minimum base salary requirement for full-time classroom teachers

<sup>158</sup> Section 1012.22(1), F.S.

<sup>159</sup> Section 1012.22(1)(c)1.a. and g., F.S.

<sup>160</sup> Section 1012.22(1)(c), F.S.

<sup>161</sup> Section 1012.22(3), F.S.

and certified prekindergarten teachers funded through the FEFP, or to provide salary increases to instructional personnel.<sup>162</sup> The allocation does not apply to substitute teachers. The amount of the allocation and the distribution methodology are specified in the General Appropriations Act. School districts and charter schools implementing the allocation must:<sup>163</sup>

- Use the lowest annual base salary on the full-time classroom teacher salary schedule as the minimum base salary.
- Pay a full-time classroom teacher no less than the minimum base salary, as adjusted by the allocation.
- Maintain the minimum base salary achieved in the prior fiscal year.
- Not reduce the salary increases in any subsequent fiscal year.
- Develop a salary distribution plan before distributing any additional funds received over the prior fiscal year.
- Submit the proposed plan to the district school board or charter school governing body for approval.
- Submit the approved district plan and each approved charter school plan in the district to the Department of Education (DOE) by October 1 of each fiscal year.
- Report to DOE beginning August 1, 2024, and annually thereafter, the district's prior-year expenditures under the allocation in a DOE-specified format, including the minimum base salary increase and specified salary schedule information.
- Provide charter school information to the district school board for inclusion in the district report.
- Use the allocation solely to comply with the subsection requirements, notwithstanding wage bargaining.
- Provide written notice to DOE or the district school board, as applicable, if a collective bargaining impasse prevents timely reporting, including reasons and a proposed resolution timeline.

### Teacher Apprenticeship Program

In 2023, the legislature created the Teacher Apprenticeship Program (TAP).<sup>164</sup> The TAP was created as an alternative pathway for an individual to enter the teaching profession. The DOE is required to administer the program in accordance with legislative intent regarding apprenticeship training<sup>165</sup> provided for in law.

To meet the minimum eligibility requirements to participate in the TAP, a candidate must have:

- Earned an associate degree from an accredited postsecondary institution.
- Earned a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 in that degree program.
- Successfully passed a background screening pursuant to law.
- Received a temporary apprenticeship certificate.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Section 1011.64(14), F.S.

<sup>163</sup> Section 1011.62(14), F.S.

<sup>164</sup> Ch. 2023-38, s. 6, Laws of Fla.

<sup>165</sup> Section 446.011, F.S. provides that it is the intent of the State of Florida to provide educational opportunities for its residents so that they can be trained for trades, occupations, and professions suited to their abilities; to promote the mode of training known as apprenticeship in occupations throughout industry in the state that require physical manipulative skills.

<sup>166</sup> Section 1012.555(2), F.S.

As a condition of participating in the TAP, an apprentice teacher must be appointed by the district school board as an education paraprofessional and must commit to spending the first two years in the classroom of a mentor teacher using team teaching strategies as specified in law<sup>167</sup> and fulfilling the on-the-job training component of the registered apprenticeship and its associated standards.<sup>168</sup>

### ***Effect of Proposed Changes***

#### **Salary Schedules and Collective Bargaining**

The bill modifies s. 1012.22, F.S., to specify that collective bargaining may not preclude a district from:

- Providing salary supplements to address identified high demand teacher needs.
- Implementing the salary increase and salary distribution plan under the allocation for the salary increase for classroom teachers and other instructional personnel.

#### **Teacher Apprenticeship Program**

The bill modifies s. 1012.555, F.S., to expand eligibility for the TAP by authorizing individuals who are working in the district as a paraprofessional but not necessarily employed through the district, to enroll in the TAP. This would allow paraprofessionals who are contracted by the district through a staffing agency to qualify as a teacher candidate.

### **Computer Science Educator Certification**

#### ***Present Situation***

#### **Computer Science Instruction and Access**

Public schools provide opportunities for computer science instruction in grades K-12, including identified courses in middle and high school. The DOE identifies computer science courses in the Course Code Directory and publishes the list for districts. Florida Virtual School offers the identified courses, and districts that do not offer a listed course provide student access through an authorized mechanism.<sup>169</sup>

#### **Course Code Directory and Staffing**

The Course Code Directory and Instructional Personnel Assignments lists each course and the certificates or endorsements that may staff that course. The SBE adopts the directory by rule each year, and districts use the listed assignments to confirm that instructional personnel hold an appropriate coverage for scheduled courses.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> “Team teaching” or “co-teaching” means two or more teachers are assigned to a group of students and each teacher is responsible for all the students during the entire class period. Section 1003.03(5) (c), F.S.

