



Office of Inspector General
Bureau of Educator Certification – Versa Certification Process

Report # A-1920DOE-028 / A-1920DOE-029

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Executive Summary

In accordance with the Department of Education’s fiscal year (FY) 2020-21 audit plan, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted audits of the Bureau of Educator Certification’s (BEC) Educator Certification Process and the associated Versa system. The audits were combined into one report for streamlining and clarity purposes. The purpose of these audits was to determine whether BEC has appropriate internal controls over the educator certification process; ensures compliance with state regulations and department policies and procedures; and has effective information technology controls in place.

During this audit we noted that, in general, BEC operated in compliance with the change management procedures documented in the Versa Technical Operational Manual. We determined BEC operated in compliance with the Information Technology Systems Disaster Recovery Plan and is appropriately backing up the Versa data. We determined the teacher certification applications flowed through the Versa system as designed, and batch processes ran in accordance with the manual. For the sample of applicants reviewed, we determined for those applicants that received a certification, all requirements were met in accordance with the laws, rules, and regulations. We further confirmed that those applicants that did not receive certifications were missing required elements needed for certification. We additionally determined there is an appropriate separation of duties and controls in place to ensure mailed payments are processed securely.

We also identified instances where improvements could be made to strengthen some controls associated with the certification process. For example, we cited that current queries and calculations return inconsistent data and reports; the Versa Analytics function is not operational; the Versa system lacks certain needed functionality; BEC did not process all applications within statutory timeframes; and security controls related to user access need improvement. We additionally provided recommendations to the Communication Sections to enhance their processes and monitoring.

As noted in the results section below, the auditors’ ability to validate the provided data and conduct detailed trend analyses to evaluate process efficiencies was hindered due to the department’s inability to provide the evaluation eligibility date for applications prior to January 1, 2020. We also noted that the application assignment date and the date the application entered certain queues was unavailable on the Versa system user interface. The inability to validate the

data retrieved from the Versa system led to uncertainty related to the accuracy of the compliance calculations in Finding 2 below. The Audit Results section provides details of the instances noted during our audit.

Scope, Objectives, and Methodology

The scope of these audits included an examination of the educator certification process during the period of January 1, 2019, through February 29, 2020, and an examination of the Versa system during the period of January 1, 2019, through the end of fieldwork. Our objectives for the audits included:

1. Determining whether educator certifications are issued in compliance with state regulations and department policies and procedures;
2. Determining whether application processing fees are appropriately and securely collected and processed;
3. Determining whether the educator certification process is effective and the Bureau of Educator Certification contact center is adequately addressing inquiries;
4. Determining whether Versa has sufficient internal controls in place to process educator certification applications; and
5. Determining whether Versa includes effective security controls to protect data from unauthorized access or modification.

To accomplish our objectives, we reviewed applicable laws, rules, and regulations; interviewed appropriate department staff; reviewed policies, procedures, and related documentation; reviewed application requirements; reviewed application processes; reviewed a sample of applications and supporting documents; reviewed the processing of application fees; reviewed communications data; reviewed system security controls; reviewed user access logs; reviewed system error reports; and reviewed batch processes.

Background

Florida's school system is the fourth largest school system in the nation. Florida's 67 public school districts are comprised of more than 4,000 public schools, including public charter schools, that enroll almost 3 million students annually.¹ The purpose of Florida educator certification is to support the academic achievement of our students by assuring that educators are professionally qualified for highly effective instruction. Florida educators must be certified to teach in public schools and in many private schools. Educators include classroom teachers, school administrators, and other support professionals such as guidance counselors and media specialists. The Bureau of Educator Certification (BEC) is responsible for implementing the certification provisions in Florida Statutes and State Board of Education administrative rules. These laws and rules also delegate limited certification responsibilities to Florida's school districts.²

¹ Sourced from <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/recruitment/>

² Sourced from <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/certification/>

The BEC’s mission is to assure that Florida teachers and leaders are professionally qualified, through evidence-based certification, to foster student success by expanding their knowledge and skills through effective instructional opportunities in Florida’s classrooms. BEC is comprised of four sections: Operations, which supports other sections with daily tasks such as mail processing; Evaluations, which is primarily responsible for the processing of educator applications; Communications, which serves as the front line for communication between the department and applicants; and the Policy Development section.

