

**By** the Committee on Education Pre-K - 12; and Senator Harrell

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to students with autism spectrum disorder; amending s. 1004.85, F.S.; requiring certain program participants at educator preparation institutes to complete the autism micro-credential; requiring each educator preparation institute to offer training on teaching students with certain disabilities; creating s. 1009.636, F.S.; providing legislative findings; creating the Autism Educator Loan Forgiveness Program; providing eligibility requirements; providing criteria for loan repayment assistance; providing requirements for teachers to receive an annual payment; requiring the State Board of Education to adopt rules; amending s. 1012.22, F.S.; revising salary supplements a district school board must provide; revising which district school board duties collective bargaining may not preclude; amending s. 1012.551, F.S.; revising core curricula for teacher preparation programs; requiring a teacher preparation program to include the autism micro-credential; amending s. 1012.552, F.S.; providing that the Coaching for Educator Readiness and Teaching Certification Program must include completion of the autism micro-credential; amending s. 1012.585, F.S.; revising requirements for the renewal of a professional certificate; amending s. 1012.586, F.S.; providing that personnel certified in exceptional student education who complete the Autism Spectrum Disorder Endorsement are eligible for a stipend;

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30       amending s. 1012.98, F.S.; requiring a professional  
31       learning system to provide at least one autism-  
32       specific professional development opportunity;  
33       providing requirements for the professional  
34       development; providing an effective date.

35  
36       Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

37  
38       Section 1. Paragraph (b) of subsection (3) of section  
39       1004.85, Florida Statutes, is amended, and subsection (9) is  
40       added to that section, to read:

41       1004.85 Postsecondary educator preparation institutes.—  
42       (3) Educator preparation institutes approved pursuant to  
43       this section may offer competency-based certification programs  
44       specifically designed for noneducation major baccalaureate  
45       degree holders to enable program participants to meet the  
46       educator certification requirements of s. 1012.56. An educator  
47       preparation institute choosing to offer a competency-based  
48       certification program pursuant to the provisions of this section  
49       must implement a program developed by the institute and approved  
50       by the department for this purpose. Approved programs shall be  
51       available for use by other approved educator preparation  
52       institutes.

53       (b) Each program participant must:

54       1. Meet certification requirements pursuant to s.  
55       1012.56(1) by obtaining a statement of status of eligibility in  
56       the certification subject area of the educational plan and meet  
57       the requirements of s. 1012.56(2) (a)-(f) before participating in  
58       field experiences.

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59        2. Demonstrate competency and participate in field  
60 experiences that are appropriate to his or her educational plan  
61 prepared under paragraph (a). Beginning with candidates entering  
62 an educator preparation institute in the 2022-2023 school year,  
63 a candidate for certification in a coverage area identified  
64 pursuant to s. 1012.585(3)(f) must successfully complete all  
65 competencies for a reading endorsement, including completion of  
66 the endorsement practicum through the candidate's field  
67 experience, in order to graduate from the program.

68        3. Before completion of the program, fully demonstrate his  
69 or her ability to teach the subject area for which he or she is  
70 seeking certification by documenting a positive impact on  
71 student learning growth in a prekindergarten through grade 12  
72 setting and, except as provided in s. 1012.56(7)(a)3., achieving  
73 a passing score on the professional education competency  
74 examination, the basic skills examination, and the subject area  
75 examination for the subject area certification which is required  
76 by state board rule.

77        4. For each participant who is certified in exceptional  
78 student education, complete the autism micro-credential created  
79 pursuant to s. 1004.551(1)(f).

80        (9) By August 1, 2027, as a condition for continued program  
81 approval, each educator preparation institute must offer  
82 instruction and training on evidence-based practices for  
83 teaching students with autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome,  
84 other developmental disabilities, and emotional or behavioral  
85 disabilities, consistent with the uniform core curricula  
86 developed by the department.

