

# Managing the Florida Certification Program at the High School and District Levels

---

Ben Dalton, Elizabeth Glennie, and Siri Warkentien



## ABOUT THE ISSUE BRIEF

---

This issue brief is part of a body of work on the implementation and outcomes of Florida’s Career and Professional Education (CAPE) Act. *“The role of industry-recognized credentials in high school completion and postsecondary enrollment in Florida”* (Florida Industry Certification Study) is examining the ways districts and schools in Florida support high school students in earning industry certifications and the benefits and challenges of these programs. The experiences of Florida’s districts and schools can inform policymakers and educators in Florida and nationally who are considering similar policies.

The Florida Industry Certification Study is being conducted by RTI International with funding from the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences under Grant No. R305A170222. The views represented here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education.

Visit [www.flcertificationstudy.org](http://www.flcertificationstudy.org) to learn more about the study and to explore findings on topics such as school strategies for promoting industry certifications, teacher supports in this program, perceived costs of the program, and challenges to the program.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

---

[Ben Dalton](#) is an expert on college and career readiness with more than a decade of experience in education research and large-scale education studies. He directs research and data collection activities for the U.S. Department of Education and other public- and private-sector clients.

[Elizabeth Glennie](#) is a senior research education analyst at RTI International and is the principal investigator on the Florida Industry Certification Study. She designs and leads studies that examine the implementation and impact of U.S. educational policies on schools, teachers, and students. Many of her projects focus on factors influencing success in secondary school and access to postsecondary education for disadvantaged students.

[Siri Warkentien](#) is a research education analyst at RTI International. Her work focuses on how social contexts affect well-being among children and young adults, with a concentration on racial and economic inequalities in schools and neighborhoods.



## Introduction

In Florida, students can earn industry certifications (also known as certifications) through programs supported by the state’s Career and Professional Education (CAPE) Act. These certifications, developed by industry vendors, measure a person’s job-specific skills in fields such as architecture and construction, health science, hospitality and tourism, and information technology. Students who earn such certifications demonstrate industry-relevant proficiency, may be eligible to earn college credits based on statewide articulation agreements, and may graduate with documentation of their knowledge and skills in addition to a high school diploma.<sup>1</sup> Schools earn points on the Florida School Report Card for the proportion of students taking and passing certification exams.

In 2018, Florida had 239 certifications on its CAPE Industry Certification Funding List.<sup>2</sup> Multiple vendors provide these certifications, so offering them is more complicated for schools than, for example, working with the College Board to increase the number of Advanced Placement offerings in a school or district. Incorporating opportunities to earn industry certifications at school requires several steps. At the district and school level, leaders must decide which certifications to offer, ensuring that they have—or can hire—qualified teachers. Someone must work with industry vendors to ensure that the school has access to any technology needed for the exam, and if not, that students can take exams at a site that will have such technology. Leaders can set goals for certification exam participation and earning, determine which students should participate in the CAPE program, and devise strategies for recruiting them. Finally, schools need to report student exam participation and passing data to the Florida Department of Education.

As part of a [study on the implementation of the CAPE Act](#), we surveyed all Florida public school districts and public high schools in 2018 to assess how they managed certification programs.<sup>3</sup> This issue brief uses the [survey results](#) to examine program responsibilities at the school and district levels. Survey respondents, who were the individuals most knowledgeable about the certification program in their school or district, answered questions about

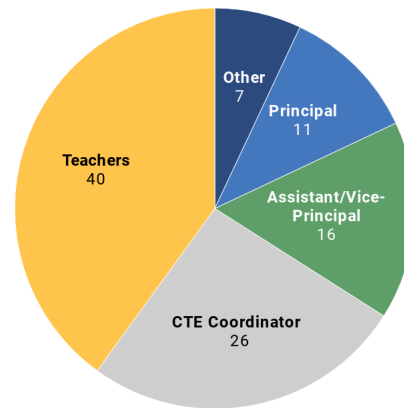
- who was primarily responsible for administering the certification program, and
- what were the responsibilities of the person(s) managing the certification program.

