

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.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

BILL: SB 896

INTRODUCER: Senator Burgess

SUBJECT: Educator Certification Pathways for Veterans

DATE: January 10, 2022

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Lloyd	Caldwell	MS	Pre-meeting
2.			ED	
3.			RC	

I. Summary:

SB 896 creates an additional eligibility pathway for educator certification for veterans after an honorable or medical discharge from the United States Armed Forces. Under this option, temporary certification from the Department of Education (department) would be valid for five school fiscal years and nonrenewable.

To qualify for certification through this process, each veteran must:

- Document a minimum of 48 months of active duty service;
- Complete at least 60 college credits at an accredited institution of higher learning, or a non-accredited institution of higher learning identified by the department as high quality;
- Achieve a minimum grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale; and
- Obtain a bachelor’s degree or higher.

SB 896 is effective July 1, 2022.

II. Present Situation:

Florida’s public school system enrolls approximately 2.8 million students annually across 67 school districts in grades pre-Kindergarten through 12.¹ For the 2020-2021 school year, these students are supported by almost 340,000 personnel in administrative, instructional, and support positions with the majority of those positions (60 percent) identified as instructional staff.²

¹ Florida Department of Education, *Florida Public School Enrollment, 2020-2021*, <https://edstats.fldoe.org/SASWebReportStudio/openRVUrl.do?rsRID=SBIP%3A%2F%2FMETASERVER%2FARM%2FPERA%2FEIAS%2FENROLLMENT%2FWEB+REPORTS%2FEnrollment.srx%28Report%29> (last visited December 10, 2021).

² Florida Department of Education, *Staff in Florida Public Schools – Full Time Staff Summary, 2020-21, Final Summary 2, State/District Level Report*, <https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/staff.stml> (last visited December 10, 2021).

Instructional staff includes teachers at each level (elementary, middle, and high school), as well as other school staff who interact with students outside of the traditional classroom setting such as guidance, librarians, social workers, and school psychologists, but who are on the campus on a daily basis. Teachers, however, comprise 87 percent of total personnel.³

Current state law requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to annually review critical teacher shortage areas and to identify those areas where there is the greatest need for teachers statewide.⁴ Shortage areas are determined based the number of courses taught by teachers not certified in the appropriate field for the course, number of projected vacancies in the subject matter, and the number of teachers who completed any teacher preparation programs.⁵ For the 2021-2022 school year, the department identified the following shortage areas:

- Science – General;
- English;
- Exceptional Student Education (ESE);
- Science – Physical;
- Reading;
- Technical Education;
- Science-Earth & Space;
- English for Speakers of Other Language; and
- Math.⁶

Currently, to achieve certification status in Florida, an individual must submit his or her transcripts and other certification documents plus any required fees through the department under one of several pathways or certificate types.⁷

Educator Certification Requirements

Initial Certification Eligibility

To be eligible to seek certification as an educator in Florida, a person must:

- Be at least 18 years of age;
- Meet general eligibility criteria to ensure competency and capability to perform the duties, functions, and responsibilities as an educator, including, but not limited to the execution of an oath of loyalty, possession of a bachelor's degree or higher, and successful passage of a background screening;
- Demonstrate mastery of subject area knowledge as defined in state law⁸;

³ Florida Department of Education, *Staff in Florida's Public Schools, Full-Time Instructional Staff Summary, 2020-2021, Final Survey 2, State/District Report*, <https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/staff.shtml> (last Visited December 10, 2021).

⁴ See s. 1012.07, F.S., and 6A-20.0131, F.A.C. (2012).

⁵ 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 December 10, 2021).

⁶ 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 December 10, 2021).

⁷ Florida Department of Education, *Educator Certification*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/> (last visited December 14, 2021).

⁸ Section 1012.56(5), F.S.