87        Section 2. Section 1009.636, Florida Statutes, is created

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88 to read:

89 1009.636 Autism educator loan forgiveness program.—90 (1) The Legislature finds that an adequate supply of  
91 special education teachers is critical to provide students who  
92 have a neurodevelopmental disability, such as autism spectrum  
93 disorder, with individualized education to foster essential  
94 social-emotional skills, provide positive interventions, and  
95 build life skills for independence. The Autism Educator Loan  
96 Forgiveness Program is created to recruit and retain qualified  
97 individuals to serve as special education teachers for students  
98 with autism spectrum disorder.99 (2) To be eligible, an individual must:100 (a) 1. Have earned a master's or higher degree in special  
101 education or exceptional student education from an accredited  
102 institution and have an active student loan balance from  
103 completion of that degree, and hold a temporary or professional  
104 certificate; or105 2. Have earned a bachelor's or higher degree from an  
106 accredited institution and have an active student loan balance  
107 from completion of that degree, hold a temporary or professional  
108 certificate, and hold the Autism Spectrum Disorder Endorsement  
109 or Severe or Profound Disabilities Endorsement; and110 (b) Serve as the primary teacher in a public school  
111 classroom in which a majority of the students have autism  
112 spectrum disorder.113 (3) Eligible participants may receive up to \$17,500 in  
114 total student loan repayment assistance over 5 years, disbursed  
115 in annual payments not to exceed \$3,500 per year. Payments must  
116 be made directly to the lender servicing the participant's

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117 student loan.118 (4) In order for the department to release each annual  
119 payment, a teacher must:120 (a) Have completed a full year of service pursuant to  
121 paragraph (2) (b) .122 (b) Have received a rating of effective or highly effective  
123 pursuant to s. 1012.34.124 (c) Not have had any disciplinary action taken by the  
125 school district or by the department against the teacher's  
126 certificate.127 (5) The State Board of Education shall adopt rules to  
128 administer this section.129 Section 3. Paragraph (c) of subsection (1) and paragraph  
130 (a) of subsection (3) of section 1012.22, Florida Statutes, are  
131 amended to read:132 1012.22 Public school personnel; powers and duties of the  
133 district school board.—The district school board shall:134 (1) Designate positions to be filled, prescribe  
135 qualifications for those positions, and provide for the  
136 appointment, compensation, promotion, suspension, and dismissal  
137 of employees as follows, subject to the requirements of this  
138 chapter:139 (c) *Compensation and salary schedules.*—

140 1. Definitions.—As used in this paragraph:

141 a. "Adjustment" means an addition to the base salary  
142 schedule that is not a bonus and becomes part of the employee's  
143 permanent base salary and shall be considered compensation under  
144 s. 121.021(22) .

145 b. "Grandfathered salary schedule" means the salary

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146 schedule or schedules adopted by a district school board before  
147 July 1, 2014, pursuant to subparagraph 4.

148 c. "Instructional personnel" means instructional personnel  
149 as defined in s. 1012.01(2) (a)-(d), excluding substitute  
150 teachers.

151 d. "Performance salary schedule" means the salary schedule  
152 or schedules adopted by a district school board pursuant to  
153 subparagraph 5.

154 e. "Salary schedule" means the schedule or schedules used  
155 to provide the base salary for district school board personnel.

156 f. "School administrator" means a school administrator as  
157 defined in s. 1012.01(3) (c).

158 g. "Supplement" means an annual addition to the base salary  
159 for the term of the negotiated supplement as long as the  
160 employee continues his or her employment for the purpose of the  
161 supplement. A supplement does not become part of the employee's  
162 continuing base salary but shall be considered compensation  
163 under s. 121.021(22).

164 2. Cost-of-living adjustment.—A district school board may  
165 provide a cost-of-living salary adjustment if the adjustment:

166 a. Does not discriminate among comparable classes of  
167 employees based upon the salary schedule under which they are  
168 compensated.

169 b. Does not exceed 50 percent of the annual adjustment  
170 provided to instructional personnel rated as effective.