<sup>168</sup> Section 1012.555(2), F.S.

<sup>169</sup> Section 1007.2616, F.S.

<sup>170</sup> Rule 6A-1.09441, F.A.C.

### Educator Certification Framework and Examinations

Educator certification includes demonstration of subject area knowledge aligned to state academic standards, with competencies and passing scores adopted by rule.<sup>171</sup> The Florida Teacher Certification Examinations (FTCE) are set in rule, including incorporation of competencies, scoring, and passing standards.<sup>172</sup>

### Assessment Characteristics and Outcomes for Computer Science K–12

The FTCE for Computer Science K–12 subject area certification is approximately 80 multiple-choice questions, and the applicant has up to 2 hours and 30 minutes of testing time.<sup>173</sup> The applicant must answer 71 percent correct to achieve a passing score.<sup>174</sup> Statewide 2024 pass rates for the FTCE Computer Science K–12 were 39 percent on first attempts, 38 percent on retake attempts, and 39 percent across all attempts.<sup>175</sup>

### Elementary Course Emphasis and Exam Domains

Elementary computer science course descriptions emphasize early computational thinking and age-appropriate skills, while several domains assessed on the FTCE reflect secondary-level content:

- K–5 course descriptions focus on digital citizenship, algorithmic problem solving, data recognition, and introductory or block-based programming integrated with core subjects.<sup>176</sup>
- FTCE competency materials include domains such as digital communications features, HTML and web concepts, privacy and security threats, computing history, and pedagogy.<sup>177</sup>
- Elementary course descriptions do not include HTML authoring or detailed networking and security content as K–5 outcomes, indicating limited overlap with those assessed domains at the elementary grade band.

### ***Effects of Proposed Changes***

#### Computer Science and Technology Instruction

The bill amends s. 1007.2616, F.S., to add requirements for computer science subject area coverages, competencies, and examinations, and to establish timelines for development and implementation. Specifically, the bill:

<sup>171</sup> Section 1012.56(4)–(5), F.S.

<sup>172</sup> Section 1012.56(10); Rule 6A-4.0021, F.A.C.

<sup>173</sup> Florida Teacher Certification Examinations, *Computer Science K–12 (005) Test Information Guide*, [https://www.fl.nesinc.com/FL\\_prepBlueprints.asp](https://www.fl.nesinc.com/FL_prepBlueprints.asp) (select “Computer Science K–12 (005)” or use the worksheet selector a (last visited Feb 6, 2026).

<sup>174</sup> Florida Department of Education, *FTCE/FELE Maximum Percentages of Correct Answers Needed to Achieve a Minimum Passing Score*, updated October 1, 2025, effective January 1, 2026, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/file/7664/FTCEFELEMaxPercentTable.pdf> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

<sup>175</sup> Florida Department of Education, *FTCE/FELE 2024 Annual Administration and Technical Report*, Appendix B, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/file/5164/AnnualTechReport.pdf> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

<sup>176</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Computer Science Course Information 2025–2026*, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/file/7746/2526CompSci.pdf> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

<sup>177</sup> Florida Teacher Certification Examinations, *Competencies and Skills for Computer Science K–12 (005)*, [https://www.fl.nesinc.com/FL\\_prepBlueprints.asp](https://www.fl.nesinc.com/FL_prepBlueprints.asp) (select “Computer Science K–12 (005)” or use the worksheet selector at [https://www.fl.nesinc.com/FL\\_prepWorksheet.asp](https://www.fl.nesinc.com/FL_prepWorksheet.asp) (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

- Requires the SBE, by rule, to establish or maintain the following computer science subject area coverages:
  - Computer science (grades K–5);
  - Computer science (grades 6–12); and
  - Computer science (grades K–12).
- Requires the SBE, by rule, to adopt competencies and skills and designate corresponding examinations for each of the specified coverages.
- Requires the comprehensive computer science (grades K–12) coverage and its examination to remain available unless amended by rule of the SBE.
- Requires the DOE to present recommended competencies and skills for the grades K–5 and grades 6–12 coverages to the SBE for approval by September 1, 2026.
- Requires the DOE, after SBE approval, to coordinate development, piloting, and standard-setting for the grades K–5 and grades 6–12 examinations, and requires that both examinations be available for administration by January 1, 2028.

