

# oppaga

# Progress Report



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## Most Recommendations on School Principal Training Implemented by Legislature and DOE

### *at a glance*

The Legislature and the Department of Education implemented most of the recommendations in OPPAGA's 2000 report on the Management Training Act, which governed training and certification of public school principals.

The 2000 Legislature adopted EDUCATE 2000, thereby repealing the Management Training Act.<sup>1</sup> As we recommended, EDUCATE 2000 eliminated the Council on Educational Management and assigned the functions of that council to the Department of Education. EDUCATE 2000 also eliminated the Center for Interdisciplinary Advanced Degree Study and the Academy for School Leaders.

The Commissioner of Education appointed a task force to identify and validate competencies of high-performing principals in public schools; identify standards and procedures for evaluating their performance; identify criteria for principal selection; and establish an educational management network to facilitate communication, involvement, and mutual assistance among educational managers.

<sup>1</sup> EDUCATE 2000—Educators Developing Unequaled Competence Act: Teaching Excellence 2000, Ch. 2000-301, Laws of Florida.

### Purpose

In accordance with state law, this report describes action by the Legislature and the Department of Education in response to a January 2000 OPPAGA report.<sup>2</sup> It assesses the extent to which the Legislature and the department have addressed the findings included in that report.

### Background

*The Florida Management Training Act was established to provide support systems to improve educational leadership*

In 1979, the Legislature established the Management Training Act to provide for a state, regional, and district support system to ensure that principals and other educational managers have the skills, experience, and academic background necessary to be effective leaders. The Legislature created three entities to achieve the intent of the act.

- The Council on Educational Management, assigned to the Department of Education, was charged with identifying, validating, and developing performance measures for competencies associated with high-performing principals and other school managers.

<sup>2</sup> *Program Review: Management Training Act Should Be Revised*, Report No. 99-26, January 2000.

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- The Academy for School Leaders was charged with providing in-service training for school managers to upgrade the quality of management at all levels of Florida's public school system.
- The Center for Interdisciplinary Advanced Graduate Study was to pursue advanced education opportunities and to conduct research for further improvement of school principals.

The act authorized school districts to train district and school-level administrators in the competencies the council deemed necessary for effective school management. The district training programs were subject to review by the Department of Education. District school boards were authorized to provide salary supplements to principals who successfully completed such training.

Florida law requires school principals to be certified to ensure that they have the competencies needed to be strong, competent administrative and instructional leaders who will be successful at improving public schools. Florida's current principal certification requirements reflect the work completed by the Council on Educational Management. To obtain principal certification in Florida, an individual must have taught for at least three years, completed a master's degree in educational administration, administration and supervision, or educational leadership, passed the Florida Educational Leadership Examination, and completed a state-approved district-level principal preparation training program.

## **Prior Findings** \_\_\_\_\_

### ***The Management Training Act had not been fully implemented***

OPPAGA concluded that the Florida Council on Educational Management had carried out most of its assigned responsibilities. It developed district-level and university-level principal preparation training program and education

leadership program guidelines. However, at the time of OPPAGA's review in 1999, the council had not met since 1994 and other entities had assumed its responsibilities.

While the council generally had carried out its duties, other aspects of the Management Training Act were not being implemented. Neither the Center for Interdisciplinary Advanced Graduate Study nor the Academy for School Leaders existed. In the absence of the center and the academy, school districts had assumed responsibility for providing in-service training and advanced educational activities for principals.

Subsequent education reforms have replaced the training system envisioned by the Management Training Act. Student performance is now a major factor in evaluating school performance and administrator assessments are based primarily on student performance outcomes.

### ***Although school districts expressed general satisfaction with certification requirements, several issues needed to be addressed to meet the intent of the act***

Our 2000 report noted that principals and human resource directors were generally satisfied with Florida's certification requirements.

Although 5,162 persons were certified to be principals in May 1998, roughly one-third of the human resource directors reported their districts had experienced trouble filling vacant principal positions during the previous two school years. They said that applicants who met certification requirements often did not have the leadership qualities needed to be a principal in their districts. This was consistent with results of OPPAGA's survey of principals in which 78% of principals said that teachers with the most leadership potential were not pursuing principal certification. OPPAGA noted that certain administrative aspects of the certification process unnecessarily might prevent qualified persons from becoming certified as principals.