171 3. Advanced degrees.—A district school board may use  
172 advanced degrees in setting a salary schedule for instructional  
173 personnel or school administrators if the advanced degree is  
174 held in the individual's area of certification.

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175        4. Grandfathered salary schedule.—

176        a. The district school board shall adopt a salary schedule

177        or salary schedules to be used as the basis for paying all

178        school employees hired before July 1, 2014. Instructional

179        personnel on annual contract as of July 1, 2014, shall be placed

180        on the performance salary schedule adopted under subparagraph 5.

181        Instructional personnel on continuing contract or professional

182        service contract may opt into the performance salary schedule if

183        the employee relinquishes such contract and agrees to be

184        employed on an annual contract under s. 1012.335. Such an

185        employee shall be placed on the performance salary schedule and

186        may not return to continuing contract or professional service

187        contract status. Any employee who opts into the performance

188        salary schedule may not return to the grandfathered salary

189        schedule.

190        b. In determining the grandfathered salary schedule for

191        instructional personnel, a district school board must base a

192        portion of each employee's compensation upon performance

193        demonstrated under s. 1012.34 and shall provide differentiated

194        pay for both instructional personnel and school administrators

195        based upon district-determined factors, including, but not

196        limited to, additional responsibilities, school demographics,

197        high-demand teacher needs areas, and level of job performance

198        difficulties.

199        5. Performance salary schedule.—By July 1, 2014, the

200        district school board shall adopt a performance salary schedule

201        that provides annual salary adjustments for instructional

202        personnel and school administrators based upon performance

203        determined under s. 1012.34. Employees hired on or after July 1,

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204 2014, or employees who choose to move from the grandfathered  
205 salary schedule to the performance salary schedule shall be  
206 compensated pursuant to the performance salary schedule once  
207 they have received the appropriate performance evaluation for  
208 this purpose.

209 a. Base salary.—The base salary shall be established as  
210 follows:

211 (I) The base salary for instructional personnel or school  
212 administrators who opt into the performance salary schedule  
213 shall be the salary paid in the prior year, including  
214 adjustments only.

215 (II) Instructional personnel or school administrators new  
216 to the district, returning to the district after a break in  
217 service without an authorized leave of absence, or appointed for  
218 the first time to a position in the district in the capacity of  
219 instructional personnel or school administrator shall be placed  
220 on the performance salary schedule.

221 b. Salary adjustments.—Salary adjustments for highly  
222 effective or effective performance shall be established as  
223 follows:

224 (I) The annual salary adjustment under the performance  
225 salary schedule for an employee rated as highly effective must  
226 be at least 25 percent greater than the highest annual salary  
227 adjustment available to an employee of the same classification  
228 through any other salary schedule adopted by the district.

229 (II) The annual salary adjustment under the performance  
230 salary schedule for an employee rated as effective must be equal  
231 to at least 50 percent and no more than 75 percent of the annual  
232 adjustment provided for a highly effective employee of the same

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233 classification.

234 (III) A salary schedule shall not provide an annual salary  
235 adjustment for an employee who receives a rating other than  
236 highly effective or effective for the year.237 c. Salary supplements.—In addition to the salary  
238 adjustments, each district school board shall provide for salary  
239 supplements for activities that must include, but are not  
240 limited to:

241 (I) Assignment to a Title I eligible school.

242 (II) Assignment to a school that earned a grade of "F" or  
243 three consecutive grades of "D" pursuant to s. 1008.34 such that  
244 the supplement remains in force for at least 1 year following  
245 improved performance in that school.246 (III) Certification and teaching in high-demand teacher  
247 needs areas. Statewide high-demand teacher needs areas shall be  
248 identified by the State Board of Education under s. 1012.07.  
249 However, the district school board may identify other areas of  
250 high-demand needs within the school district for purposes of  
251 this sub-sub-subparagraph and may remove areas identified by the  
252 state board which do not apply within the school district.

253 (IV) Assignment of additional academic responsibilities.

