



November 2007

Report No. 07-45

Increased Funding and Program Delivery Changes Aim to Increase Florida's Teachers and Nurses

at a glance

Consistent with our recommendations, the Florida Legislature, the State Board of Education, the Department of Education, the state's community colleges and universities, and the Florida Board of Nursing have all taken steps to increase student enrollment in teaching and nursing programs and reduce barriers contributing to the state's shortage in these areas.

- Since 2005, the Legislature has appropriated \$56.8 million to support the expansion of teacher preparation and nursing programs. This additional funding includes \$52.5 million for the SUCCEED Florida Grant Program and \$4.2 million in direct funding for the graduate level nursing programs.
- The Legislature has increased financial aid for prospective teachers and nurses.
- More community colleges are offering baccalaureate degree programs in teaching, and community colleges and universities have expanded programs for individuals seeking teaching credentials through alternative preparation processes.
- To help address the problem of clinical site availability, the Florida Board of Nursing has increased the amount of training that can be delivered by simulators.

Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of the actions taken in relation to a 2005 OPPAGA report regarding strategies to encourage students to enroll in teacher preparation and nursing programs, two of the state's identified critical workforce needs.^{1, 2}

Background

Florida is projected to face shortages of teachers and nurses in coming years. Florida, like other states, has established scholarships and loan forgiveness programs to encourage students to enroll in teacher preparation and nursing programs, particularly in areas of high need. While helpful, these programs have limited resources and address only part of the training challenges facing the state.

The problems of attracting students to the teaching and nursing professions are different for the two professions. For teaching, the primary challenges appear to be attracting students into teaching programs, particularly in the areas of high school science and math and exceptional student education, and increasing the percentage of graduates of these programs who subsequently take classroom jobs in Florida's public schools. In nursing, the primary challenge is addressing the shortage of space in nursing education programs at the associate and baccalaureate levels.

Our 2005 report presented several options to the Legislature to increase the number of students enrolling in teacher preparation and nursing programs. These options included

- increasing access to teaching degrees by offering them on community college campuses;

¹ Section 11.51(6), *F.S.*

² *Florida Can Use Several Strategies to Encourage Students to Enroll in Areas of Critical Need*, OPPAGA Report No. [05-09](#), February 2005.

- increasing funds for the critical loan forgiveness program (for teachers) to the statutory maximum of \$10,000 per recipient;
- increasing the length of time teachers in the critical teacher shortage program are eligible for loan forgiveness awards;
- making teacher aides eligible for critical teacher scholarships;
- expanding university and community college nursing programs;
- providing scholarships or loan forgiveness awards to allow nurses to obtain advanced degrees and become nursing instructors; and
- making better use of technology by substituting simulations for some required nursing clinical experience.

Current Status

Since the release of OPPAGA's 2005 report, the Florida Legislature increased financial aid for prospective teachers and nurses and provided additional funding to support the expansion of teacher preparation and nursing programs. In addition, the State Board of Education, the Department of Education, community colleges, universities, and the Florida Board of Nursing have changed policies and program delivery to address some of the contributing factors to the teaching and nursing shortage.

The state has taken steps to increase the number of teachers

Consistent with our recommendations, the Legislature, the State Board of Education, the Department of Education, community colleges, and universities have all taken steps to increase the number of students enrolled in teaching programs across the state. The Legislature increased funding over the past two years for teaching grants, tuition reimbursement, and loan forgiveness programs. In addition, the State Board of Education approved more community colleges to begin offering baccalaureate degree programs in teaching, and community colleges and universities have expanded programs for individuals seeking teaching credentials through alternative preparation processes.

The Legislature is using SUCCEED Florida grants to support the expansion of teacher preparation programs

Beginning in 2005, the Florida Legislature has appropriated approximately \$20 million annually for

the SUCCEED Florida Grant Program—Crucial Professionals Initiative. These funds, administered by the Department of Education, are intended to increase the capacity of private and public undergraduate programs to produce more certified teachers, nurses, and allied health professionals for Florida's workforce. Both community colleges and universities are eligible to apply for the grant. The 2007 Legislature directed OPPAGA to study whether the program is producing the intended results; our report on this program will be available prior to the 2008 legislative session.