The Florida Department of Education (DOE) entered into contract #17-601 on July 8, 2016, with MicroPact Global, Inc., to provide the proprietary Versa Online and Versa Regulation software. The total contract amount, including amendments, was \$3,734,049.00. The purpose of the contract was to replace the previous legacy educator certification system with a commercial off the shelf system allowing for a single database that would support the certification process. Per the contract, the Versa system would include the following: “rules-based fee calculation; the ability for educators to affiliate with multiple school districts, allows for an ‘inactive’ status, the ability to attach and upload necessary documents for certifications, accept online credit card payments, automated interface with education specific systems, role based security and school district interface capability.”

The DOE Division of Technology and Innovation (DTI) performs information technology (IT) functions relating to the administration of the Versa system. The Versa enterprise licensing tool consists of three primary applications: Versa Regulation, Versa Online, and Versa Analytics.

- Versa Regulation (VR) – Supports the Bureau of Educator Certification staff and select school district personnel.
- Versa Online (VO) – Supports educator applicants, teaching certificate holders, select school district personnel, and members of the public.
- Versa Analytics – Used for reporting and analysis. The system was purchased with ten custom reports and has the capability to design additional customized reports using the Logi Analytics software.

All components of the BEC licensing system (applications and databases) are housed at the Northwest Regional Data Center (NWRDC). BEC processes four types of licenses through Versa Regulation. See Figure 1.

Figure 1

License	Description
6001 Educator	3 year Non-Renewable Temp 1 year Renewable Temp 5 year Restricted Professional 5 year Renewable Professional
6002 Speech Language Impaired (Bachelor degree only)	2 year 5 year 3 year – Speech Language Associates only
6003 Athletic Coach	3 year Athletic Coaching 5 year Athletic Coaching

(does not include endorsement)	
6004 Exchange Teacher	3 year

There are a number of batch jobs that support Versa Regulation reporting for BEC. The Workflow Request Management batch job runs workflow rules to assign applications to the appropriate queue when a workflow request has been made. Versa has eight queues containing educator applications awaiting evaluation by BEC staff, as well as a queue containing expired applications. The queue an application enters depends on the license type being applied for, the transaction class, the transaction code, and the action that triggered the application to enter the workflow. For our review, we performed our analysis on the DOE_EVALUATION, TRAINING_PRE_APPROVE, and FPCLEAR_ISSUE_REQ queues.

- DOE_EVALUATION – Completed Educator (code 6001), Speech Language Impaired (code 6002), and Athletic Coaching (code 6003) applications deemed eligible for review are moved to this queue unless the applicant has completed certain academic training programs.
- TRAINING_PRE_APPROVE – Applications where academic training is on file with a program type of FLAP (Florida State Approved Program), OSAP (Out of State Approved Program), FLTEP (Florida Teacher Education Program), or Professional Training Option (PTO) are moved into this queue. These are direct pathways to a professional certificate and these applications require a slightly less complex review as these training programs have been approved by the department.
- FPCLEAR_ISSUE_REQ – Applications with certain transaction codes move into this queue if the fingerprints are deficient³ and an issue request exists, or a temporary certificate holder has passed the General Knowledge and Professional Education exams and the Professional Education Competence (PEC) is cleared.

Once the application has been moved to the appropriate queue, BEC supervisors assign the application to a specialist who then conducts an evaluation. Upon completion of the evaluation BEC issues the applicant a professional certificate, if all requirements have been satisfied, or a statement of eligibility. The statement of eligibility notifies the applicant of any requirements that still need to be completed or notifies the applicant that they are eligible for a temporary certificate upon employment.

³ Includes fingerprint records not previously reviewed by BEC.

Audit Results

Finding 1: Current queries and calculations return inconsistent data and reports; Versa Analytics is not operational; and the Versa system could be enhanced.

BEC is responsible for implementing the certification provisions in Florida Statutes and State Board of Education administrative rules. At the outset of this audit, we intended to analyze staffing sufficiency and subsequent performance along with reviewing compliance with the statutes. However, during the course of the audit, we experienced difficulty obtaining consistent and accurate data from the Versa system that would allow us to perform meaningful calculations and accurately determine BEC's compliance with the Florida Statutes. As a result of the inconsistent data, we were unable to provide any additional analysis outside of the compliance calculations. Our review identified three primary factors that led to the inconsistent data and reporting capabilities. The Versa Analytics module designed to include key analytical reports never worked as intended. There was only one person that had extensive knowledge and experience with the Versa system sufficient to perform queries and pull consistent reports once Versa Analytics failed. Finally, certain key date fields necessary for calculating statutory compliance were not originally captured within Versa and were not visible to Versa users within the system.