254 (V) Completion of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Endorsement.255  
256 If budget constraints in any given year limit a district school  
257 board's ability to fully fund all adopted salary schedules, the  
258 performance salary schedule shall not be reduced on the basis of  
259 total cost or the value of individual awards in a manner that is  
260 proportionally greater than reductions to any other salary  
261 schedules adopted by the district. Any compensation for

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262 longevity of service awarded to instructional personnel who are  
263 on any other salary schedule must be included in calculating the  
264 salary adjustments required by sub-subparagraph b.

265 (3) (a) *Collective bargaining.*—Notwithstanding provisions of  
266 chapter 447 related to district school board collective  
267 bargaining, collective bargaining may not preclude a district  
268 school board from carrying out its constitutional and statutory  
269 duties related to the following:

270 1. Providing incentives to effective and highly effective  
271 teachers.

272 2. Implementing intervention and support strategies under  
273 s. 1008.33 to address the causes of low student performance and  
274 improve student academic performance and attendance.

275 3. Implementing student discipline provisions required by  
276 law, including a review of a student's abilities, past  
277 performance, behavior, and needs.

278 4. Implementing school safety plans and requirements.

279 5. Implementing staff and student recognition programs.

280 6. Distributing correspondence to parents, teachers, and  
281 community members related to the daily operation of schools and  
282 the district.

283 7. Providing any required notice or copies of information  
284 related to the district school board or district operations  
285 which is readily available on the school district's website.

286 8. The school district's calendar.

287 9. Providing incentives to exceptional student education  
288 teachers who complete the Autism Spectrum Disorder Endorsement,  
289 in addition to any stipend funded in the General Appropriations  
290 Act for completion of the endorsement, and who serve as the

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291 primary teacher in a classroom in which a majority of the  
292 students have autism spectrum disorder.

293       Section 4. Paragraph (g) of subsection (2) of section  
294 1012.551, Florida Statutes, is amended, and subsection (4) is  
295 added to that section to read:

296       1012.551 Teacher preparation core principles, standards,  
297 and content.—

298       (2) The uniform core curricula for each state-approved  
299 teacher preparation program must meet, at a minimum, the  
300 following standards:

301       (g) Must include strategies for differentiated instruction  
302 to meet student needs, including English language learners and  
303 students with disabilities, while maintaining grade-level  
304 expectations. The strategies must also include specific training  
305 aligned with evidence-based practices for supporting students  
306 with autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, other  
307 developmental disabilities, and emotional or behavioral  
308 disabilities applicable across all levels of support.

309       (4) Each state-approved teacher preparation program using  
310 the uniform core curricula developed pursuant to this section  
311 must include the autism micro-credential created pursuant to s.  
312 1004.551(1)(f), which shall count for at least 1 semester hour  
313 toward completion of the program.

314       Section 5. Paragraph (g) is added to subsection (2) of  
315 section 1012.552, Florida Statutes, to read:

316       1012.552 The Coaching for Educator Readiness and Teaching  
317 (CERT) Certification Program.—

318       (2) PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS.—A CERT program must include all  
319 of the following:

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320        (g) Required successful completion of the autism micro-  
321        credential created pursuant to s. 1004.551(1)(f) for a candidate  
322        certification in exceptional student education.

323        Section 6. Paragraph (e) of subsection (3) of section  
324        1012.585, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

325        1012.585 Process for renewal of professional certificates.—

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

328        (e) Beginning July 1, 2014, an applicant for renewal of a  
329        professional certificate must earn a minimum of one college  
330        credit or the equivalent inservice points in the area of  
331        instruction for teaching students with disabilities. The  
332        requirement in this paragraph may not add to the total hours  
333        required by the department for continuing education or inservice  
334        training. Beginning August 1, 2027:

335        1. Instruction for teaching students with disabilities must  
336        include autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, other  
337        developmental disabilities, and emotional or behavioral  
338        disabilities.