While SUCCEED Florida's intent has remained consistent over the last three years, the Legislature changed the allocation process for the grant funds. The 2005 and 2006 Legislatures specified allocations among the teaching, nursing, and allied health programs, with teaching programs receiving a total allocation of \$13.8 million over the two-year period. However, the 2007 Legislature did not specify allocations of grant funds among the professions. Instead, the Legislature appropriated the monies in a lump sum with minimum and maximum award amounts and directed the department to establish competitive application procedures

The Legislature increased financial aid for prospective teachers

As stated in our 2005 report, loan forgiveness and scholarship programs can be effective ways of attracting students to teacher preparation programs and encouraging graduates to take teaching jobs. The 2006 Legislature increased funding to the Critical Teacher Shortage Tuition Reimbursement Program and Critical Teacher Shortage Student Loan Forgiveness Program by 44%, from \$1.7 to \$2.5 million. The 2007 Legislature continued the \$2.5 million appropriation.

While funding for existing programs increased, other options to improve financial aid programs for prospective teachers have not been implemented.

- Changing the eligibility requirements for loan forgiveness and tuition reimbursement programs could improve access. The department has examined the feasibility of expanding the length of time that teachers in critical shortage areas are eligible to participate in the current loan forgiveness program. To date, however, no changes have been made and the Legislature has not extended the time frame for teacher eligibility.

The department favors amending s. 100.58, *Florida Statutes*, to allow baccalaureate degree holders in critical teacher shortage areas who are enrolled in Educator Preparation Institutes (EPIs) to be eligible for the Critical Teacher Shortage Tuition

Reimbursement Program. Current law limits program eligibility to baccalaureate degree holders who are already employed as teachers.

- The state lacks financial incentives for teaching aides to become teachers. Our 2005 report provided several options for encouraging teaching aides to become certified teachers. These options have not been implemented. No statutory changes have been made allowing teaching aides to be eligible for critical teacher scholarships. In addition, no funds have been appropriated to pay aides during their required teaching internships in an effort to encourage them to become teachers.

Community colleges and universities have improved access to teacher preparation programs

Individuals seeking to become teachers may meet the educational requirements in one of two ways: (1) entering into a baccalaureate teacher preparation program and earning a teaching degree, or (2) completing alternative processes for receiving teacher certification. As discussed below, the state's community colleges and universities have taken steps to improve access to both teaching degrees and alternative processes for becoming a teacher.

The number of community colleges approved to offer teacher education baccalaureate degree programs has grown from three to six in the last two years. At the time of our 2005 report, three community colleges offered baccalaureate degrees in education.³ According to department data, these baccalaureate programs enrolled approximately 900 education students in Fiscal Year 2005-06. In February 2007, the State Board of Education approved three additional community colleges to begin offering baccalaureate degree programs in education. Indian River Community College will begin offering its program in January 2008, and Edison College and Okaloosa-Walton College will begin their programs during fall 2008.

Community colleges and universities have expanded programs for individuals seeking teaching credentials through alternative processes. Community colleges and universities have implemented Educator Preparation Institutes (EPIs) to improve access to teacher preparation programs. Twenty-seven community colleges and one university are currently implementing approved EPIs designed to produce new teachers. No institutions were operating an approved EPI program at the time of our 2005 report. These

specialized teacher training programs may provide any or all of the following types of training:

- professional development to improve teacher classroom instruction and meet certification requirements;
- instruction to assist potential and current substitute teachers;
- instruction to help paraprofessionals meet their education and training requirements; and/or
- instruction for baccalaureate degree holders to become certified teachers.

While EPIs do not grant teaching degrees, they are authorized to provide instruction to prepare non-education major baccalaureate degree holders to sit for the Florida Professional Educator Certification Exam. The department reports that, within the first year of operation, approximately 1,500 students enrolled in EPIs.

The state has taken steps to address nursing shortages

Since the publication of our 2005 report, the Legislature and the Florida Board of Nursing have taken steps to increase enrollment in the state's nursing programs and to address some of the contributing factors to the state's nursing shortage. The Legislature has appropriated additional funding to expand enrollment capacity in undergraduate and graduate nursing programs, to create new simulation laboratories, and to provide scholarships for nursing students. The Florida Board of Nursing has changed how simulators are used in nursing programs in an effort to address the shortage of clinical space for students to get direct care experience.

