

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

BILL #: CS/CS/HB 573 Educator Certification Pathways for Veterans

SPONSOR(S): Education & Employment Committee and Secondary Education & Career Development Subcommittee, Snyder and others

TIED BILLS: None **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** CS/SB 896

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: Y's 111

N's 0

GOVERNOR'S ACTION: Approved

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/CS/HB 573 passed the House on March 4, 2022, as CS/SB 896.

In Florida, to be eligible for an educator certificate to teach in a public school, an individual must meet basic eligibility requirements, including earning a bachelor's degree or higher. The Florida Department of Education (DOE) may issue a professional educator certificate, temporary certificate, or athletic coaching certificate to eligible educators. A temporary certificate covers employment in full-time positions for which an educator certification is required, is valid for 3 years, and is nonrenewable. To receive a temporary certificate, among other requirements, an individual must demonstrate mastery of subject area knowledge or complete the required degree or content courses specified by the State Board of Education (SBE) and attain a specified grade point average in the courses.

The bill creates an additional pathway to educator certification for military service members by authorizing the Department of Education to issue a temporary educator certificate, for a subject area specialization for which the SBE otherwise requires a bachelor's degree, to military service members meeting the following requirements:

- documents 48 months of active-duty military service with an honorable discharge or a medical separation;
- meets minimum eligibility criteria for educator certification with the exception of receipt of a bachelor's degree;
- completes the subject area content requirements specified in state board rule or demonstrates mastery of subject area knowledge; and
- completes 60 college credits with a minimum grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale, as provided by an eligible institution of higher learning.

The bill requires that temporary certificate holders be assigned a teacher mentor for a minimum of 2 school years after commencing employment. The teacher mentor must hold a valid professional teaching certification, have at least 3 years of teaching experience, and have earned an effective or highly effective rating on the prior year's performance evaluation. A temporary certificate for military service members who meet the established requirements is valid for a period of 5 years, is limited to a one-time issuance, and is nonrenewable.

The bill repeals the active duty requirement for an honorably discharged veteran or a veteran of a reserve component of the Armed Forces in order for the veteran or his or her spouse to be eligible for the waiver of specified educator certification fees.

The fiscal impact of the bill is indeterminate. See fiscal comments, *infra*.

The bill was approved by the Governor on June 9, 2022, ch. 2022-186, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2022.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Florida Educator Certification

Present Situation

In Florida, a person may serve as an educator in a traditional public school, charter school, virtual school, or other publicly operated school if they hold a certificate issued by the Florida Department of Education (DOE).¹

To be eligible for an educator certificate, an individual must meet the following basic eligibility requirements:²

- be at least 18 years of age;
- sign an affidavit attesting that the applicant will uphold the U.S. and State of Florida Constitutions;
- document receipt of a bachelor's or higher degree from an accredited institution of higher learning³ or from a nonaccredited institution identified by the DOE as having a quality program resulting in a bachelor's or higher degree;⁴
- 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 an educator.

In addition, each applicant must submit an application and the required fee to the DOE.⁵

After meeting basic eligibility requirements, a person may choose a certification route. The DOE issues three types of educator certificates:

- Professional Certificate: Florida's highest type of full-time educator certification;⁶ valid for 5 years and renewable.⁷
- Temporary Certificate: covers employment in full-time positions for which educator certification is required;⁸ valid for 3 years and nonrenewable.⁹

¹ Sections 1012.55(1) and 1002.33(12)(f), F.S.

² Section 1012.56(2)(a)-(f), F.S.

³ Section 1012.56(2)(c), F.S.; Rule 6A-4.003(1), F.A.C. (approved accrediting agencies); *see also* 34 C.F.R. ss. 602.1-602.50; U.S. Department of Education, *Regional and National Institutional Accrediting Agencies*, http://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation_pg6.html (last visited Feb. 3, 2022) (list of accrediting agencies approved by the U.S. Department of Education).

⁴ Section 1012.56(2)(c), F.S.; Rule 6A-4.003(2), F.A.C. (criteria for approval of nonaccredited institutions of higher learning). For initial certification, an applicant must attain at least a 2.5 overall grade point average on a 4.0 scale in the applicant's major field of study. Section 1012.56(2)(c), F.S.

⁵ Section 1012.56(1), F.S.; *See s.* 1012.59, F.S. The fee for initial certification is \$75 per subject area. Rule 6A-4.0012(1)(a)1. and 2., F.A.C.

