

# Rollout of the Career and Professional Education (CAPE) Act

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Elizabeth Glennie, Erich Lauff, and Randolph Ottem



## ABOUT THE ISSUE BRIEF

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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 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 that are considering similar policies.

This analysis of the rollout of the CAPE Act was funded by the U.S. Department of Education Contract No. ED-VAE-12-C0051. For more information, please see *Examining the Influence of the Florida Career and Professional Education Act of 2007. Changes in Industry Certifications and Educational and Employment Outcomes*: [https://flcertificationstudy.org/s/Examining\\_the\\_Influence\\_of\\_the\\_CAPE\\_Act.PDF](https://flcertificationstudy.org/s/Examining_the_Influence_of_the_CAPE_Act.PDF)

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 AUTHOR

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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. These studies have involved analyzing large national databases and data collected by states and specific intervention programs. She has developed surveys and interview protocol for students, teachers, and educational leaders.

Dr. Glennie has studied early college high schools, STEM schools, and other new models and strategies that have proliferated in North Carolina and across the country. Throughout her work, she communicates and collaborates with policymakers and service providers so that her studies can inform best practices.



## Introduction

In 2007, the Florida legislature passed the Career and Professional Education (CAPE) Act to provide rigorous and relevant coursework that can lead to industry certification and college credit for high school students. This Act focuses on providing a means for students to earn certifications considered critical to Florida employers. Students trying to earn these certifications do not pay examination costs, nor do they need to schedule the examination or arrange for transportation to an examination site. The schools handle that for them as well as providing the courses necessary to succeed in these exams. Earning industry certifications may bring real-world relevance to high school education and help students become more engaged with school.

During the initial rollout of the CAPE program, the number of industry certifications earned by secondary school students dramatically increased. Almost 50 times as many certifications were awarded in 2011-12 (45,557) as had been in 2007-08 (954 certifications).

In 2017, RTI issued a [report on its study of the roll-out of this high school industry certification program](#). This work was funded by the U.S. Department of Education Contract No. ED-VAE-12-C0051. The study used academic and certification data from Florida's Education Data Warehouse to track a cohort of first-time ninth-graders in 2007–08, the first year of the program, through 2012–13, when they were 3 years out of high school. Comparisons of certification earners and with those who did not earn certifications, identified which kinds of students elected to earn a certification, and it illuminated strong relationships between earning certifications and high school attendance, graduation, and postsecondary enrollment.

## Certification Earning

Although numbers of certifications earned increased dramatically for the students in this cohort, some groups of students earned certifications less frequently than one might expect given their representation in this cohort.

- Males were 53 percent of the sample, but they earned 49 percent of certifications.
- Blacks were 25 percent of the sample, but they earned 19 percent of the certifications.
- Whites were 44 percent of the sample, but they earned 48 percent of certifications.
- 56 percent of these students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, but they earned 53 percent of the certifications.

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Students who took at least three career and technical education (CTE) courses had the highest rates of earning certifications. Certifications may be particularly important for these students, who may be less focused on college-going, by allowing them to explore relevant and in-demand career possibilities. At the same time, about 40 percent of certifications were earned by students who had taken CTE courses and who had taken required courses for admission to Florida's university system. Apparently, schools promoted certifications to students on the college preparatory track and did not limit certification opportunities to those who were not on a college preparatory track.

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School characteristics were associated with differences in certification rates.

- In terms of racial composition, schools with lower racial/ethnic minority populations had the highest rates of earning certifications (40 percent compared to 30 percent in schools where racial/ethnic minorities predominate).
- City schools had lowest proportion of certifications (19 percent), while suburban schools accounted for more than half of all awards (52 percent).
- The study classified schools as city, suburban, or rural, and found students in higher poverty schools had lower rates of certification-earning than students in more affluent schools, regardless of whether these were city, suburban, or rural schools. Higher poverty schools may not have had recourses to fully implement and promote certifications during the early stages of Florida's CAPE Act, meaning that poorer students may have had fewer opportunities to get certifications.

Not all students who took certification exams passed them. For this group of students, 64 percent of those who took certification exams passed them. Pass rates differed across schools and students. Certification-

Certification-level exam pass rates were highest in schools with the lowest percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (68 percent) and in schools with the lowest percentage of students who were underrepresented minorities (69 percent).

level exam pass rates were highest in schools with the lowest percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (68 percent) and in schools with the lowest percentage of students who were underrepresented minorities (69 percent). Florida schools receive state recognition not only for the percentage of students who pass the exam, but also for the percentage of students who take the exam. Some may push under-prepared students to take the exam, and other schools and programs may not have equipped their students to succeed on certification exams.



## Certification Outcomes

- On average, students who earned certifications had fewer absences, earned more credits in 12th grade, and had higher high school graduation rates.
- Certification earners were more likely than non-earners to enroll in a 2- or 4-year college after graduating from high school.
- Among those who enrolled in community college, certification earners were more likely to enroll immediately after their high school graduation, to persist into a second year of college, and to attain an associate degree.

Certifications may smooth the transition to postsecondary educational programs by allowing students to explore their interests prior to investing time and money in postsecondary schooling, providing crucial information about the demands of workplace preparation, and enabling students to accumulate postsecondary credit.

## Interviews

In addition to analyzing the state's administrative data, the study team conducted semi-structured interviews with a sample of eight Florida school districts identified as possessing exemplary certification programs by Florida Department of Education staff. These interviews provide crucial background information for constructing a broader survey of school and district policies that affect certification preparation, access, and later outcomes.

District staff described many benefits of this program. The CAPE Act benefited:

- Students by preparing them to get jobs, and giving them potential college credit;
- Teachers and schools by giving schools credit on the Florida School Report Card for students who take and pass industry-recognized exams; and
- Districts by allowing them to identify the most effective certification programs.

However, district officials said that districts face a variety of challenges in increasing the number and success of high school students taking certification exams. These challenges include start-up or ramp-up costs, program management, teacher qualifications, and exam scheduling.

The district officials also described their certification promotion strategies and test retake policies for students who have failed.

## Fit with current work

The current [Florida Industry Certification Study](#) builds on this work. The responses to these interviews informed the design of the 2018 survey. RTI will examine whether the patterns identified here persisted once the program became established.