



Mar 29, 2005

Turning out teachers in one year

By PAUL QUINLAN
pquinlan@hernandotoday.com

Facing a looming 24,000-teacher shortage, lawmakers have turned to the state's community colleges for help. Tallahassee's prescription: creating a condensed, one-year program designed to turn individuals with college degrees into trained and certified teachers.

Last month, Pasco-Hernando Community College, along with 24 other Florida community colleges, applied to the state Department of Education to participate in the program. The colleges will also turn back to Tallahassee to ask for money necessary to fund such a large-scale teacher training effort, officials said.

"We have no money, period," said Paul Szuch, PHCC's vice president of educational services. "That's what all of us are looking at right now. We're hoping to have funding in place for next year." To alleviate the teacher drought, the legislature laid the groundwork for the programs, called educator training institutes, in a bill passed last year.

The one-year competency program would compress into one year what most college education programs cover in two or three.

But the training programs will still match the rigors of a normal college or university education program, requiring 295 contact hours - some of which will be spent in hands-on training in school district classrooms - versus the 315 required in most two or three-year programs, according to Stanley Giannet, dean of arts, letters and social sciences at PHCC.

Since students must already have earned a degree to enroll in the institutes, the program may focus on teaching only the methods and subject-specific material necessary to move into the teaching profession, Giannet said. "The individuals who come into this program will have the skill sets and dispositions of a professional. They will have the foundation," Giannet said. "All we're providing is the methodology courses along with the field experience." To pass and receive certification, students would still be required to pass three state tests required for teacher certification, which cover knowledge of teaching profession and methods as well as material related to the specific subject in which a teacher hopes to be certified, Szuch said.

Pasco County School Superintendent Heather Fiorentino said she began work on the program as a state legislator. She said she realized that the alternative certification methods now in place were inadequate. "In the past, it was just on-the-job training," Fiorentino said. "With this new way, we'll provide the training ahead of time."

Officials expect that the cost to students will be around \$1,000, plus the cost of textbooks, testing and other fees. But those costs could change, as community colleges gain a clearer picture of how the program will work. "There's a critical need out there for teachers, and there's already people who are hungry to teach but do not have the methodology and experience to be certified," said Giannet.

The Florida Department of Education estimates that Florida will need about 31,000 more teachers in 2006-07. Next year, state colleges are expected to turn out only about 6,500 teachers to meet that demand, leaving a shortfall of more than 24,000.

In the recent past, Florida school districts have had to find around 16,000 new teachers a year, according to DOE figures.



That need grew to about 22,500 in 2003, when school districts were first forced to reduce the number of students in each classroom under the requirements of the class-size reduction amendment.

Meanwhile, a large portion of the state's existing teachers began to near retirement age as the state's population and student enrollment grew. In 2003, almost 10 percent of the state's teachers retired, more than in any previous year, according to a DOE study.

The same study said teacher retirement could reach unprecedented heights in the decade following 2006.

Reporter Paul Quinlan can be contacted at (352) 544-5289.

This story can be found at: <http://www.hernandotoday.com/MGB91HSXW6E.html>