The Legislature provided additional funding to support the expansion of nursing programs

As noted in our 2005 report, the state's nursing education programs do not have sufficient capacity to serve all qualified students seeking admission. To increase capacity and enroll more students, community colleges and universities must address two basic challenges: (1) accessing funds to hire additional nursing faculty; and (2) finding qualified faculty when funding is available. Nursing educators are generally required to have graduate degrees. As discussed below, the Legislature has appropriated additional funding to address these challenges, thus increasing the state's capacity to serve nursing students.

The Legislature provided funding through SUCCEED Florida grants to support the expansion of undergraduate nursing programs. As part of the

³ St. Petersburg College, Chipola College, and Miami-Dade College were authorized to offer a baccalaureate degree in education.

SUCCEED Florida Grant Program discussed earlier, the Legislature allocated \$18.8 million (\$10 million in Fiscal Year 2005-06 and \$8.8 million in Fiscal Year 2006-07) for nursing and allied health programs to help increase the capacity of undergraduate programs at public and private postsecondary institutions. The 2007 Legislature appropriated \$19.8 million for the SUCCEED Florida grant to fund teaching and nursing programs. It is not yet determined what proportion of the funding each critical need area will ultimately receive.

The Legislature increased direct funding for graduate level nursing programs. Based on a two-year plan developed by the Board of Governors in 2005 to increase the number of nurses and nursing faculty, the 2006 and 2007 Legislatures appropriated funds to increase the number of slots for students in master's and doctoral nursing programs across the state. As shown in Exhibit 1, several universities in both 2006 and 2007 received funds for graduate nursing programs.

Exhibit 1 Seven Universities Received Funds to Expand Graduate Nursing Programs in the Last Two Years

University	2006 Funding	2007 Funding
Florida Atlantic University	\$ 507,500	\$ 202,500
University of Central Florida	812,500	202,500
Florida International University	366,000	202,500
Florida Gulf Coast University ¹	305,000	-
University of South Florida ²	-	202,500
University of Florida	557,500	405,000
Florida State University ¹	518,500	
Total	\$3,067,000	\$1,215,000

¹Florida State University and Florida Gulf Coast University have only masters nursing programs and do not have doctoral programs, so they received no funding for 2007.

²University of South Florida received a separate appropriation in 2006 for its doctoral programs.

Source: Florida Board of Governors.

Each of the universities receiving funds to expand graduate nursing programs is required to report on its progress in increasing the number of new students in the graduate nursing programs. In addition, the 2006 Legislature required students enrolled in graduate nursing programs at universities receiving the funds to commit to practicing in Florida for at least three years and agree to repay any tuition or stipends provided by the university if they fail to meet the three-year commitment. The 2007 Legislature revised this language to specify that students receiving a stipend or waiver must commit to practicing as a nurse or nursing instructor in Florida for at least three years. Students are still expected to repay any received funds if they fail to meet this three-year commitment.

The Legislature increased financial aid for prospective nurses

The 2006 Legislature moved \$1.6 million from the Nursing Student Loan Trust Fund to the nursing student loan reimbursement and scholarship programs. This funding is enough to support 133 new students or nursing instructors at the current award level of \$12,000 per year. The 2007 Legislature also allocated \$1.6 million for nursing student loan reimbursement and scholarship programs, supporting another 133 new students or nursing instructors.

The Florida Board of Nursing and the Legislature took steps to increase the use of simulators as a partial substitute for required clinical experience

The Florida Board of Nursing requires nursing programs to provide students a specific number of hours or training in a clinical setting like a hospital, but hospitals and other health care facilities are limited in their ability to provide these clinical slots. As we recommended in our 2005 report, the Florida Board of Nursing, in October 2006, increased the allowable use of simulators in nursing education programs from a total of 10% of direct care experience to 25%. This increased use of simulators should help reduce the problem of limited clinical sites for nursing students.

In addition, to facilitate the expansion of simulation opportunities, the 2007 Legislature appropriated \$9.6 million in fixed capital outlay for the creation of simulation facilities at several public and private institutions. However, only \$3.6 million was actually distributed, as the former governor vetoed \$5.9 million for a Nursing Simulation Lab Facility at Broward Community College. Of the \$3.6 million distributed, Manatee Community College received \$175,000 for a Medical Tech/Simulation Center and private colleges and universities received \$3.5 million for a medical training and simulation lab. The Legislature also provided varying amounts to several colleges and universities to renovate nursing simulation laboratories and/or facilities.

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