⁶ Rule 6A-4.004(2), F.A.C.

⁷ Section 1012.56(7)(a), F.S.; *See* Rule 6A-4.0051(3)(c), F.A.C. (validity period is expressed as 5 years from July 1 of the school fiscal year). The DOE also issues a nonrenewable 5-year professional certificate that allows an applicant with a bachelor's degree in the area of speech-language impairment to complete a master's degree in speech-language impairment. Section 1012.56(7)(c), F.S.; Rule 6A-4.004(3), F.A.C.

⁸ Rule 6A-4.004(1)(a)2., F.A.C.

⁹ Section 1012.56(7), F.S. (flush-left provisions at the end of subsection; validity period is expressed in school fiscal years); Rule 6A-4.004(1)(a), F.A.C. The DOE also issues a nonrenewable temporary certificate, which is valid for 2 years, in the area of speech-language impairment. Sections 1012.56(7)(c) and 1012.54, F.S.; Rule 6A-4.001(1), F.A.C.

- Athletic Coaching Certificate: covers full-time and part-time employment as a public-school athletic coach;¹⁰ includes two types of athletic coaching certificates – one is valid for 5 years and may be issued for subsequent 5-year periods while the other is valid for 3 years and may be issued only once.¹¹

Currently, all states in the United States require a bachelor's degree for a person to receive a professional educator certificate and the most common pathway for certification is the traditional route by initially earning a professional teaching certificate.¹²

Professional Certification

A professional teaching certificate is valid for 5 years and is renewable.¹³ To receive a professional certificate, an applicant must:

- meet the basic eligibility requirements for certification;¹⁴
- demonstrate mastery of general knowledge;¹⁵
- demonstrate mastery of subject area knowledge;¹⁶ and
- demonstrate mastery of professional preparation and education competence.¹⁷

Mastery of general knowledge for a professional teaching certificate may be demonstrated through several methods, including the passing of one of several different examinations identified by the State Board of Education (SBE),¹⁸ having a valid teaching certificate from another state,¹⁹ having a SBE approved national educator credentialing,²⁰ having a master's or higher degree,²¹ or completion of two semesters of college teaching experience at a specified Florida institution.²²

Mastery of subject area knowledge for a professional teaching certificate may be demonstrated through the passing of a subject matter examination under specific conditions, a valid teaching certificate from another state, a valid certificate from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, or a passing score or program completion of a specified defense language proficiency test or program.²³ The SBE also maintains a system for the development and approval of teacher preparation programs for new teacher certifications.²⁴ Teacher preparation programs have entrance requirements for all applications, including those who already have a bachelor's degree, including a minimum GPA of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale and passage of the General Knowledge Test of the Florida Teacher Certification Examination by the time of graduation.²⁵

¹⁰ Section 1012.55(2), F.S.

¹¹ Rule 6A-4.004(4), F.A.C. (validity periods expressed in school fiscal years).

¹² TEACH National, *2021 Teacher Certification (Complete Guide)*, <https://www.teach.org/becoming-teacher/teaching-certification> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

¹³ Section 1012.56(7)(a), F.S.

¹⁴ Section 1012.56(2)(a)-(f), F.S.

¹⁵ Section 1012.56(2)(g) and (3), F.S.; Florida Department of Education, *General Knowledge*, <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/general-cert-requirements/general-knowledge.stml> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

¹⁶ Section 1012.56(2)(h) and (5), F.S.

¹⁷ Section 1012.56(2)(i) and (6), F.S.; Florida Department of Education, *Professional Preparation and Education Competence*, <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/general-cert-requirements/professional-preparation-edu-competenc.stml> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

¹⁸ Section 1012.56(3)(e), F.S. Examinations for mastery of general knowledge include the Florida General Knowledge Test and identified test sections of the GRE, including GRE Analytical Writing, GRE Quantitative Reasoning, and GRE Verbal Reasoning.

¹⁹ Section 1012.56(3)(b), F.S.

²⁰ Section 1012.56(3)(c), F.S.

²¹ Section 1012.56(3)(f), F.S. Degree must be from an accredited postsecondary educational institution that the DOE has identified as having a quality program resulting in a bachelor's degree or higher.

²² Section 1012.56(3)(d), F.S.

²³ Section 1012.56(5), F.S.

²⁴ Section 1004.04(1), F.S.

²⁵ Section 1004.04(3), F.S.

