

CHAPTER 2025-95

Committee Substitute for Committee Substitute for Senate Bill No. 112

An act relating to children with developmental disabilities; amending s. 381.9855, F.S.; revising the scope of the Dr. and Mrs. Alfonse and Kathleen Cinotti Health Care Screening and Services Grant Program to allow grant funds to be used for screenings, referrals for treatment, and related services for autism; amending s. 391.302, F.S.; revising applicability of definitions to conform to changes made by the act; defining the term “department”; amending s. 391.308, F.S.; revising requirements for the annual grant application submitted by the Department of Health for the Early Steps Program to conform to changes made by the act; creating s. 391.3081, F.S.; providing legislative intent; providing a purpose for the Early Steps Extended Option; defining the term “child”; requiring the department to seek federal approval for the Early Steps Extended Option; requiring the department, jointly with the Department of Education, to develop or amend any rule, policy, procedure, written agreement, or contract necessary to implement the Early Steps Extended Option; requiring the department to seek additional federal grant funds for implementation of the Early Steps Extended Option; authorizing the department to implement the Early Steps Extended Option regardless of certain federal funding; requiring local program offices of the Early Steps Program to include certain steps for transition in the individualized family support plan for each child served by the Early Steps Extended Option; specifying eligibility criteria for a child’s enrollment in the Early Steps Extended Option; providing that a child becomes ineligible to reenter the Early Steps Extended Option upon exiting; requiring local school districts, in conjunction with local program offices, to notify a child’s parent or legal guardian of his or her rights under certain circumstances; requiring local program offices to take specified steps for transitioning children out of the Early Steps Extended Option within a specified timeframe before they age out; requiring local program offices, in conjunction with local school districts, to modify or develop, as applicable, individual education plans with specified elements for such children; requiring local program offices and local school districts to provide specified written information to a child’s parent or legal guardian if the child is determined ineligible for school district program services; requiring the department to include a performance assessment of the Early Steps Extended Option in a specified annual report; specifying requirements for such assessment; providing an appropriation; creating s. 1003.5711, F.S.; providing legislative findings and intent; requiring the University of Florida Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment to oversee certain grants; requiring the center to develop guidelines for grant administration; providing eligibility requirements for grant applicants; providing that grants may be used for specified purposes; authorizing the center to prioritize grant allocations for specified purposes; requiring grant recipients to submit a specified report;

creating s. 1003.5712, F.S.; providing legislative findings and purpose; requiring the University of Florida Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment to fund specialized summer programs for children with autism spectrum disorder; requiring the center to publish guidelines for grant applications; requiring the center to provide technical assistance to grant applicants and recipients; providing eligibility requirements for the specialized summer programs; authorizing the center to set maximum grant amounts; requiring grant recipients to submit a report to the center within a specified timeframe; creating s. 1004.551, F.S.; creating the University of Florida Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment; providing duties of the center; requiring the center to develop an autism micro-credential; providing requirements for the micro-credential; providing a stipend as determined in the General Appropriations Act; requiring the center to administer stipends; requiring the center to publish on its website an annual report; prohibiting the host state university from charging certain fees to the center; amending s. 1012.582, F.S.; requiring the Commissioner of Education to review specified curricula by a specified date; requiring the commissioner to report findings and recommendations to the Legislature; amending s. 1012.585, F.S.; revising the process for the renewal of professional certificates to include training in the knowledge and skills required to support students with autism; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 381.9855, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

381.9855 Dr. and Mrs. Alfonse and Kathleen Cinotti Health Care Screening and Services Grant Program; portal.—

(1)(a) The Department of Health shall implement the Dr. and Mrs. Alfonse and Kathleen Cinotti Health Care Screening and Services Grant Program. The purpose of the program is to expand access to no-cost health care screenings or services for the general public facilitated by nonprofit entities. The department shall do all of the following:

1. Publicize the availability of funds and enlist the aid of county health departments for outreach to potential applicants at the local level.

2. Establish an application process for submitting a grant proposal and criteria an applicant must meet to be eligible.

3. Develop guidelines a grant recipient must follow for the expenditure of grant funds and uniform data reporting requirements for the purpose of evaluating the performance of grant recipients. The guidelines must require grant funds to be spent on screenings, including referrals for treatment, if appropriate, or related services for one or more of the following:

- a. Hearing.