Versa Analytics

Per the Versa Operations and Maintenance Manual V2.0, Versa Analytics is used for reporting and analysis. Versa Analytics, or Logi Analytics software, was included as part of the Versa solution as proposed by the single source response by MicroPact. While not a separate deliverable, detailed business requirements were written and approved for 10 custom reports during the project period.

During a meeting with the BEC program office, we learned Versa Analytics is not currently in use. Per BEC staff, "Versa analytics was a reporting program to allow BEC to develop custom reports for processing and staff production numbers. Versa Analytics was to allow the flexibility for designated BEC staff to create custom reports to mirror report functionality from the legacy system. Examples of reports were staff processing timelines, database searches for academic training records, fingerprint uploads, etc."

We inquired further into the use of Versa Analytics. Per DTI, the reports delivered by MicroPact were never determined to be operational. Testing was delayed, as the reports were delivered as the system was going live, and resources were dedicated to processing applications rather than validating reports. Additionally, the Versa Analytics administrator training provided by MicroPact was provided prior to any DOE data or reports being loaded in the Logi Analytics platform.

The Versa Analytics system was delivered as a standalone component rather than being integrated into the Versa platform. DTI set up a separate database for the analytics platform, due to the Versa system crashing when they began testing the reports. The DTI technical support

team determined that the reporting mechanism relied on pulling down all of the data, then filtering it as indicated by the front-end user. Due to the volume of data, the process was very slow. DTI additionally stated that the Versa data configuration was so different from the legacy data that the main tester was unable to determine the validity of the reports. The testing raised multiple questions about the reporting results and, at the time, MicroPact had discontinued its developer licenses for Logi Analytics and had limited resources to help resolve the questions. In 2019, DTI made another effort to determine whether Versa Analytics could function normally after BEC used Versa for a year, but there was no change in the outcome of the reports.

The Versa Analytics component was not broken out as a separate cost in the Versa contract. The BEC and DTI based technical support team put substantial effort into testing and supporting the Analytics component that was part of the MicroPact/Versa project, but the team was not able to validate the reports provided by MicroPact. Versa Analytics would have proven to be beneficial to the mission of the BEC had it functioned as intended. BEC would benefit from having reliable reports to track their statutory mandates and staff efficiency reports such as the number of items processed and average time for processing. Although Versa Analytics is not operational, BEC could partner with DTI to develop custom reports based on select original Logi reports, which then could be provided routinely to BEC to assist them in tracking production on a daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly basis. This would allow BEC to monitor compliance with Florida Statutes and identify inefficiencies in their certification processes. For example, creating the following reports from the original Logi reports would enhance the ability of BEC to monitor its processes:

- User Activity Summary Report - The User Activity Summary Report could be used to track the files processed, correspondence, and BEC Certificates issued by user per week.
- Application Processing Timelines - This report could be used to retrieve statistical information concerning the number of days between a completed application being officially received and the application being evaluated.
- Application Processing Timelines after Fingerprint and Issue Request submission - This report could be used to retrieve statistical information concerning the number of days between the fingerprint and issue request submittal and the application being processed for both temporary and professional certificates.

As stated above, many of the data issues we encountered were due in large part to a single point of failure, as only one person had both the historical knowledge of the Versa system and database structures and the knowledge to query the system. Unfortunately, this key member of the DTI team passed away in the summer of 2020. Due to this loss, there was uncertainty surrounding how previous queries were written and calculated. This resulted in recreated queries that were similar but did not include identical calculations or key date fields. The uncertainty surrounding the calculations and subsequent data led to multiple attempts to retrieve the needed data from the Versa system and additional time spent validating data.

The final contributing factor to the identified data concerns was the validity of the evaluation eligibility dates. The evaluation eligible date is equivalent to the date the department received a

completed application and should be used to determine processing calculations. The evaluation eligible date is based on an applicant submitting the following documents:

- a CG-10 Application Form;
- payment in full of the processing fee (\$75.00 for each subject requested);
- an official transcript showing all degrees and credits; and
- if applicable, copies of the front and back of all teaching certificates held from U.S. states, territories, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

As of January 1, 2020, the Versa system now captures the evaluation eligible date on the user accessible screens as a disposition date. Prior to January 1, 2020, the evaluation eligible date was only available within the data tables and was not visible to Versa users. During the course of the audit, we requested queries to identify the evaluation eligible date. Originally, DTI provided the “Assignment Time Stamp”, which they identified as the same date as the Work Queue Transfer Date (wf_task_asgn.add_time_stmp). This was believed to be the date the applications entered the queue for evaluation and; therefore, represented the evaluation eligible date.