339        2. An applicant certified in exceptional student education  
340        must earn the autism micro-credential created pursuant to s.  
341        1004.551(1)(f), which must count toward 3 college credits or the  
342        equivalent inservice points. Once earned, an applicant is not  
343        required to earn the micro-credential for additional renewal  
344        periods.

345        Section 7. Subsection (3) is added to section 1012.586,  
346        Florida Statutes, to read:

347        1012.586 Additions or changes to certificates; duplicate  
348        certificates; reading endorsement pathways.—

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349        (3) Personnel certified in exceptional student education  
350        who complete the Autism Spectrum Disorder Endorsement are  
351        eligible for a stipend as specified in the General  
352        Appropriations Act.

353        Section 8. Paragraph (b) of subsection (5) of section  
354        1012.98, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

355        1012.98 School Community Professional Learning Act.—

356        (5) The Department of Education, school districts, schools,  
357        Florida College System institutions, and state universities  
358        share the responsibilities described in this section. These  
359        responsibilities include the following:

360        (b) Each school district shall develop a professional  
361        learning system as specified in subsection (4). The system shall  
362        be developed in consultation with teachers, teacher-educators of  
363        Florida College System institutions and state universities,  
364        business and community representatives, and local education  
365        foundations, consortia, and professional organizations. The  
366        professional learning system must:

367        1. Be reviewed and approved by the department for  
368        compliance with s. 1003.42(3) and this section. Effective March  
369        1, 2024, the department shall establish a calendar for the  
370        review and approval of all professional learning systems. A  
371        professional learning system must be reviewed and approved every  
372        5 years. Any substantial revisions to the system must be  
373        submitted to the department for review and approval. The  
374        department shall establish a format for the review and approval  
375        of a professional learning system.

376        2. Be based on analyses of student achievement data and  
377        instructional strategies and methods that support rigorous,

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378 relevant, and challenging curricula for all students. Schools  
379 and districts, in developing and refining the professional  
380 learning system, shall also review and monitor school discipline  
381 data; school environment surveys; assessments of parental  
382 satisfaction; performance appraisal data of teachers, managers,  
383 and administrative personnel; and other performance indicators  
384 to identify school and student needs that can be met by improved  
385 professional performance.

386 3. Provide inservice activities coupled with follow-up  
387 ~~followup~~ support appropriate to accomplish district-level and  
388 school-level improvement goals and standards. The inservice  
389 activities for instructional and school administrative personnel  
390 shall focus on analysis of student achievement data; ongoing  
391 formal and informal assessments of student achievement;  
392 identification and use of enhanced and differentiated  
393 instructional strategies that emphasize rigor, relevance, and  
394 reading in the content areas; enhancement of subject content  
395 expertise; integrated use of classroom technology that enhances  
396 teaching and learning; classroom management; parent involvement;  
397 and school safety.

398 4. Provide inservice activities and support targeted to the  
399 individual needs of new teachers participating in the  
400 professional learning certification and education competency  
401 program under s. 1012.56(8)(a).

402 5. Include a professional learning catalog for inservice  
403 activities, pursuant to rules of the State Board of Education,  
404 for all district employees from all fund sources. The catalog  
405 must be updated annually by September 1, must be based on input  
406 from teachers and district and school instructional leaders, and

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407 must use the latest available student achievement data and  
408 research to enhance rigor and relevance in the classroom. Each  
409 district inservice catalog must be aligned to and support the  
410 school-based inservice catalog and school improvement plans  
411 pursuant to s. 1001.42(18). Each district inservice catalog must  
412 provide a description of the training that middle grades  
413 instructional personnel and school administrators receive on the  
414 district's code of student conduct adopted pursuant to s.  
415 1006.07; integrated digital instruction and competency-based  
416 instruction and CAPE Digital Tool certificates and CAPE industry  
417 certifications; classroom management; student behavior and  
418 interaction; extended learning opportunities for students; and  
419 instructional leadership. District plans must be approved by the  
420 district school board annually in order to ensure compliance  
421 with subsection (1) and to allow for dissemination of research-  
422 based best practices to other districts. District school boards  
423 shall submit verification of their approval to the Commissioner  
424 of Education no later than October 1, annually. Each school  
425 principal may establish and maintain an individual professional  
426 learning plan for each instructional employee assigned to the  
427 school as a seamless component to the school improvement plans  
428 developed pursuant to s. 1001.42(18). An individual professional  
429 learning plan must be related to specific performance data for  
430 the students to whom the teacher is assigned, define the  
431 inservice objectives and specific measurable improvements  
432 expected in student performance as a result of the inservice  
433 activity, and include an evaluation component that determines  
434 the effectiveness of the professional learning plan.