- b. Vision.
- c. Dental.
- d. Cancer.
- e. Diabetes.
- f. Renal disease.
- g. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.
- h. Hypertension.
- i. Heart disease.
- j. Stroke.
- k. Scoliosis.
- l. Autism.

Section 2. Section 391.302, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

391.302 Definitions.—As used in ss. 391.301-391.3081 ~~ss. 391.301-391.308~~, the term:

(1) “Department” means the Department of Health.

(2) “Developmental delay” means a condition, identified and measured through appropriate instruments and procedures, which may delay physical, cognitive, communication, social or emotional, or adaptive development.

~~(3)~~(2) “Developmental disability” means a condition, identified and measured through appropriate instruments and procedures, which may impair physical, cognitive, communication, social or emotional, or adaptive development.

~~(4)~~(3) “Developmental intervention” or “early intervention” means individual and group therapies and services needed to enhance both the infant’s or toddler’s growth and development and family functioning. The term includes habilitative services and assistive technology devices, rehabilitative services and assistive technology devices, and parent support and training.

~~(5)~~(4) “Habilitative services and devices” means health care services and assistive technology devices that help a child maintain, learn, or improve skills and functioning for daily living.

~~(6)~~(5) Except as otherwise defined for the purposes of s. 391.3081, “infant or toddler” or “child” means a child from birth until the child’s third birthday.

(7)(6) “Local program office” means an office that administers the Early Steps Program within a municipality, county, or region.

(8)(7) “Rehabilitative services and devices” means restorative and remedial services that maintain or enhance the current level of functioning of a child if there is a possibility of improvement or reversal of impairment.

Section 3. Paragraph (a) of subsection (2) of section 391.308, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

391.308 Early Steps Program.—The department shall implement and administer part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which shall be known as the “Early Steps Program.”

(2) DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT.—The department shall:

(a) Annually prepare a grant application to the United States Department of Education for funding early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities, ~~from birth through 36 months of age~~, and their families pursuant to part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Section 4. Section 391.3081, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

391.3081 Early Steps Extended Option.—

(1) LEGISLATIVE INTENT.—The Legislature recognizes that continuity of care promotes positive outcomes in the learning and development of infants, toddlers, and children. It is the intent of the Legislature to offer families of children with developmental delays or disabilities a choice for such children to continue services in the Early Steps Program beyond the age of 3 years old.

(2) PURPOSE.—

(a) The purpose of the Early Steps Extended Option is to continue enrollment in the Early Steps Program for those children who are eligible. Therefore, the provisions of s. 391.308 are maintained and incorporated in the Early Steps Extended Option.

(b) For the purposes of this section, “child” means a child from birth until the beginning of the school year following the child’s fourth birthday, as provided in 34 C.F.R. s. 303.211(a)(2)(ii).

(3) DUTIES.—

(a) The department shall:

1. Submit its application for federal approval to extend eligibility for services under part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act no later than July 1, 2026.

2. Jointly with the Department of Education, develop or amend any rule, policy, procedure, written agreement, or contract necessary to implement the Early Steps Extended Option in accordance with state law and part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

3. Seek additional federal grant funds, as available, for the implementation of the Early Steps Extended Option, including a state incentive grant. However, the department may implement the Early Steps Extended Option regardless of the availability or acceptance of supplemental federal grant funds, contingent upon the appropriation of state funds.

(b) As part of the individualized family support plan for each child served under the Early Steps Extended Option, a local program office shall include steps for a child to transition to part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or other future services by the beginning of the school year following the child's fourth birthday.

(4) ELIGIBILITY.—The department must apply the following eligibility criteria if specific funding is provided in the General Appropriations Act:

(a) All of the following criteria must be met for a child to continue receiving Early Steps Program services under the Early Steps Extended Option:

1. The child must be determined eligible for early intervention services through the Early Steps Program at least 45 days before the child's third birthday.

2. The child must be determined eligible for services under part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

3. Before the child's third birthday, the family must choose to continue services through the Early Steps Extended Option, which shall include an educational component to promote school readiness and incorporate pre-literacy, language, and numeracy skills.

(b) A child becomes ineligible to reenter the Early Steps Extended Option upon exiting the program. If a family chooses to exit the Early Steps Extended Option before the beginning of the school year following the child's fourth birthday, the local school district, in conjunction with the local program office, must notify the child's parent or legal guardian of his or her rights under part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

(c) A child may not receive services under part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act while receiving services through the Early Steps Extended Option.