- Demonstrate mastery of general knowledge as defined in state law⁹ if the person is to serve as a classroom teacher;¹⁰ and
- Demonstrate mastery of professional preparation and education competency.¹¹

Mastery of general knowledge can be demonstrated through several methods including the passing of one of several different examinations identified by the SBE, having a teacher education certification from another state, or teaching at the Florida College System or university or private college level for a minimum of two semesters in either full-time or part-time status.¹²

To demonstrate mastery of subject area knowledge and meet the educator certification standards, applicants can also pass a subject matter examination under specific conditions, document a teaching certificate from another state, document a certificate from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, or provide a passing score from a specified defense language proficiency test or evidence of program completion.¹³

Teacher Preparation Programs

The SBE maintains a system for development and approval of teacher preparation programs,¹⁴ and each teacher preparation program must be approved by the DOE as specified in law.¹⁵ Continued approval of a teacher preparation program is based on evidence that the program continues to implement the requirements for initial approval and upon significant, objective, and quantifiable measures of the program and the performance of the program completers.¹⁶ The programs have entrance requirements for all applicants, including those who already have a baccalaureate degree, such as a minimum grade point average of a 2.5 on a 4.0 scale. All participants in teacher preparation programs are required to pass the General Knowledge Test of the Florida Certification examination by the time of graduation and before receipt of any professional certificate.¹⁷

Postsecondary Educator Preparation Institutes

Educator Preparation Institutes (EPIs) also provide an alternate route to teacher certification.¹⁸ EPIs are created by a postsecondary institution or a qualified private provider and approved by the DOE.¹⁹ Postsecondary institutions that are accredited or approved as described in SBE rule may seek approval from the DOE to create EPIs for the purpose of providing instruction to both potential and existing educators. Such institutions can also help individuals with baccalaureate

⁹ Section 1012.56(3), F.S.

¹⁰ Section 1012.56(3)

¹¹ Section 1012.56(6), F.S.

¹² Section 1012.56(3), F.S.; and Fla Admin. Code R. 6A-4.004(2020).

¹³ Section 1012.56(5), F.S.; and Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-4.004 (2020).

¹⁴ Section 1004.04(1)(b), F.S.

¹⁵ Section 1004.04(3)(c), F.S.

¹⁶ Section 1004.04(4), F.S.

¹⁷ Section 1004.04(3), F.S.

¹⁸ Florida Department of Education, *Educator Preparation Institutes (EPIs)*, <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/higher-ed/fl-college-system/academic-student-affairs/educator-preparation-institutes-epis/> (last visited December 17, 2021).

¹⁹ Section 1004.85(1), F.S.

degrees transition into certified teachers. Approved EPIs must meet standards established by the department and deliver content and curriculum which complies with statutory requirements.²⁰

District Alternative Certification Program

Once an educator holds a valid Florida Temporary or Professional Certificate, the educator may be eligible to add another subject coverage according to subject specialization requirements in the SBE rule, but an endorsement does not stand alone.²¹ Add-on programs are offered by colleges, universities, and school districts and must be approved by the department. Currently, thirty-four school districts operate their own certification add-on programs.²²

Non-Degreed Teachers of Career Education

Qualifications for part-time and full-time non-degreed teachers of careers programs are based primarily on successful occupational experience rather than academic training.²³ The qualifications for such teachers require that such candidates be fingerprinted, document their education and successful occupational experience, and provide evidence of any professional credentials or any industry certifications which may be relevant to the requested teaching certification.²⁴

Military Personnel, Veterans, and Spouses

Fee Waivers

Currently, future military educators are eligible to have certification fees waived for initial applications, athletic coaching certifications, upgrades in certifications from temporary to permanent, and for the addition of a subject or an endorsement if the candidate is:

- 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 a 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.²⁵

²⁰ Section 1004.04, F.S.; and Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-5.0066.

²¹ Florida Department of Education, *Certificate Additions*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/additions/> (last visited December 10, 2021).

²² Florida Department of Education, Professional Development Certification Programs, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/preparation/pdcp.stml> (last visited December 10, 2021).

²³ Section 1012.43, F.S.

²⁴ See s. 1012.39, F.S.; Fla Admin, Code. R. 6A.4.0.44 (2016); 6A.4054 (2016); 6A-4.056 (2016); 6A-4.058 (2000); 6A.4060 (2002); and 6A.4062 (2000).