## Safe School Officers

### *Present Situation*

Each district school board and superintendent must ensure that one or more safe-school officers are assigned to every public school facility in the district, including charter schools, and may use any combination of the statutory options to meet this requirement.<sup>178</sup> Safe-school officer options include:

- *School resource officer (SRO)*. A district may establish an SRO program by agreement with a law enforcement agency; SROs must be certified law enforcement officers, undergo criminal background checks, drug testing, and a psychological evaluation, abide by district policies, and coordinate with the principal while remaining employees of the law enforcement agency.<sup>179</sup>
- *School safety officer*. A district may commission one or more school safety officers who are certified law enforcement officers employed by a law enforcement agency or by the district; safety officers have arrest authority on school property and authority to carry weapons while on duty.<sup>180</sup>
- *School guardian*. A district or charter governing board may participate in the state guardian program; eligible employees who complete the statutory requirements and are certified by the sheriff may serve as school guardians.<sup>181</sup>
- *School security guard*. A district or charter governing board may contract with a licensed security agency to provide a school security guard who holds Class “D” and Class “G” licenses and meets statutory training, screening, approval, and ongoing qualification requirements.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Section 1006.12, F.S.

<sup>179</sup> Section 1006.12(1)(a)–(b), F.S.

<sup>180</sup> Section 1006.12(2), F.S.

<sup>181</sup> Section 1006.12(3), F.S.; s. 30.15(1)(k), F.S.

<sup>182</sup> Section 1006.12(4)(a)–(c), F.S.; Chapter 493, F.S.

***Effect of Proposed Changes***

The bill amends s. 1006.12, F.S., to clarify that the authority of a school district or charter school to implement any one of the four safe school officer options overrides any local ordinance or development order.

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:**

The bill has an indeterminate fiscal impact on the Department of Education (DOE), which may include:

- Contracting with state or nationally recognized agricultural education organizations to develop training and grade-appropriate classroom resources for required instruction in the elementary principles of agriculture, to the extent DOE contracts for those services.

- Coordinating development, piloting, and standard-setting for computer science subject area examinations for grade-band coverages, with exams available for administration by January 1, 2028.

The bill requires the Department of Education (DOE) to develop algebra courses. In order to implement the bill, the DOE estimated it would need \$698,693, which includes salary and benefits for five new positions and funding to support workgroup operations such as travel, lodging, meeting space and related operating expenses.

The bill also requires the DOE to collaborate with the Laster Center for Learning to recommend to the Legislature an individualized, adaptive artificial intelligence tool to support mathematics instruction in kindergarten through grade 12. The costs for developing such recommendations can be absorbed within existing resources.

The bill authorizes school districts to choose to offer one or more applied algebra courses in lieu of Algebra I. If any school district chooses to offer one of the courses developed by the DOE, then the DOE is required to provide professional development, instructional resources, and technical assistance to support district implementation.<sup>183</sup>

If every eligible child participated, the bill may increase Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK)-related expenditures by an estimated \$2.2 million due to expanding the summer bridge eligibility by changing the final coordinated screening and progress monitoring threshold from below the 10th percentile to below the 25th percentile.

Institutions participating in the Graduation Alternative to Traditional Education (GATE) Program may incur costs if they choose to enter agreements with online providers for the adult education or career instruction portion of the program. Removing the upper age limit for initial eligibility may increase participation, with an indeterminate fiscal impact.

#### **VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

#### **VII. Related Issues:**

None.

#### **VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 120.81, 1001.42, 1002.20, 1002.33, 1002.42, 1002.67, 1002.68, 1002.71, 1002.945, 1003.42, 1003.4282, 1003.5716, 1004.85, 1004.933, 1006.12, 1007.2616, 1008.25, 1008.2125, 1008.33, 1010.20, 1011.14, 1011.69, 1011.71, 1011.73, 1011.804, 1012.22, 1012.555, F.S.

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<sup>183</sup> Department of Education, *Senate Bill 920 Fiscal Analysis* (Dec. 19, 2025) (on file with the Senate Appropriations Committee on Pre-K-12 Education).

This bill creates section 1003.4936 of the Florida Statutes.

This bill creates an undesignated section of law.