(d) A child may not receive a state scholarship under s. 1002.394 while receiving services through the Early Steps Extended Option.

(5) TRANSITION TO EDUCATION.—

(a) At least 90 days before the beginning of the school year following the fourth birthday of a child enrolled in the Early Steps Extended Option, the local program office shall initiate transition planning to ensure the child's successful transition from the Early Steps Extended Option to a school district program under part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or to another program as part of an individual family support plan. Specifically, the local program office shall:

1. Notify the Department of Education and the local school district in which the child resides that the eligible child is exiting the Early Steps Extended Option, unless the child's parent or legal guardian has opted out of such notification; and

2. Upon approval by the child's parent or legal guardian, convene a transition conference that includes participation of a local school district representative and the parent or legal guardian to discuss options for and availability of services.

(b) The local program office, in conjunction with the local school district, shall modify a child's individual family support plan, or, if applicable, the local school district shall develop or review an individual education plan for the child pursuant to ss. 1003.57, 1003.571, and 1003.5715 which identifies special education or related services that the child will receive and the providers or agencies that will provide such services.

(c) If a child is found to be no longer eligible for part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act during the review of an individual education plan, the local program office and the local school district must provide the child's parent or legal guardian with written information on other available services or community resources.

(6) ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING.—The department shall include a performance assessment of the Early Steps Extended Option in the annual report specified in s. 391.308(5).

(a) The assessment must include:

1. The number and percentage of children eligible under part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act who receive services through the Early Steps Extended Option.

2. The number and percentage of children determined eligible to receive services under part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

3. The number and percentage of children determined ineligible to receive services under part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

(b) The Department of Education shall provide to the department data necessary for the evaluation of the Early Steps Program and the Early Steps Extended Option, including, but not limited to, the number and percentage of children who are referred by either program and who elect to receive services under part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Section 5. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the recurring sum of \$720,282 and the nonrecurring sum of \$35,622 are appropriated from the General Revenue Fund, and six full-time equivalent positions are authorized, to the Department of Health for the purpose of implementing the Early Steps Extended Option as created by this act.

Section 6. Section 1003.5711, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

1003.5711 Startup grant for autism charter schools.—

(1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.—

(a) The Legislature finds that students identified as having autism spectrum disorder may require highly specialized educational environments and resources to achieve their full potential.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature to support the creation of schools exclusively serving this population by providing startup funding to offset the costs of developing and implementing these specialized programs.

(2) ADMINISTRATION.—

(a) The University of Florida Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment shall oversee the application, evaluation, and distribution of grants under this section.

(b) The center shall develop guidelines for grant administration, including:

1. Application procedures and deadlines.
2. Criteria for program eligibility and funding priorities.
3. Reporting and accountability standards for grant recipients.
4. A preapproval process to assist applicants with planning in the charter school application process under s. 1002.33(6) and (7).

(3) ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS AND USE OF FUNDS.—

(a) The guidelines developed by the center must, at a minimum, require applicants, before approval for a startup grant, to:

1. Demonstrate intent, in accordance with guidelines developed by the center, to establish or expand a charter school pursuant to s. 1002.33, or a

laboratory school under s. 1002.32, to serve exclusively students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and classified as exceptional students under s. 1003.01(9).

2. Provide evidence of community need and stakeholder support, which may include letters of intent to enroll from families or organizations.

3. Submit a detailed plan outlining:

a. Instructional methods and proposed support services, including evidence-based practices for students with autism.

b. Family engagement and strategies for coordinating necessary services for students outside of school hours and as students transition to adulthood.

c. Anticipated startup costs and a budget for use of grant funds.

d. Strategies for leveraging other federal and state funding.

4. Provide evidence of financial stability and programmatic expertise.

5. Attest to compliance with state and federal laws.

(b) Grants may be used for the following purposes:

1. Facility acquisition, renovation, or modification.

2. Purchase or development of specialized instructional materials, curriculum, assistive technology, and adaptive equipment.

3. Recruitment, salaries, and training of staff experienced in working with students with autism and significant cognitive disabilities.

4. Student transportation.

5. Ancillary equipment related to student safety.

(4) FUNDING AND GRANT AMOUNTS.—

(a) The grant is subject to legislative appropriation.

(b) The center shall annually determine the maximum grant amount for each school on the basis of the annual appropriation in relation to projected applications.