We later received the BEC 2019-2020 Long Range Performance Plan (LRPP) query, which included a field titled “Eval Eligible Date”. The LRPP “eval_eligible_date” was derived from the “add_tme_stmp field” in the “wf_task_asgn table”. We compared the “Assignment Time Stamp” from the original query to the “Eval Eligible Date” from the LRPP query. Upon review, 97% of the “Eval Eligible Dates” on the LRPP query were prior to the “Assignment Time Stamp” date, which indicated the assignment date provided was not the same as the “Eval Eligible Date” identified in the LRPP query. Due to this discovery, we requested an additional query with the newly identified evaluation eligibility date. The new query was used to conduct the calculations in Finding 2.

Efforts to validate the dates in the subsequent query were hindered due to the evaluation eligibility date (prior to 1/1/2020), assignment date, and date in queue not appearing in the user interface of the Versa system. This inability to validate the data retrieved from the Versa system led to uncertainty related to the accuracy of the compliance calculations identified in Finding 2.

In order to ensure consistent reporting and retrieval of data in the future, it would benefit both BEC and DTI to ensure the required calculations and subsequent queries are determined based on the needs of the program office and are validated and maintained by both DTI and BEC. This would ensure year to year calculations are consistent and can be used to perform trend analysis.

Recommendation

We recommend BEC and DTI determine the required calculations and subsequent queries based on the needs of the program office, validate the calculations, and maintain documentation of the calculations and queries for future use. We recommend BEC and DTI cross-train team members on the Versa system and the certification process in the event a team member departs from the agency and is no longer available to perform the needed functions.

We recommend BEC partner with DTI to develop custom reports based on select original Logi reports, which then could be provided routinely to BEC to assist them in tracking production on

a daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly basis. We additionally recommend BEC and DTI engage in discussions with the Versa vendor regarding the inability to use the Versa Analytics tool purchased as part of the contract. We recommend BEC conduct a cost analysis for enhancing the Versa system in order to make key dates visible to users. We additionally recommend BEC and DTI consider continuation of the previous request for quote to procure the services of an IT professional to assess the Versa system and BEC business processes and produce a gap analysis to identify areas where system enhancements could better support the business processes and ensure competent, reliable data and reports.

Management Response

Concur. The BEC will coordinate with our development team in DTI to cross train team members on required calculations and subsequent queries. The BEC will also partner with our development team in DTI to develop custom reports to assist in tracking production per the OIG recommendation. Additionally, the BEC will explore the functionality of the Versa Analytics program with our development team in DTI and Tyler Technologies. Finally, BEC and Educator Quality leadership will explore conducting a business process analysis with a third party to identify potential areas for enhancement.

Finding 2: BEC did not process all applications within statutory timeframes.

BEC is responsible for implementing the certification provisions in Florida Statutes and State Board of Education administrative rules. Per Section 1012.56 of the Florida Statutes (F.S), Educator certification requirements, “(a) Pursuant to s. 120.60, the department shall issue within 90 calendar days after receipt of the completed application a professional certificate to a qualifying applicant covering the classification, level, and area for which the applicant is deemed qualified and a document explaining the requirements for renewal of the professional certificate.

(c) Pursuant to s. 120.60, the department shall issue within 90 calendar days after receipt of the completed application, if an applicant does not meet the requirements for either certificate, an official statement of status of eligibility.”

As stated in the above finding, we experienced difficulty obtaining the completed evaluation eligible date during the audit. In our efforts to locate and obtain the accurate application evaluation date, we reviewed the Long Range Program Plan (LRPP) query provided by DTI for fiscal year 2019-20, which included an evaluation eligible date field. The data set included applications deemed eligible for evaluation between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020, and reflected BEC processed 98% of the initial educator applications (code 6001) within 90 days during this time period. The analytics performed below were modeled on the 2019-20 LRPP query and data fields used.

To determine compliance during the scope of the audit, we requested initial educator applications (code 6001) with an evaluation eligible date ranging from January 1, 2019, through February 29, 2020, that resulted in professional certificates. We reviewed applications that entered the

DOE_Evaluations queue or the Training_Pre_Approved queue during the scope of the audit. Therefore, it is only a partial view of the BEC workload. See Figure 2.

