

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Military Affairs and Domestic Security Committee

BILL: CS/SB 2016

INTRODUCER: Military Affairs and Domestic Security Committee and Senator Wise

SUBJECT: High School Graduation

DATE: March 17, 2010 REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Pardue	Pardue	MS	Fav/CS
2.			ED	
3.			EA	
4.			WPSC	
5.				
6.				

Please see Section VIII. for Additional Information:

A. COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE..... Statement of Substantial Changes

B. AMENDMENTS..... Technical amendments were recommended

Amendments were recommended

Significant amendments were recommended

I. Summary:

This committee substitute for SB 2016 provides for the establishment in statute of the Florida National Guard’s currently existing Youth Challenge Program. The bill provides for the award of a standard high school diploma under the General Education Development (GED) Exit Option and directs the State Board of Education to adopt rules for high school equivalency diplomas.

This bill substantially amends sections 1003.435 and 1008.34 and creates 1003.452 and 1003.4282 of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Florida Youth Challenge Program

The following background information is provided from the Florida Youth Challenge Academy website:

The Youth Challenge Program began as a National Guard pilot program in 1993 to address the problem of high school dropouts under Public Law 102-484. The program now operates in at least 29 states.

The Florida Youth Challenge Program currently is a cooperative effort the Departments of Education, Juvenile Justice, Children and Family Services, the Clay County School District, and the Florida National Guard. It is housed at Camp Blanding in an existing military complex that has been renovated to accommodate administrative and operational program requirements.

To qualify, a Youth Challenge Academy applicant must meet the following minimum eligibility criteria:

- Be at least 16 but not more than 19 years old;
- Be a high school dropout, expellee, or disenrollee;
- A citizen or legal resident of the United States and of the State of Florida;
- Unemployed/underemployed;
- Not currently on probation or parole for other than misdemeanor offenses;
- Not charged, under indictment, or awaiting sentencing;
- Not convicted of a felony;
- Free of illegal drugs;
- Physically and mentally capable of completing the program; and
- Be a volunteer.

The program consists of three phases: A two-week pre-Challenge phase, a five month residential Challenge phase, and a one-year post residential phase that includes case management and mentoring. Participants in the Challenge phase become cadets and undergo a demanding and highly regimented motivational period. The motivational period includes academics (GED completion), community service, job skills, leadership/followership, life-coping skills, physical fitness, and health education.

Funding is provided by the United States Department of Defense and the State of Florida, graduating a class of 125 cadets twice a year. There is no charge to the participants.

Academy staff consists of an operational staff and a cadre with in-depth military experience, certified instructors from the Clay County School District, a registered nurse practitioner, counselors, and recruitment/placement personnel.¹

The academic portion of the program, until recently, led to either a standard high school diploma awarded under the GED exit option or a GED adult education State of Florida high school diploma.² The Department of Education has ruled that the GED exit option statewide may no longer lead to the award a standard high school diploma. Students now receive a high school equivalency diploma under the GED exit option.³

Youth Challenge vocational and technical education offers a wide variety of courses including:

- AUTOCAD computer aided drafting and design;
- Electronic communications including basic electricity and electronic communications systems circuitry;

¹ Florida Youth Challenge website at <http://www.ngycp.org/site/state/fl/node/15039> last viewed on March 15, 2010.

² Florida Youth Challenge website at <http://www.ngycp.org/site/state/fl/content> last viewed on March 15, 2010.

³ Florida Department of Education Memorandum, Dr. Frances Haithcock, *GED Exit Option*, dated August 12, 2009.

- Television broadcasting/video production;
- Internal combustion engine basics;
- Horticulture including the science of growing fruits, vegetables, flowers, shrubs, and trees;
- Landscape design;
- Carpentry;
- Home security systems;
- Home wiring;
- Home plumbing;
- Hydroponics plant growing;
- Graphic communications vinyl sign making;
- Desktop publishing;
- Exploratory level home design; and
- Aquaculture resources.⁴