(c) The center may prioritize grants for schools in the following priority:

1. Programs serving rural and underserved areas.

2. Programs serving other underserved areas.

3. Programs with demonstrable success in establishing and operating a charter school exclusively for students with autism and related disorders.

4. Programs that use existing facilities.

(d) An applicant may not receive funds until the applicant has received approval from a sponsoring entity to operate a charter school or modify an existing charter pursuant to s. 1002.33(6) and (7), or has established a school advisory body for a laboratory school in accordance with s. 1002.32(8).

(5) REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY.—Grant recipients must submit an annual report to the Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment detailing:

(a) How grant funds were expended.

(b) Enrollment and program outcomes following the first complete school year of operation.

(c) Challenges encountered and recommendations for improvement.

Section 7. Section 1003.5712, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

1003.5712 Specialized summer programs for children with autism and related disorders.—

(1) PURPOSE AND INTENT.—

(a) The Legislature finds that many children with autism spectrum disorder face challenges during the summer months due to limited access to extended school year programs, summer school, and traditional summer camps that can accommodate their needs.

(b) The purpose of this section is to support specialized summer programs that provide structured, supportive environments for these children, ensuring continuity of care, skill development, and social engagement.

(2) ADMINISTRATION AND GRANTS.—

(a) The University of Florida Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment shall administer a grant program to fund specialized summer programs for children with autism spectrum disorder who have significant emotional or behavior disorders or cognitive disabilities.

(b) Grants may be awarded annually to eligible entities, subject to available appropriations.

(c) The center shall develop and publish guidelines for grant applications, including criteria for program eligibility, use of funds, and reporting requirements.

(d) The center shall provide technical assistance to grant applicants and recipients.

(3) PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY AND STANDARDS.—The guidelines developed by the center must, at a minimum, require programs to:

(a) Serve children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for whom placement in a summer camp that is not equipped to serve such children is inappropriate.

(b) Provide a structured schedule of activities that may include, but are not limited to:

1. Behavioral and social skill development.
2. Recreational and leisure activities tailored to individual needs.
3. Therapy-based support, including speech, occupational, or behavioral therapies, when appropriate.
4. Family support and training workshops.

(c) Employ staff with relevant experience or training in working with children with autism and severe emotional, behavioral, or cognitive disorders.

(d) Maintain a safe and inclusive environment, with appropriate staff-to-participant ratios.

(e) Operate in compliance with all applicable state and federal laws, including health and safety regulations.

(f) Provide a full-day program for at least 4 weeks.

(g) Leverage other available federal or state funding sources, including Medicaid waivers, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and other federal funding, or private contributions, to supplement state grants.

(4) FUNDING.—

(a) Grants are subject to legislative appropriation.

(b) Grants may be used for any of the following purposes:

1. Facility costs.
2. Staff salaries and training.
3. Curriculum or other instructional or activity costs.
4. Property and liability insurance.
5. Equipment purchase or rental.
6. Transportation for camp participants.

(c) The center shall prioritize awarding grants to programs that:

1. Serve underserved or rural areas where specialized summer programs are unavailable.

2. Provide comprehensive support services, including family involvement and community integration.

(d) The center may set maximum grant amounts and require matching funds contributions from grant recipients, dependent upon available funds and projected participation.

(e) In addition to criteria determined by the center, grant amounts may vary based on the services provided and the duration of the program.

(5) REPORTING AND OVERSIGHT.—Grant recipients must submit a report to the Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment within 45 days after the conclusion of the summer program detailing:

(a) Program enrollment and participation.

(b) Use of grant funds.

(c) Outcomes related to participant engagement, skill-building, and family satisfaction.

Section 8. Section 1004.551, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

1004.551 University of Florida Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment.—There is created at the University of Florida the Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment.

(1) The center shall:

(a) Collaborate with state and local agencies that provide early intervention, educational, medical, employment, financial, and daily living services. The center shall also collaborate with other entities that provide autism research and services, including, but not limited to, the Florida State University Autism Institute, each Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD), the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS), the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, the Department of Health, the Department of Education, and the Department of Children and Families.

(b) Coordinate information and resources related to research, best practices, training, and public awareness to better support families of children with autism.

(c) Develop strategies to promote public awareness of the signs of autism, the importance of early screening, and interventions and supports available to families. The center shall assist in the assignment of a toll-free number for autism support.

(d) Catalog and distribute best practices related to screening tools, diagnosis, and interventions.