## Program Responsibility: Who's Responsible?

Figure 1 shows who was responsible for managing certifications at the school level. *Teachers were most often responsible for administering the program* (40% of all schools), followed by a dedicated career and technical education (CTE) coordinator (26%), although principals and vice-principals together (27% combined) were as likely to administer the program as CTE coordinators. In a few schools, others, including district-level staff, administered the program at the school level.

Program administration at the school level depended on the size and type of the school (table 1). The *smallest quartile of schools was less likely to have a dedicated CAPE coordinator (21%) than larger quartiles of schools (25% to 31%)*. Similarly, charter schools were less likely (21%) than non-charter schools (26%) to have a CAPE coordinator and much more likely to have another school leader (principal or assistant/vice-principal) administering the program (56% versus 24% for non-charter schools).

**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of school staff responsible for administering certification program in Florida public schools: 2017**



Note: "Other" includes district staff, other school staff such as guidance counselors, and "don't know" responses.

Source: Florida Industry Certification Study

**Table 1. Percentage distribution of school staff responsible for administering certification programs in Florida public schools, by school characteristic: 2017**

School characteristics	CTE coordinator	Other school leaders	Teachers	Other/ don't know
<b>Locale</b>				
Urban	24	31	39	6
Suburban	27	29	39	6
Rural	26	20	43	10
<b>Free and reduced-price lunch rate</b>				
Low (0%-25%)	29	17	54	0
Middle (26%-75%)	27	28	37	8
High (76%-100%)	19	29	45	7
<b>School size (number of students)</b>				
600 or fewer	21	27	44	9
601-1,500	26	28	38	8
1,501-2,000	31	26	38	6
More than 2,000	25	27	41	6
<b>Charter status</b>				
No	26	24	42	8
Yes	21	56	24	0

Note: "Other school leaders" include principals and assistant/vice-principals.

Source: Florida Industry Certification Study

*Districts were much more likely to have a CTE coordinator overseeing the district's responsibilities: 83% of districts reported that a CTE or CAPE coordinator was responsible for managing the program (table 2). Smaller districts were less likely to have a CTE coordinator, but a majority of even the smallest districts (62%) had one.*

**Table 2. Percentage of school staff responsible for administering certification program in Florida public school districts**

	CTE coordinator	Other school leaders	Other/ don't know
<b>Overall</b>	83	13	4
<b>District size (number of students)</b>			
1,200 or fewer	62	31	8
1,201-3,500	80	20	0
3,501-12,000	92	0	8
More than 12,000	100	0	0

Source: Florida Industry Certification Study

### **Program Responsibility: What Do Program Managers Do?**

Managing the certification program can require a range of activities, including planning to offer certain certifications, recruiting teachers, promoting the program to students, working with industry vendors, and managing the coordination of exam taking. Table 3 shows the specific responsibilities of the program manager for both schools and districts (some questions were on only the school or the district survey).

***The most common responsibility, reported by 89% of schools and 93% of districts, was monitoring or tracking participation and/or passing rates.*** Schools also very frequently reported setting program goals (81%) as a program responsibility. Coordinating transportation to exams was the only responsibility not identified by a majority of schools and districts.

For some responsibilities, districts more often indicated that they had a program responsibility than the school did. For example, ***83% of districts reported that they decided which certifications to offer, compared to 71% of schools.*** Among districts, 69% set student eligibility policies, while 58% of schools did. The largest difference between schools and districts, however, was in scheduling exams, which was primarily a school responsibility (67%) rather than a district one (31%).