GED Exit Option

The GED exit option program was developed to assist in high school dropout prevention including students at risk of not graduating with their cohort group.⁵ The option provides an opportunity for high school dropouts and those students at-risk of not graduating with their entry cohort to obtain a high school equivalency diploma. This option is not intended to be an early exit vehicle for at-risk students. It requires that students pass both the GED test and the FCAT and complete other requirements in order to receive the high school equivalency diploma.⁶

In addition to the Youth Challenge Program, school districts statewide and the Department of Juvenile Justice use the GED exit option as part of their dropout prevention and at-risk student programs.⁷

School Grades

Section 1008.34, F.S., establishes a system for assessing student achievement and awarding individual schools a grade for progress achieved during the school year. A school's grade is based on a combination of:

- Student achievement scores, including achievement scores for students seeking a special diploma;
- Student learning gains as measured by annual FCAT assessments in grades 3 through 10;
- Improvement of the lowest 25th percentile of students in the school in reading, mathematics, or writing on the FCAT unless these students are exhibiting satisfactory performance;
- Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, high schools' grades are based 50% on the preceding criteria and 50% from the following:
 - The school's high school graduation rate;

⁴ Florida Youth Challenge website at <http://www.ngycp.org/site/state/fl/content> last viewed on March 15, 2010.

⁵ A cohort group is formed each year consisting of all the students who enter kindergarten. Students remain in their cohort group until high school graduation.

⁶ Florida Department of Education (FDOE), The GED Exit Option Model Procedure Manual, 2003 and Ibid., FDOE August 12, 2009 Memorandum.

⁷ Ibid., GED Exit Option Model Procedure Manual.

- Performance and participation of the school's students in College Board Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate courses, dual enrollment courses, and Advanced International Certificate of Education courses; and students' achievement of industry certification, as determined by the Agency for Workforce Innovation under s. 1003.492(2), F.S.;
- Postsecondary readiness of the school's students as measured by the SAT, ACT, or the common placement test;
- The high school graduation rate of at-risk students who scored at Level 2 or lower on the grade 8 FCAT Reading and Mathematics examinations;
- Performance of the school's students on statewide standardized end-of-course assessments administered under s. 1008.22, F.S.; and
- The growth or decline in the components listed above from year to year.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1. Committee substitute for SB 2016 creates s. 1003.452, F.S., to establish the Florida National Guard Youth Challenge Program in statute. The Youth Challenge Program is created as a community-based program for the purpose of leading, training, and mentoring at-risk youths. This bill directs that the program will be jointly administered by the Clay County School District, the Departments of Juvenile Justice and Children and Family Services, and the Florida National Guard.

Under the provisions of this bill, the Youth Challenge Program must consist of a residential component of at least 22 weeks and must raise each student's mathematics, science and reading scores. High school dropouts who: are between the ages of 16 and 19, have not been convicted of a felony, and are drug free may participate. After the residential component is completed, each student shall be assigned a case manager and a highly trained mentor for a period of at least 12 months.

The program core academic course must include at a minimum:

- Mathematics;
- Communications;
- Science;
- Social Studies; and
- Literature;

As well as life skills education including:

- Occupational or technical studies in cooperation with a technical training center or college that awards occupational or technical certificates;
- Physical training or applied health studies;
- Leadership; and
- Volunteerism.

Each student is required to successfully work as an unpaid intern or paid worker during the 12-month post-residential period in order to successfully complete the program. Students are required to be paired with a mentor who has demonstrated qualifications to serve as a positive role model.

In addition, students must pass all five parts of the GED test and both parts of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

The United States Department of Defense, through the National Guard Bureau and the Florida National Guard, and in conjunction with the Departments of Juvenile Justice and Children and Family Services shall provide for the costs of the program including student housing, food, and clothing. The Clay County School District must fund the instructional component of the program through funds provided by the Florida Education Finance Program.

Section 2. Section 1003.4282 is created to provide for the GED Education Development Exit Option for students who are enrolled in the Youth Challenge Program or programs offered by or under contract with the Department of Juvenile Justice and approved by the Department of Education.

To be eligible to participate in the GED exit option a student must be enrolled in the Youth Challenge Program established in s. 1003.452, F.S., as created in this bill or programs offered by or under contract with the Department of Juvenile Justice and approved by the Department of Education and must meet the following criteria:

- Be enrolled in courses that meet high school graduation requirements;
- Have been a drop-out student or currently be in the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice;
- Have earned acceptable scores on the official GED practice test administered under student-testing conditions approved by the school district; and
- Have a student cumulative record that indicates that the GED exit option is the most appropriate educational program for the student.