435 6. Include inservice activities for school administrative

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436 personnel, aligned to the state's educational leadership  
437 standards, which address updated skills necessary for  
438 instructional leadership and effective school management  
439 pursuant to s. 1012.986.

440 7. Provide for systematic consultation with regional and  
441 state personnel designated to provide technical assistance and  
442 evaluation of local professional learning programs.

443 8. Provide for delivery of professional learning by  
444 distance learning and other technology-based delivery systems to  
445 reach more educators at lower costs.

446 9. Provide for the continuous evaluation of the quality and  
447 effectiveness of professional learning programs in order to  
448 eliminate ineffective programs and strategies and to expand  
449 effective ones. Evaluations must consider the impact of such  
450 activities on the performance of participating educators and  
451 their students' achievement and behavior.

452 10. For all grades, emphasize:

453 a. Interdisciplinary planning, collaboration, and  
454 instruction.

455 b. Alignment of curriculum and instructional materials to  
456 the state academic standards adopted pursuant to s. 1003.41.

457 c. Use of small learning communities; problem-solving,  
458 inquiry-driven research and analytical approaches for students;  
459 strategies and tools based on student needs; competency-based  
460 instruction; integrated digital instruction; and project-based  
461 instruction.

462  
463 Each school that includes any of grades 6, 7, or 8 shall include  
464 in its school improvement plan, required under s. 1001.42(18), a

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465 description of the specific strategies used by the school to  
466 implement each item listed in this subparagraph.

467 11. Provide training to reading coaches, classroom  
468 teachers, and school administrators in effective methods of  
469 identifying characteristics of conditions such as dyslexia and  
470 other causes of diminished phonological processing skills;  
471 incorporating instructional techniques into the general  
472 education setting which are proven to improve reading  
473 performance for all students; and using predictive and other  
474 data to make instructional decisions based on individual student  
475 needs. The training must help teachers integrate phonemic  
476 awareness; phonics, word study, and spelling; reading fluency;  
477 vocabulary, including academic vocabulary; and text  
478 comprehension strategies into an explicit, systematic, and  
479 sequential approach to reading instruction, including  
480 multisensory intervention strategies. Such training for teaching  
481 foundational skills must be based on the science of reading and  
482 include phonics instruction for decoding and encoding as the  
483 primary instructional strategy for word reading. Instructional  
484 strategies included in the training may not employ the three-  
485 cueing system model of reading or visual memory as a basis for  
486 teaching word reading. Such instructional strategies may include  
487 visual information and strategies which improve background and  
488 experiential knowledge, add context, and increase oral language  
489 and vocabulary to support comprehension, but may not be used to  
490 teach word reading. Each district must provide all elementary  
491 grades instructional personnel access to training sufficient to  
492 meet the requirements of s. 1012.585(3)(f).

493 12. Provide at least one autism-specific professional

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494 development opportunity annually for instructional personnel and  
495 school-based administrators. The professional development must  
496 be developed and delivered in coordination with the district's  
497 assigned Center for Autism and Related Disabilities and must  
498 include evidence-based practices for supporting students with  
499 autism spectrum disorder across all levels of need, including  
500 academic instruction, behavioral supports, communication  
501 strategies, and inclusive practices.

502       Section 9. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.