There are three state approved teacher preparation programs in Florida, including Initial Teacher Preparation Programs (ITPs), Educator Preparation Institutes (EPIs), and Professional Development Certification Programs (PDCPs).²⁶ ITPs are the traditional pathway to a teaching license, culminating in a bachelor's or master's degree and leading directly to professional teacher certification.²⁷ ITPs do not require a bachelor's degree to apply and are offered by Florida postsecondary institutions.²⁸

EPIs provide an alternate route for educator licensure, allowing candidates who already hold a bachelor's degree to work as teachers while earning their professional certification.²⁹ PDCPs offer an alternate route allowing teachers with temporary licenses to work as teachers with a mentorship component while working towards full certification.³⁰

Temporary Certification

A temporary teaching certificate is valid for 3 school fiscal years and is nonrenewable.³¹ To receive a temporary certificate, an applicant must:

- meet the basic eligibility requirements for certification;³²
- obtain full-time employment in a position that requires a Florida educator certificate by a school district or private school that has a DOE-approved professional education competence demonstration program;³³ and
- do one of the following:
 - demonstrate mastery of subject area knowledge;³⁴ or
 - complete the required degree or content courses specified in state board rule for subject area specialization³⁵ and attain at least a 2.5 grade point average on a 4.0 scale in the subject area courses.³⁶

To qualify for a temporary certificate, an applicant must meet subject area specialization requirements in at least one subject. Each subject area has specific degree or course requirements set in State Board Rule,³⁷ and select subject areas including Reading, Speech-Language Impaired, School Counseling, School Psychology, and School Social Work require a master's or specialist degree.³⁸

The DOE offers a variety of pathways to transition from a temporary to professional teaching certificate, including certification programs, professional training programs, and professional preparation college courses.³⁹

²⁶ Florida Department of Education, *Florida Teacher Preparation Programs 2021 Annual Program Performance Reports Summary and Analysis* (2022), available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7502/urlt/22AnnTeachPrepReport.pdf>.

²⁷ Section 1004.04(3), F.S.

²⁸ Florida Department of Education, *State-Approved Educator Preparation Programs*, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/preparation/initial-teacher-preparation-programs/approved-teacher-edu-programs.shtml> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022). The DOE identifies 52 state-approved educator preparation programs at colleges and universities throughout Florida.

²⁹ Section 1004.85(2), F.S.

³⁰ Section 1012.56(8), F.S.

³¹ Section 1012.56(7)(c), F.S.

³² Section 1012.56(2)(a)-(f) and (7)(b), F.S.

³³ Section 1012.56(1)(b), F.S.; Rule 6A-4.004(1)(a), F.A.C.

³⁴ Section 1012.56(7)(b), F.S.; Florida Department of Education, *Subject Area Knowledge* <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/general-cert-requirements/subject-area-knowledge.shtml> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

³⁵ Section 1012.56(7)(b), F.S. The degree and content requirements are specified in ch. 6A-4, F.A.C.

³⁶ Section 1012.56(2)(c), F.S.; *See* Florida Department of Education, *Certificate Types and Requirements*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/general-cert-requirements/> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

³⁷ Section 1012.56(7)(b), F.S. The degree and content requirements are established in ch. 6A-4, F.A.C.

³⁸ Florida Department of Education, Educator Certification, *Certificate Subjects*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/certificate-subjects/#degreed> (last visited Feb. 14, 2022).

³⁹ Florida Department of Education, Certification Pathways and Routes, *Pathways to Upgrade from a Temporary to a Professional Certificate*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/pathways-routes/> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

Athletic Coaching Certification

There are two types of athletic coaching certificates, one valid for 3 years and nonrenewable and one valid for 5 years and may be issued for subsequent 5-year periods.⁴⁰ To receive a nonrenewable athletic coaching certificate for 3 years, an applicant must:⁴¹

- complete and submit the required Educator Certification Application to the DOE;⁴² and
- submit fingerprint reports processed by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) and Florida Bureau of Investigation.