Under the provisions of this bill the following exemption and requirements apply to Youth Challenge students who participate in the GED exit option:

- A student who participates in the GED exit option shall be exempt from the minimum graduation requirements prescribed for the standard high school diploma, including the grade point average and credit requirements. For exceptional students, this exemption must be included in the individual education plan;
- Upon entering the GED exit option, a student who has not previously met the grade 10 promotion requirements will be promoted to that grade in order to take the grade 10 FCAT;
- A student who has not met the requirements for high school graduation in grade 12 and elects to return for a 13th year in order to participate in the GED exit option is not required to continue classes upon completion of the GED exit option graduation requirements. A student shall be considered a high school graduate upon completion of the GED exit option requirements; and
- If the school district or school to which the student returns for a 13th year requires a vocational component for graduation, the student may be required to complete this requirement in addition to the GED exit option requirements in order to be considered a high school graduate.

To successfully complete the GED exit option, a student in order to receive a standard high school diploma, must pass the GED test, all sections of the grade 10 FCAT, and any vocational components included in an approved school program. A GED exit option student may not graduate before his or her cohort group. Student transcripts must identify only the actual credits earned, the successful completion of the FCAT requirements, and the date on which the diploma was awarded.

Students who successfully complete the GED exit option and receive a standard high school diploma shall be included in the high school grade calculated by the Department of Education pursuant to s. 1008.34, F.S., as if the student had completed high school graduation prescribed in s. 1003.43, F.S.

Section 3. The bill amends s. 1003.435, F.S., relating to candidates for high school equivalency diplomas.

- The bill directs the State Board of Education to adopt rules for high school equivalency diploma eligibility requirements;
- The Department of Education is given authority to authorize a school district to award high school equivalency diplomas to candidates who meet performance standards prescribed by the State Board of Education;
- School districts may participate in a program established for students who are currently enrolled in K-12 public schools, leading to the award of a high school equivalency diploma, pursuant to rules established by the State Board of Education; and
- The State Board of Education may adopt rules establishing conditions under which a student who is enrolled in a K-12 public school may take the high school equivalency examination prior to age 18.

Except as otherwise provided in s. 1008.34, F.S., all high school equivalency diplomas issued under the provisions of s. 1003.435, F.S., have equal status with other high school diplomas for all state purposes including admission to any state higher education institution.

Section 4. This proposed committee bill amends s. 1008.34, F.S., to allow schools, beginning in 2010-2011, to earn additional points on their school grade if a significant percentage of students not earning a standard high school diploma earn a high school equivalency diploma. The State Board of Education may elect to afford greater weight to diplomas awarded pursuant to s. 1003.435 (3) (b) than granted to other equivalency diplomas.

Section 5. The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2010.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The Youth Challenge Program is designed to provide drop-out students with academic, vocational, and life skills in order for them to enter and successfully perform in the work place.

C. Government Sector Impact:

This bill requires the Clay County School District to fund the instructional component of the program through funds provided by the Florida Education Finance Program. This funding requirement reflects currently existing operating policy for the Youth Challenge Program and is not a change.

The Department of Military Affairs indicates that there are no fiscal impacts arising from this bill.⁸ The Youth Challenge Program is primarily funded by the United States Department of Defense.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

CS by Military Affairs and Domestic Security on March 17, 2010.

Students who successfully complete the GED exit option and are awarded a standard high school diploma may be counted towards a high school's grade as computed by the Department of Education pursuant to s. 1008.34, F.S.

School districts may participate in a program leading to the award of a high school equivalency diploma to students currently enrolled in K-12 public schools pursuant to

⁸ Department of Military Affairs staff analysis of SB 2016 dated March 3, 2010.

rules adopted by the State Board of Education. The State Board of Education may adopt rules under which a currently enrolled K-12 public school student may take the high school equivalency diploma examination before the student reaches the age of 18. The department may authorize a district school board to award a high school equivalency diploma.

B. Amendments:

None.