## **IX. Additional Information:**

### **A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**

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

#### **CS/CS by Rules on February 24, 2026:**

The committee substitute:

- Exempts district school boards from ch. 120 rulemaking requirements when adopting rules with public input at a public meeting.
- Revises VPK attendance policy for district-operated programs.
  - Removes monthly parent verification and related form collection and retention requirements for districts and public schools.
  - Emphasizes automated, electronic submission of attendance information.
  - Authorizes use of a district automated daily attendance system to maintain and transmit attendance records to the early learning coalition in a mutually agreed format.
  - Requires the district to certify accuracy of attendance data submitted to the statewide single point of entry.
- Authorizes a dance techniques course with a significant health and lifelong fitness component to satisfy the 1.0 credit in physical education or performing arts for a standard high school diploma.
- Authorizes two years of marching band to satisfy both the physical education and performing arts credits required for high school graduation.
- Clarifies that, notwithstanding local ordinances or development orders, a school district or charter school may implement any combination of authorized safe-school officer options to meet district and charter school needs.
- Updates school improvement requirements.
  - Prohibits requiring student learning growth as the sole determinant when recruiting instructional personnel.
  - Requires SBE rule timelines for approval of specified improvement and turnaround plans and for release of Title I school improvement funds.
  - Requires release of Title I school improvement funds within 20 calendar days after plan approval.
- Requires each charter school to receive and respond to DOE monitoring questions.
- Expands allowable 1-year obligations to include educational plants, ancillary plants, and auxiliary facilities.
- Revises the 1.5 mill discretionary levy authority.
  - Authorizes proceeds for district schools to be used for operational or capital purposes.
  - Deletes the per-student additional spending authority and deletes the related FEFP reduction penalty.

- Adds to the list of items collective bargaining may not preclude a school board from carrying out by including providing salary supplements and implementing required teacher salary increases and the related salary distribution plan.
- Revises Teacher Apprenticeship Program eligibility so the paraprofessional condition may be satisfied by appointment or by working in the district as an education paraprofessional.
- Provides additional parental notice and access related to IEP services.
  - Requires the district to notify the parent or guardian within 10 school days if a related service in a student’s IEP is not provided as scheduled.
  - Requires the notice to explain why the service was not provided and address a make-up services plan.
  - Authorizes the parent or guardian, upon request, to access service provider logs or progress notes within 15 school days after the service is provided.
  - Requires the district to inform parents of this right at each IEP meeting.
- Expands where private schools may locate or expand by allowing use and, in limited cases, new construction on certain properties under existing zoning and land use designations, subject to applicable health and safety requirements.
- Treats small private schools as a permitted use in commercial or mixed-use zoning without rezoning or special approvals, and limits local conditions to proportionate traffic and pedestrian safety mitigation, with a traffic study option.
- Allows small private schools to use certain existing building occupancies if they meet state fire-code educational occupancy standards, provides an express injunctive relief remedy for local noncompliance, and authorizes State Fire Marshal rulemaking.
- Limits provider and public school curriculum discretion if the provider or school fails to meet the minimum performance metric score or designation. For a provider that fails to meet the minimum performance standard, the amendment:
  - Requires the DOE review and approval process to include both commercially available curricula and proprietary curricula not available for purchase
  - Authorizes DOE to review and approve, outside the regular process, a proprietary or commercially available curriculum used by a provider or district operating VPK in more than 5 distinct locations
  - Requires DOE to approve or deny a request within 60 days after receipt
  - Prohibits submitting an outside-process request within 120 days before the opening of the regular review process
  - Requires a curriculum approved outside the regular process that is available for purchase to be added to the DOE approved list.

**CS by Appropriations Committee on Pre-K – 12 Education:**

The committee substitute removes from the bill provisions that would:

- Remove school district authority to use of temporary door-locking devices on certain school doors.
- Authorize school districts to purchase certain instructional materials developed by or under the direction of the Department of Education.

The committee substitute adds to the bill a section revising the GATE Startup Grant Program to:

- Redesignate “rural area of opportunity” by cross-reference to the statutory definition in s. 288.0656(2)(d), F.S.
- Clarify that institutions that serve areas designated as a rural area of opportunity are eligible for the GATE Startup Grant Program.
- Authorize grant awards to eligible institutions that are establishing a new GATE Program or implementing an existing GATE Program.
- Authorize the Department of Education to accept grant applications annually for each year in which funds are appropriated.
- Expand allowable direct costs to include implementation costs and specified startup-related expenses, including:
  - Minor facility modifications and classroom supplies for program delivery.
  - Marketing and outreach related to participant recruitment and engagement.

The committee substitute includes a technical clarification that students with only a substantial deficiency in math are not subject to the provision of the bill requiring parents to be notified about eligibility for the New Worlds Reading Initiative.

**B. Amendments:**

None.