²⁵ Florida Department of Education, *Military Personnel, Veterans, & Spouses*, <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/military/> (last visited December 14, 2021). See also Ch. 2018-007, Laws of Fla.)

A fee waiver is valid for up to five years after the veteran or his or her spouse is determined eligible and can be requested online.²⁶

Military Extensions to Certificates

If an educator with a temporary certificate is called to active duty or volunteers, whether in wartime or peacetime, the educator may request an extension of time to his or her temporary certificate equal to the amount of time spent in service.²⁷ A spouse of an active duty service member or reserve unit may also request a two-year military extension to a temporary certificate to complete the requirements for a Professional Certificate where the spouse has demonstrated mastery of general knowledge.²⁸

Federal Troops to Teachers Program

Prior to October 1, 2020, the Department of Defense organized and managed a *Troops to Teachers* program which assisted service members and veterans with new careers as Kindergarten to Grade 12 teachers in public, charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs schools. From 1993 until the program resources were realigned, more than 100,000 veterans were transitioned into an education career.²⁹ Funding for the program which began in 1993 sunsets at the end of federal Fiscal Year 2021(October 31, 2021).

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill creates an additional eligibility pathway for veterans to achieve initial educator certification through the following criteria:

- Documentation of 48 months of active-duty military service with an honorable discharge or medical separation;
- Completion of 60 college credits; and
- Evidence of a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale from an accredited institution of higher learning or an unaccredited institution of higher learning which has been identified by the Department of Education of having a quality program and which results in a bachelor's degree.

The bill allows a temporary certificate to be issued covering grades 6-12 for subject area specialization for which a bachelor's degree would otherwise be required, if the individual has:

- Completed 48 months of active-duty military service with an honorable discharge or medical separation; and
- Earned 60 college credits with a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.5 on a scale of 4.0, as provided by one or more accredited institutions of higher learning or a nonaccredited institution of higher learning which the department has identified as having a quality program resulting in a bachelor's degree or higher.

²⁶ The value of the current fee waiver is \$75.00 for each waived action. *Id.*

²⁷ Section 1012.56(7)(c), F.S.

²⁸ Section 1012.56(7)(c), F.S.

²⁹ United States Army, *My Army Benefits – Troops to Teachers (TTT) Program*, [https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Troops-to-Teachers-\(TTT\)](https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Troops-to-Teachers-(TTT)) (last visited December 15, 2021).

A temporary certificate issued under this pathway is valid for five school fiscal years and is nonrenewable.

Additionally, the bill waives certification fees for honorably discharged veterans of the United States Armed Forces or veterans of a reserve component eliminating the current requirement that the veteran have served on active duty to be eligible for a fee waiver.

The bill is effective July 1, 2022.

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:

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 and not just those who served on active duty.

B. Private Sector Impact:

Private schools that require educational certification for its teachers could potentially see an impact in its pool of candidates if additional veterans choose to follow this eligibility path.

C. Government Sector Impact:

SB 896 expands the eligibility options for educator certification for specified military service members who have completed a minimum number of active-duty military service

hours and achieved a minimum number of college credits hours with at least a 2.7 grade point average on 4.0 scale and who can meet other eligibility requirements. The potential availability of additional educators, especially as Florida faces a teacher shortage in certain regions and in specific instructional subject matters could provide district school board with enhanced options and expanded personnel choices. Experienced military leaders who have mentored and educated military service members for years may have skills and experiences that can translate easily to the classroom and would be a ready-made workforce for Florida's public and charter schools and could address short and long-term workforce needs.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

The top five instructional needs in Florida's public schools are in the sciences, exceptional student education, reading, technical education, and English according to the most recent critical shortages reports for the 2021-2022 school year.³⁰ The critical shortage document identifies that a significant portion of these classes are currently being taught by teachers not certified in the subject matter. While the bill identifies subject matter area specialization where a bachelor's degree would otherwise be required, the bill does not address whether or not any of the credit hours must be in a specific subject area or if any of the specific skills and experiences of service members are intended to mitigate these same critical shortage areas in lieu of any college credits for that subject area specialization.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 1012.56 and 1012.59.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

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

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

³⁰ 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: December 15, 2021).