**Table 3. Percentage of Florida public schools and districts reporting each program responsibility**

Responsibility	School	District	Difference
Setting program goals	81	85	4
Administering finances	-	89	-
Deciding which certifications to offer	71	83	12
Setting student eligibility policy	58	69	10
Promoting certifications	-	89	-
Recruiting students	64	-	-
Recruiting teachers	-	70	-
Negotiating testing costs with vendors	-	59	-
Scheduling exams for students	67	31	-35
Coordinating student transportation to exams	14	22	8
Monitoring participation and/or passing rates	89	93	3

- Not applicable

Source: Florida Industry Certification Study

Program responsibilities differed by the type of program manager (table 4). In particular, schools whose program manager was a CTE coordinator, school leader, or teacher were more likely to report having responsibilities than other kinds of managers. Similarly, at the district level, certification managers who were CTE coordinators were more likely to report having responsibilities than other types of program managers. These differences were sometimes quite large: for example, although 96% of district CTE coordinators administered program finances, only 56% of other managers did so. ***These results suggest that district-level CTE coordinators are critical in managing the program, including financial matters.***

At the school level, the CTE coordinator or school leader more often set goals and decided which certifications to offer, while teachers more often recruited students into classes and scheduled exams.

**Table 4. Percentage of Florida public school and districts reporting each program responsibility, by type of program manager**

<b>School</b>	<b>CTE coordinator</b>	<b>School leader</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Other/ Don't know</b>
Setting program goals	77	94	77	67
Deciding which certifications to offer	78	83	63	52
Setting student eligibility policy	66	50	61	44
Recruiting students	49	64	79	37
Scheduling exams for students	56	43	94	44
Coordinating student transportation to exams	16	13	14	7
Monitoring participation and/or passing rates	92	87	91	78

<b>District</b>	<b>CTE coordinator</b>	<b>Other</b>
Setting program goals	89	67
Administering finances	96	56
Deciding which certifications to offer	87	67
Setting student eligibility policy	76	33
Promoting certifications	93	67
Recruiting teachers	76	44
Negotiating testing costs with vendors	64	33
Scheduling exams for students	31	33
Coordinating student transportation to exams	27	0
Monitoring participation and/or passing exams	96	78

Source: Florida Industry Certification Study



## Implications

---

Managing certifications is a complex endeavor involving multiple subjects, certification providers, and exam coordination. In general, *districts tended to have more responsibility for deciding which certifications to offer, recruiting qualified teachers, administering finances, and working with the vendors, while schools tended to have more responsibility for recruiting students into the program and scheduling exams.*

Within schools, a variety of people are responsible for certification programs, and the specific role is partly dependent on school size and other characteristics. For example, while teachers were the most likely person to administer the program in schools overall, in charter schools, principals and assistant/vice-principals most frequently managed the program. *The differing school resource constraints, staff burdens, and school needs likely helped drive these different patterns and individual school decisions about who would manage the certification programs.*

Teachers, CTE coordinators, and administrators shared responsibilities in different ways. Teachers often had responsibility for managing the school certification program. It may be the case that multiple teachers within a school collaborate on managing the program. If only a single teacher is responsible, it may be challenging for area CTE teachers to advise about or recruit students into certifications outside their particular subject area. This could result in students having fewer opportunities across career areas.

At the district level, CTE coordinators tended to have most responsibilities associated with this program. *District CTE coordinators consistently reported having responsibility for a variety of program activities more frequently than other district managers.* District CTE coordinators likely have more experience, training, or district supports to manage these responsibilities. Most districts have a CTE coordinator, and those without one may have a difficult time managing the program and providing the most opportunities for their students.

## End Notes

---

### Overall Notes

Results reported in this issue brief include school survey data collected through the Florida Industry Certification Study and are based on the schools that offer certifications. For more information about the study, please visit: <https://flcertificationstudy.org/about-the-study>.

### References

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fldoe.org/academics/career-adult-edu/career-technical-edu-agreements/industry-certification.stml>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fldoe.org/academics/career-adult-edu/cape-secondary/cape-industry-cert-funding-list-current.stml>. The count of 239 (school year 2017–18) does not include CAPE Digital Tool Certificates, which are for middle school students.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see <https://flcertificationstudy.org/survey-methods>. The Florida Industry Certification Study is being conducted by RTI International with funding from the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Grant No. R305A170222. The views represented here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education.