To receive a renewable athletic coaching certificate for 5 years, an applicant must:⁴³

- complete and submit the required Educator Certification Application to the DOE;⁴⁴
- submit fingerprint reports processed by the FDLE and Florida Bureau of Investigation;
- complete 9 semester hours in athletic coaching to include care and prevention of athletic injuries and dangers of drug use, theory and practice of coaching a specific sport; and
- have a valid cardiopulmonary resuscitation course completion card or certificate issued by an entity approved by the Florida Department of Health (FDOH).⁴⁵

Teacher Mentorship

The DOE provides PDCPs as a pathway to upgrade from a temporary certification to a professional teaching certification. The program includes many components to prepare individuals to transition into professional certification, including a mentorship and induction component.⁴⁶ A teacher mentor shall be selected by the district for educators in the PDCP pathway, and the mentor must meet the following requirements:⁴⁷

- hold a valid professional certificate;
- earned at least 3 years of teaching experience in prekindergarten through grade 12;
- completed specialized training in clinical supervision and participate in ongoing mentor training provided by the DOE, including components on teacher development, peer coaching, time management, and other related topics;⁴⁸
- earned an effective or highly effective rating on the prior year's performance evaluation; and
- may be a peer evaluator under the district's evaluation system.

A teacher mentorship must provide minimum weekly opportunities for activities including common planning time, professional development, opportunities for observing other teachers, co-teaching experiences, and reflection and follow-up discussions.⁴⁹

Teacher Shortage

The SBE annually identifies critical teacher shortage areas considering current and emerging educational requirements and workforce demands.⁵⁰ The DOE identified shortages for the 2021-2022 school year in areas including Science, English, Exceptional Student Education (ESE), Reading, Technical Education, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and Mathematics. These

⁴⁰ Rule 6A-4.004(4), F.A.C. (validity periods expressed in school fiscal years).

⁴¹ *Id.* at (4)(a).

⁴² Rule 6A-4.0012, F.A.C.

⁴³ Rule 6A-4.004(4)(b), F.A.C.

⁴⁴ Rule 6A-4.0012, F.A.C.

⁴⁵ Rule 6A-4.0282, F.A.C.

⁴⁶ Section 1012.56(8)(a)(3), F.S.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ Section 1012.98(3)(e), F.S.

⁴⁹ Section 1012.58(8)(a)(3)(b), F.S.

⁵⁰ Section 1012.07, F.S.

shortage areas represent certification areas where significant vacancies exist and where postsecondary institutions do not produce enough graduates to meet the needs for Florida's K-12 student population.⁵¹

Military Personnel, Veterans, and Spouses

Currently, members of the United States Armed Forces, veterans, and their spouses have opportunities for support in attaining educator certification through the Don Hahnfeldt Veteran and Military Family Opportunity Act, effective July 1, 2018.⁵²

The SBE waives the certification fees for initial applications, athletic coaching certifications, upgrades in certifications from temporary to permanent, and the addition of a subject or an endorsement for applicants that meet one of the following requirements:⁵³

- an active duty service member of the United States Armed Forces or reserve unit;
- a spouse of an active duty service member of the United States Armed Services or reserve unit;
- a veteran who was honorably discharged or retired from service as member of the United States Armed Services or reserve unit;
- a spouse of a veteran who was honorably discharged or retired from service as a member of the United States Armed Services or reserve unit; or
- a surviving spouse of a veteran or service member who died while on active duty as a member of the United States Armed Forces or reserve unit.

The DOE shall issue a 3-year temporary certificate in educational leadership to an individual who:⁵⁴

- earned a passing score on the Florida Educational Leadership Exam (FELE);
- served as a commissioned or noncommissioned military officer in the U.S. Armed Forces for at least 3 years, or documents 3 years of successful executive management or leadership experience;
- has been honorably discharged or has retired from the U.S. Armed Forces; and
- is presently employed full-time in a position for which a Florida educators' certificate is required in a Florida school (public or nonpublic) that has a DOE-approved Level II program.

Level I Educational Leadership Programs lead to initial certification in educational leadership to prepare individuals to serve as school administrators, and Level II Principal Preparation Programs build upon Level I training to lead to certification as a school principal.⁵⁵ An approved Level II program must admit applicants who hold such a temporary certificate and requires the DOE to issue a professional school principal certificate to an individual who holds the temporary certificate and successfully completes the Level II program.⁵⁶

If an educator with a valid temporary educator certificate is called into service for the United States Armed Forces or reserve, the service member may request a military extension to the certificate for the period of time equal to the time spent in service.⁵⁷ The spouse of an active duty military service member or reserve unit may also request a 2-year military extension to a temporary certificate, if the spouse has already demonstrated mastery of general knowledge.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Florida Department of Education, *Identification of Critical Teacher Shortage Areas for 2021-22*, <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7766/urlt/CTSA2122.pdf> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

⁵² Florida Department of Education, Educator Certification, *Military Personnel, Veterans & Spouses*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/military/> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ Section 1012.55(1)(e), F.S.