(e) Review and approve applications for specialized summer programs for children with autism pursuant to s. 1003.5712. The center shall act as the fiscal agent for grant funds and develop minimum requirements for the creation of specialized summer programs.

(f) Develop an autism micro-credential to provide specialized training in supporting students with autism.

1. The micro-credential must be stackable with the autism endorsement and be available to:

a. Instructional personnel as defined in s. 1012.01(2);

b. Prekindergarten instructors as specified in ss. 1002.55, 1002.61, and 1002.63; and

c. Child care personnel as defined in ss. 402.302(3) and 1002.88(1)(e).

2. The micro-credential must require participants to demonstrate competency in:

a. Identifying behaviors associated with autism.

b. Supporting the learning environment in both general and specialized classroom settings.

c. Promoting the use of assistive technologies.

d. Applying evidence-based instructional practices.

3. The micro-credential must:

a. Be provided at no cost to eligible participants.

b. Be competency-based, allowing participants to complete the credentialing process either in person or online.

c. Permit participants to receive the micro-credential at any time during training once competency is demonstrated.

4. Individuals eligible under subparagraph 1. who complete the micro-credential are eligible for a one-time stipend, as determined in the General Appropriations Act. The center shall administer stipends for the micro-credential.

(g) Develop strategies to increase the workforce qualified to provide autism-related services to children and adults in a public or private setting.

(h) Develop and catalog professional learning activities for health care, child welfare, and instructional personnel.

(i) Administer startup grants for autism charter schools pursuant to s. 1003.5711 and provide technical assistance to grant applicants and recipients. The center shall also review access to federal funding sources for establishing charter schools for students with autism and include in its annual report recommendations for improving practical access.

(j) Catalog best practices for screening, referral, and diagnosis; access to therapy services; and other licensed practitioner services using private and public insurance, to include access to services in schools.

(k) Beginning August 1, 2026, and each August 1 thereafter, publish on its website a report detailing activities, expenditures, and outcomes from the previous year. The report must include the grants administered by the center and recommendations for improvement.

(2) The host state university may not charge any indirect administrative fees to the center.

Section 9. Subsection (5) is added to section 1012.582, Florida Statutes, to read:

1012.582 Continuing education and inservice training for teaching students with developmental and emotional or behavioral disabilities.—

(5) The commissioner shall review the curricula in continuing education or inservice education of instructional personnel based on recommendations required under this section. No later than December 1, 2025, the commissioner shall report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on findings and recommendations for updates to instruction.

Section 10. Paragraph (a) of subsection (3) of section 1012.585, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

1012.585 Process for renewal of professional certificates.—

(3) For the renewal of a professional certificate, the following requirements must be met:

(a) The applicant must earn a minimum of 6 college credits or 120 inservice points or a combination thereof. For each area of specialization to be retained on a certificate, the applicant must earn at least 3 of the required credit hours or equivalent inservice points in the specialization area. Education in “clinical educator” training pursuant to s. 1004.04(5)(b); participation in mentorship and induction activities, including as a mentor, pursuant to s. 1012.56(8)(a); credits or points that provide training in the knowledge and skills required to support students with autism; and credits or points that provide training in the area of scientifically researched,

knowledge-based reading literacy grounded in the science of reading, including explicit, systematic, and sequential approaches to reading instruction, developing phonemic awareness, and implementing multi-sensory intervention strategies, and computational skills acquisition, exceptional student education, normal child development, and the disorders of development may be applied toward any specialization area. Credits or points that provide training in the areas of drug abuse, child abuse and neglect, strategies in teaching students having limited proficiency in English, or dropout prevention, or training in areas identified in the educational goals and performance standards adopted pursuant to ss. 1000.03(5) and 1008.345 may be applied toward any specialization area, except specialization areas identified by State Board of Education rule that include reading instruction or intervention for any students in kindergarten through grade 6. Each district school board shall include in its inservice master plan the ability for teachers to receive inservice points for supporting students in extracurricular career and technical education activities, such as career and technical student organization activities outside of regular school hours and training related to supervising students participating in a career and technical student organization. Credits or points earned through approved summer institutes may be applied toward the fulfillment of these requirements. Inservice points may also be earned by participation in professional growth components approved by the State Board of Education and specified pursuant to s. 1012.98 in the district's approved master plan for inservice educational training; however, such points may not be used to satisfy the specialization requirements of this paragraph.

Section 11. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.

Approved by the Governor May 27, 2025.

Filed in Office Secretary of State May 27, 2025.