



Policy Brief

CS/HB 7069: "Best & Brightest Teachers and Principals"

Issue Summary

The Best & Brightest Teacher Scholarship Program (program) rewards teachers who have a high intellectual aptitude and who are skilled at improving student outcomes. By rewarding our best teachers, we can attract and retain the highest quality talent in the classroom and provide our students with the best education possible. The program is effective, but it is important we improve and expand the criteria for eligibility to further ensure its success.

We should also create a Best & Brightest program for principals, who are essential to the success of schools, teachers, and students. In particular, a principal's leadership is one of the most critical influences on a school's ability to recruit and retain the best teachers.

Background

The program is established in s. 1012.731, F.S., but it requires an annual appropriation. In 2016, lawmakers appropriated \$49 million to fund the program.

The program works as follows:

- To be eligible for a scholarship, a classroom teacher must have (1) scored at or above the 80th percentile on either the SAT or the ACT based on the National Percentile Ranks in effect when the classroom teacher took the test, and (2) have been evaluated by the district as "highly effective," in the previous school year (except for a new teacher).¹
- Once a classroom teacher is deemed eligible by the school district, the teacher will remain eligible as long as he or she remains employed by the school district as a classroom teacher and is rated highly effective.²
- By December 1, each school district, charter school governing board, and the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, has to submit to the Florida Department of Education (DOE) the number of eligible classroom teachers who qualify for the scholarship.³
- By February 1, DOE must disburse scholarship funds to each school district for each eligible classroom teacher.⁴
- By April 1, each school district must award the scholarship to each qualifying classroom teacher based on the amount provided in the General Appropriations Act.⁵

¹ Section 1012.731(3), F.S. (2016).

² *Id.*

³ Section 1012.731(4), F.S. (2016).

⁴ Section 1012.731(5), F.S. (2016).

⁵ Section 1012.731(6), F.S. (2016).



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Messaging

Best & Brightest Teachers

- The Florida House is committed to attracting the highest quality teachers to educate our students.
- The House also recognizes that other measures of academic ability are linked to teacher effectiveness, such as undergraduate academic performance.
- Proposed changes to the program include the following:
 - 1) Lowering the qualifying test score from the 80th to the 77th percentile
 - 2) Recognizing other national, standardized assessments that measure cognitive ability including the LSAT, GRE, GMAT, and the MCAT
 - 3) Allows teachers to satisfy the “highly effective” requirement based solely on their state-calculated value added model (VAM) score.
 - The VAM measures a teacher’s impact on student achievement.
- By lowering the qualifying test scores from the 80th percentile to the 77th percentile and recognizing other national, standardized assessments, more teachers will be eligible for the program. The new assessment score threshold is aligned to more rigorous entrance requirements established by the national teacher preparation program accrediting organization.
- Allowing teachers to demonstrate they are highly effective based on their state-calculated VAM score will prevent subjective components of evaluation from disqualifying a teacher from eligibility.
- Teacher quality makes a measurable difference in a student’s achievement. As stated in “The Irreplaceables,” a report by The New Teacher Project, the highest quality teachers on average help students learn five to six additional months’ worth of math and reading each year compared to low-performing teachers, and two to three months more compared to average-performing teachers.⁶

Best & Brightest Principals

- The Florida House recognizes the importance of leadership in our schools. A school’s principal is the most critical influence on the school’s ability to recruit and retain the most effective teachers.
- The Best & Brightest Principal Scholarship Program would provide a financial reward and increased autonomy over personnel and budget decisions to any principal who:
 - Has been at a school for at least two years; and
 - Has a ratio of Best & Brightest Teachers in the top 20% of the state, by school type (elementary, middle, high school, or combination).
- Because teacher effectiveness is essential to closing the achievement gap, the Best & Brightest principal program would also provide for a greater award amount to qualifying principals assigned to Title I schools (i.e., schools with high percentages of children from low-income families).

⁶ http://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_Irreplaceables_2012.pdf



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- Accordingly, the Best & Brightest principal program would provide principals with the authority and flexibility to make budgeting and personnel decisions. Such authority will encourage principals to work hard to create and maintain an environment that will make it easier to recruit and retain Best & Brightest teachers.

Counter Messaging/FAQs

Q: *If a teacher's standardized test score is not in the top 77th percentile when he or she first takes the test, will they ever be eligible for the scholarship program?*

A: If a teacher's original standardized test score is not in the top 77th percentile the teacher may retake the test and submit the new score. If a teacher is rated as highly effective and the new standardized test score meets the standard, the teacher will be eligible for the scholarship program.

Q: *Is there any research linking a teacher's performance on standardized assessments to how their students perform in the classroom?*

A:

- According to the scholarly article "Teacher Characteristics and Student Achievement Gains: A Review" published in the Review of Educational Research, there has been research linking teachers' scores on tests, such as the SAT or ACT, and the learning gains of those teachers' students. Specifically, it indicates that students learn more from teachers who achieved higher SAT or ACT scores, suggesting that quality teachers achieved high standardized test scores.⁷
- According to a study by the National Bureau of Economic Research, higher average teacher test scores are associated with higher math and reading achievement.⁸
- A study conducted in New York City public schools found that student achievement improved in high poverty areas when employment of teachers with higher SAT scores in Math and English were hired.⁹
- In a study conducted by the Education Policy Initiative at Carolina, teacher preparation programs that admitted applicants based on their ACT and SAT scores¹⁰ were linked with increased teacher effectiveness.¹¹

Q: *How can we implement this program even though there has been no proven success elsewhere?*

A: McKinsey & Company, an American-based global management consulting firm which conducts qualitative and quantitative analyses to evaluate management decisions, found that top performing countries, like Finland, recruit 100% of their new teachers from the top-third of college graduates. In the United States, just 23% of new teachers are from the top-third of college graduates. They argue if the United States recruited more top-third graduates to become teachers, our schools would improve dramatically.¹²

⁷ <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/00346543073001089>

⁸ <http://www.nber.org/papers/w12828.pdf>

⁹ The Narrowing Gap in New York City Teacher Qualifications and Its Implications for Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools

¹⁰ ACT of 24/SAT of 1120

¹¹ <https://publicpolicy.unc.edu/files/2015/07/Measuring-Up-The-National-Council-on-Teacher-Quality-Ratings-of-Teacher-Preparation-Programs-and-Measures-of-Teacher-Performance.pdf>

¹² http://mckinseyonsociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/Closing_the_talent_gap.pdf



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Q: *Are other instructional personnel able to qualify for a scholarship award?*

A: No, only classroom teachers, as defined by s. 1012.01(2)(a), F.S., may qualify as a Best & Brightest Teacher. This program focuses recognition on the education professionals who have the greatest impact on student learning. Personnel responsible for advising students, librarians, media specialists, educational paraprofessionals, and administrative personnel are not eligible to receive a scholarship award under this program.