

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

This bill analysis was prepared by nonpartisan committee staff and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

BILL #: CS/HB 851 TITLE: Professional Learning for Instructional and School Administrative Personnel SPONSOR(S): Long	COMPANION BILL: CS/SB 206 (Harrell) LINKED BILLS: None RELATED BILLS: None
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FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 108 Y's 0 N's **GOVERNOR'S ACTION:** Approved

SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

The bill requires each school district to provide at least one annual autism-specific professional learning opportunity for instructional personnel and school-based administrators. The professional learning must be developed in consultation with the district's Center for Autism and Related Disabilities and include evidence-based practices to support students with autism spectrum disorder.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

None

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ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

The bill requires each school district's [professional learning system](#) to provide at least one autism-specific professional learning opportunity annually for instructional personnel and school-based administrators. The professional learning must be developed in consultation with the district's assigned [Center for Autism and Related Disabilities](#) and must include evidence-based practices for supporting students with [autism spectrum disorder](#) across all levels of need, including academic instruction, behavioral supports, communication strategies, and inclusive practices. (Section [1](#)).

The bill was approved by the Governor on May 22, 2026, ch. 2026-109, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2026. (Section [2](#)).

RELEVANT INFORMATION

SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

[Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\)](#)

ASD is a condition that reflects a wide range of symptoms and levels of impairment, which vary in severity from one individual to another. ASD is characterized by an atypical developmental profile with a pattern of qualitative impairments in social interaction and social communication, and the presence of restricted or repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities, which occur across settings.¹ During the 2025–2026 school year, 71,688 students in Florida were documented as having ASD.²

Professional Learning

Florida law establishes requirements for the renewal of professional certificates for instructional personnel, which must occur every 5 years. For renewal, instructional personnel may earn college credit or inservice points in a

¹ Rule 6A-6.03023(1), F.A.C.

² Florida Department of Education, PK-12 Public School Data Publications and Reports, *Membership in Programs for Exceptional Students, Survey 2, 2025-26* (Excel), <https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/students.stml> (last visited Mar. 13, 2026). See tab ASD.

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variety of subject areas, such as exceptional student education and training to support students with autism.³ In addition, an applicant for renewal of a professional certificate must earn a minimum of one college credit or the equivalent inservice points in the area of instruction for teaching students with disabilities.⁴ Current law does not require recurring or autism-specific professional development as part of certificate renewal.

District Professional Learning Systems

The School Community Professional Learning Act requires each district to maintain a professional learning system meeting statutory requirements and subject to the Department of Education review and approval.⁵ The purpose of the professional learning system is to increase student achievement, enhance classroom instructional strategies that promote rigor and relevance throughout the curriculum, and prepare students for continuing education and the workforce.⁶ District professional learning systems must include, among other components:⁷

- Maintaining a district professional learning catalog for inservice activities, updated annually.
- Providing inservice activities with follow-up support aligned to district and school improvement goals.

Regional Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD)

CARD serve individuals with autism in assigned geographic service areas throughout the state. Each center provides technical assistance and consultation services, including intervention and assistance for a client, the client's family, and the school district. Each center also develops, provides, and evaluates professional training programs, including preservice and inservice training in state-of-the-art practices for personnel who work with the populations served by the centers and their families.⁸

Autism-Specific Training and Credentials

Florida also offers autism-specific training, credentials, and endorsements to provide educators with the knowledge and skills to support students with ASD.

Autism Microcredential

The University of Florida Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment (UF-CAN)⁹ is required to develop an autism microcredential that provides specialized training in supporting students with autism. The microcredential must be stackable with the autism endorsement and must be competency-based and offered at no cost to eligible participants.¹⁰

The microcredential must be available to specified categories of personnel, including instructional personnel and specified early learning personnel. Individuals who complete the microcredential are eligible for a one-time stipend, as determined in the General Appropriations Act (GAA).¹¹

In Fiscal Year 2025-2026, the GAA appropriated \$10 million from the General Revenue Fund for the UF-CAN. The appropriation included:

³ Section [1012.585\(3\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

⁴ Section [1012.585\(3\)\(e\), F.S.](#)

⁵ Section [1012.98\(5\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

⁶ Section [1012.98\(1\), F.S.](#)

⁷ Section [1012.98\(5\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

⁸ Section [1004.55\(4\), F.S.](#) See also, Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, Home, <http://florida-card.org/> (last visited Mar. 13, 2026).

⁹ University of Florida, Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment, About, <https://autism.psychiatry.ufl.edu/about-overview/> (last visited Mar. 13, 2026). The Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment helps patients and their families navigate the process of receiving an ASD diagnosis and finding services that best fit their needs within the center, UF Health, and the community.

¹⁰ Section [1004.551\(1\)\(f\), F.S.](#) See also, University of Florida Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment, Micro-credential, <https://autism.psychiatry.ufl.edu/advocacy/florida-senate-bill-112/> (last visited Mar. 13, 2026). Enrollment is planned to open in summer 2026.

¹¹ *Id.*

- Up to \$4.5 million for costs associated with the UF-CAN’s role as the statewide coordinating body, administrator, and fiscal agent for programs and services, including the microcredential; and
- The remainder to support and implement programs that include the administration of the microcredential and stipend, based on actual participation and demonstrated need.¹²

ASD Endorsement

An endorsement is a credential added to an educator certificate to reflect specialized training and qualifications in a particular instructional area.¹³ The State Board of Education rules establish requirements for endorsements,¹⁴ including the endorsement in ASD.¹⁵ Those rules specify eligibility prerequisites and completion requirements, which generally include required coursework and supervised field experience.

An ASD endorsement requires a bachelor’s or higher degree with certification in an exceptional student education area and completion of 12 semester hours that include:¹⁶

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

For the 2023-24 school year, district-reported certification data show 2,614 ASD endorsements; endorsements are counted once per teacher per certification area.¹⁷

RECENT LEGISLATION:

YEAR	BILL #/SUBJECT	HOUSE/SENATE SPONSOR(S)	OTHER INFORMATION
2025	CS/CS/SB 112 - Children with Developmental Disabilities	Maggard/ Harrell	Became law on July 1, 2025.

¹² Specific Appropriation 162A, s. 2, Chapter 2025-198, L.O.F

¹³ Florida Department of Education, Educator Certification, *Certificate Additions*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/additions/> (last visited Mar. 13, 2026).

¹⁴ Florida Academic Endorsements include American Sign Language, Athletic Coaching, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Driver Education, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Gifted, Orientation and Mobility, Prekindergarten Disabilities, Reading, Severe or Profound Disabilities, and Civics Seal of Excellence. See rules 6A-4.02431; 6A-4.02482; 6A-4.01796; 6A-4.0131; 6A-4.0244; 6A-4.01791; 6A-4.01794; 6A-4.01792; 6A-4.0292; 6A-4.01793; 6A-4.0164, F.A.C.

¹⁵ Rule 6A-4.01796, F.A.C.

¹⁶ *Id.*

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