Consequently, about half of the districts employed individuals who were not fully certified to fill vacant principal positions because the districts could not find suitable certified candidates.

District staff and other stakeholders identified several problems in the certification process.

- Coordination and cooperation between some school districts and colleges of education were weak.
- Prospective principals in areas that are geographically distant from a university could have trouble accessing coursework needed to complete their certification.
- The certification process could discourage individuals with leadership potential from pursuing principal certification.

OPPAGA concluded that the Management Training Act needed substantial revision to meet current needs. We recommended that the Legislature eliminate the Council on Educational Management and assign its responsibilities to the Department of Education. We further recommended that the Commissioner of Education appoint a task force to assume the council's duties for oversight of the principal training and certification processes, address issues relating to principal competencies, and eliminate barriers to certification of otherwise qualified persons to be principals. We also recommended that the task force obtain input from stakeholder groups when considering making changes to the principals' competencies or certification requirements. Finally, we recommended that the Legislature eliminate the Center for Interdisciplinary Advanced Graduate Study and the Academy for School Leaders.

OPPAGA also concluded that there should be increased coordination and cooperation between school districts and colleges of education. We recommended that the Legislature require districts and universities to follow guidelines developed by the Commissioner's task force to develop specific articulation agreements for training school administrators. These guidelines

and related agreements should be periodically reviewed and updated to ensure that strong cooperative relationships exist between the districts and the universities. OPPAGA recommended that the district principal training plan review process be expanded to assess implementation and effectiveness of coordination, partnerships, and cooperation between the school districts and the universities

Finally, OPPAGA concluded that barriers to certification were causing some districts to experience difficulty in filling open principal positions with highly qualified applicants. We recommended that the Legislature consider changes to the certification process to provide school districts greater flexibility in hiring principals. This flexibility might include authorizing waivers to selected certification requirements, alternative routes of certification, and employment of non-certified individuals with strong leadership skills to serve as principals.

## Current Status ---

The Legislature and the DOE have taken steps to implement the recommendations in OPPAGA's 2000 report.

### *The Legislature repealed the Management Training Act*

In 2000, the Legislature addressed OPPAGA's recommendation to substantially revise the Management Training Act by adopting EDUCATE 2000 (Ch. 2000-301, *Laws of Florida*), which repealed the act. In this step, the Legislature eliminated the Council on Educational Management, the Center for Interdisciplinary Advance Degree Study, and the Academy for School Leaders. EDUCATE 2000 also modified the School Community Professional Development Act that requires the Commissioner of Education to appoint a school administrators task force to "provide recommendations to the department in the areas of recruitment, certification, preparation, professional development, and evaluation of

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school administrators." The task force met in June and July 2001 to solicit stakeholder input, and is scheduled to meet in late November 2001 to review the information collected and to begin developing recommendations about principal training and certification.

### ***The Legislature provided school districts greater flexibility in preparing teachers to become principals***

EDUCATE 2000 requires the Department of Education to provide a system for professional development, recruitment, and preparation of school administrative personnel. EDUCATE 2000 requires school districts to develop training programs that

- identify the knowledge, competencies, and skills necessary for effective management and instructional leadership that align with student performance standards and accountability measures;
- include performance evaluation measures;
- provide for alternative means of preparation of school administrative personnel in programs designed by the school district and institutions of higher education (these programs must comply with guidelines developed by the Commissioner and approved by the Department of Education);
- provide for hiring of qualified out-of-state school administrative personnel; and
- provide advanced educational opportunities for school-based instructional leaders.

While the Legislature provided for an alternative means of preparation of school administrators in EDUCATE 2000, it did not adopt our recommendation to require school districts and universities to develop specific articulation agreements for principal education and training programs. We continue to believe that this step would be beneficial.

### ***The Department of Education is waiting for task force input before changing training and certification processes***

The department has not yet expanded the district principal training and review process to (1) assess implementation and effectiveness of coordination, partnerships, and cooperation between school districts and universities and (2) address weaknesses in current management training plans and opportunities for improvement. The department will make such changes based on the recommendations of the task force. According to the Commissioner of Education, the school districts and universities are poised to develop new articulation agreements, based on task force recommendations and are in the process of identifying weaknesses to current management training plans.

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