



Office of Program Policy Analysis And Government Accountability



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Follow-Up Report on Florida's Teacher Certification System Administered by the Department of Education

Abstract

- The Legislature, the Department of Education, and the Education Standards Commission have taken steps to better ensure that teachers provide quality education and foster student learning. Florida has taken action to align the teacher certification and preparation systems with the Sunshine State Standards for student performance. Further, the 1997 Legislature revised the requirements for districts' teacher evaluation systems, which must now include indicators of improvement in student performance.
- However, while recent certification system modifications do include greater emphasis on student performance, certification requirements do not directly specify that students must demonstrate improved performance for a teacher to maintain certification. In addition, the Department has not yet identified specific goals and objectives for teacher certification, nor has it developed performance benchmarks and outcome measures to assess the effectiveness of teacher certification.

Purpose

In accordance with s. 11.45(7)(f), F.S., this follow-up report informs the Legislature of actions in response to Report No. 95-10, issued October 23, 1995. This report presents our assessment of the extent to which our findings and recommendations have been addressed.

Background

Florida regulates individuals who teach in public schools by requiring that they be certified. The purpose of teacher certification is to protect the educational interests of students, parents, and the public by assuring that teachers in this state are professionally qualified. The state requires teachers to renew their certificate(s) every five years to promote continued professional competency.

Prior Findings

Our prior report concluded that Florida should continue to certify its teachers but should revise the teacher certification system to better ensure that teachers provide quality education and foster student learning. We noted that the system under development by the Education Standards Commission provided for teacher-centered performance assessment but did not include a student performance assessment element to evaluate whether teachers should be certified.

Further, we noted that neither the Department of Education nor the Education Standards Commission had established goals, objectives, or measures for assessing whether teacher certification was meeting the intent established in the statutes.

Current Status

The Legislature, the Department, and the Education Standards Commission (ESC) have taken steps toward developing a system that includes student performance standards in the certification and evaluation of teachers. However, the Department and the ESC have not yet developed performance benchmarks and outcome

measures to assess the effectiveness of the teacher certification system.

Actions Partially Taken

Florida has taken action to align the teacher certification and preparation system with student performance standards and now requires districts to include student performance data in teachers' evaluations. However, the teacher certification system does not specify that students must demonstrate improved performance for a teacher to maintain certification.

Revised Teacher Certification System. In 1996, the Education Standards Commission identified 12 generic competencies needed by teachers to effectively instruct all students. These competencies, called Educator Accomplished Practices, are aligned with the Sunshine State Standards for expected student performance. The Commission identified benchmarks that teachers must meet for these competencies at the pre-professional, professional, and advanced levels of an educator's career. Teachers must demonstrate these practices to be certified.

The 1995 Legislature directed the Education Standards Commission to develop teacher content standards that are based upon the Sunshine State Standards. According to Department staff, development of teacher standards in English, mathematics, science, social studies, and elementary education is nearing completion. Content standards are also being identified in art, physical education, health, music, and foreign languages.

The 1997 Legislature revised the requirements for professional teaching certificates. The revisions specify that an initial professional certificate will be issued only after a prospective teacher has demonstrated subject area knowledge and understanding that is consistent with the Sunshine State Standards for students.

Revised Teacher Preparation System. The teacher preparation system has been revised to require performance-based evaluations of prospective educators. To maintain approval, a Florida-approved teacher preparation institution must require that students demonstrate the Educator Accomplished Practices at the pre-professional benchmark prior to graduation.

Revised Teacher Evaluation System. The 1997 Legislature revised the system for evaluating a teacher's performance. Each district's instructional personnel assessment system must now include data and indicators of improvement in student performance and be approved by the Department of Education. However, student performance comprises only one component of the evaluation system. If a teacher receives two consecutive unsatisfactory evaluations, the school board may dismiss the employee and, if dismissed, the teacher must be referred to the Department for possible action against his/her teaching certificate.

Actions Not Yet Taken

Goals and Objectives for Teacher Certification. The Department reports that implementation of the recommendation to establish teacher certification goals and objectives that could be used to assess the overall effectiveness of the certification requirements will be incorporated into its review and revision of certification rules for the different subject areas during Fiscal Years 1997-98 and 1998-99.

Performance Benchmarks and Outcome Measures. Specific performance benchmarks and outcome measures to assess the effectiveness of teacher certification have not yet been identified. In 1995-96, a Commissioner of Education's citizen task force was charged with examining the effectiveness of the existing teacher certification system and recommended changes to the certification system which subsequently prompted 1997 legislative changes. However, according to Department staff, assessing the effectiveness of the changes will be an ongoing process as changes are implemented on a short-term and long-term basis.

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