⁵⁵ Florida Department of Education, *Level II Principal Preparation*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/professional-dev/level-ii-pp.stml> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

⁵⁶ *See* s. 1012.55(1)(e), F.S.

⁵⁷ Florida Department of Education, Educator Certification, *Military Personnel, Veterans & Spouses*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/military/> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

⁵⁸ Section 1012.56(7)(c), F.S.

Federal Troops to Teachers Program

In 1993, the Department of Defense (DOD) established the Troops to Teachers (TTT) program to assist transitioning service members and veterans in beginning careers as kindergarten through grade 12 school teachers. The program provided counseling and referral services to assist members and veterans in meeting education and licensing requirements to secure a teaching position.⁵⁹

Within the program, the DOD provides assistance of up to \$5,000 to eligible members to obtain certification or licensing as educators, and up to \$10,000 in bonuses to participants who agree to teach in high-poverty schools.⁶⁰

Members of the armed forces who wish to receive the program's assistance for placement are required to have a bachelor's or advanced degree, and priority is given to those members who have educational or military experience in science, mathematics, special education, or vocational/technical subjects.⁶¹ To meet the requirements for the stipend, participants must:⁶²

- be enrolled in an accredited institution that would result in licensure as a full-time teacher;
- commit to full-time teaching in an eligible or high need school for 3 years; and
- if not retired or discharged due to service-connected physical disability, commit to serving 3 years in reserves.

The program's goals include reducing veteran unemployment, increasing the number of male and minority teachers in classrooms, and addressing the teacher shortage issues in kindergarten through grade 12 schools that serve low-income families and in the critical subject areas including math, science, special education, foreign language, and career and technical education. Since the program's launch in 1993, more than 100,000 veterans have transitioned to a career in education.⁶³

The TTT program was discontinued in October 2021⁶⁴ and was reinstated on December 27, 2021, in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022.⁶⁵

Effect of the Bill

The bill waives the requirement to document receipt of a bachelor's or higher degree to seek educator certification in Florida for specified military service members.

The bill creates an additional pathway to educator certification for military service members by authorizing the Department of Education to issue a temporary educator certificate, for a subject area specialization for which the State Board of Education otherwise requires a bachelor's degree, to military service members meeting the following requirements:

- documents 48 months of active-duty military service with an honorable discharge or a medical separation;
- meets minimum eligibility criteria for educator certification with the exception of receipt of a bachelor's degree;
- completes the subject area content requirements specified in state board rule or demonstrates mastery of subject area knowledge; and

⁵⁹ United States Army, *Troops to Teachers (TTT)*, [https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Troops-to-Teachers-\(TTT\)?serv=122](https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Troops-to-Teachers-(TTT)?serv=122) (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

⁶⁰ U.S. Department of Education, *Troops to Teachers Program*, <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/troops/index.html> (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² United States Army, *Troops to Teachers (TTT)*, [https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Troops-to-Teachers-\(TTT\)?serv=122](https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Troops-to-Teachers-(TTT)?serv=122) (last visited Feb. 3, 2022).

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ Pub. L. No. 117-81, S. 1605, 117th Cong. (Dec. 27, 2021)(provides a requirement to carry out the program until the termination date of July 1, 2025).

- completes 60 college credits with a minimum grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale, as provided by one or more accredited institutions of higher learning or a nonaccredited institution of higher learning identified by the DOE as having a quality program resulting in a bachelor's degree or higher.

The bill requires that temporary certificate holders be assigned a teacher mentor for a minimum of 2 school years after commencing employment. The teacher mentor must hold a valid professional teaching certification, have at least 3 years of teaching experience, and have earned an effective or highly effective rating on the prior year's performance evaluation. The temporary educator certificate for eligible service members is valid for a period of 5 school fiscal years, is limited to a one-time issuance, and is nonrenewable.

The bill removes the requirement for an honorably discharged veteran of the United States Armed Forces or a veteran of a reserve component thereof and the spouse or surviving spouse of such a veteran to have served on active duty to receive the waiver of examination and certification fees for educator certification.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

See fiscal comments.

2. Expenditures:

See fiscal comments.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

None.

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

The bill removes restrictive language for the waiver of certification fees charged by the department opening the waiver to all honorably discharged veterans of the United States Armed Forces or reserve units, including those who have not served on active duty.