Figure 2

Applications Resulting in a Professional Certificate*

Month	Number of Applications Deemed Eligible for Evaluation	Number of SOE's Issued	Number of Certificates Issued
Jan-19	3539	385	482
Feb-19	1440	579	399
Mar-19	1436	565	432
Apr-19	1112	1218	483
May-19	1262	1863	751
Jun-19	1438	955	484
Jul-19	1296	825	601
Aug-19	1095	738	828
Sep-19	534	554	1338
Oct-19	466	728	1920
Nov-19	360	596	1094
Dec-19	322	490	937
Jan-20	571	526	1023
Feb-20	489	461	683

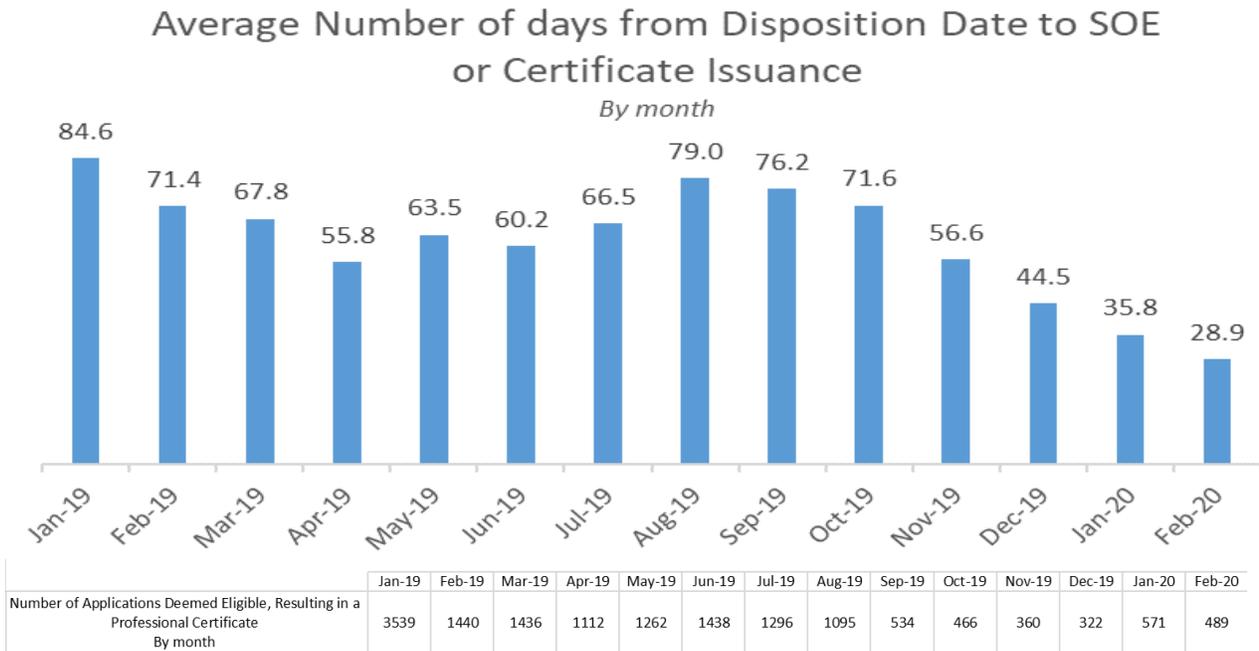
*The data request to DTI specified applications that ultimately resulted in a certification.

Based on the data provided, of the 15,360 applications deemed eligible for evaluation during the scope, 12,448 (81%)⁴ received a statement of eligibility (SOE) or certification within 90 days of the receipt of a completed application. However, upon further analysis of a sample of applications that took over 90 days to process, we were unable to validate the evaluation eligibility dates in the Versa system and identified certain SOE's not included in the data set provided that could have altered our calculations.

We determined BEC processed the applications in an average of 68 days from the date they received a complete application to the date an SOE or a certificate was issued, whichever occurred first. The months with the longest processing times were January (84.6-day average), August (79-day average), and September 2019 (76.2-day average). See Figure 3 for a breakdown by month.

⁴ We determined the difference in compliance percentages from our analysis (81%) and the 2019-20 LRPP (98%) data was due to BEC processing a large backlog of educator certifications during the spring of 2019. As a result of the backlog, BEC was authorized to allow overtime for individuals to work on the applications, leading to the processing of many older applications past the statutory timeline. As evidenced in Figure 3, the average number of days for processing applications decreased throughout the scope of the audit.

Figure 3



We additionally compared the application evaluation eligible dates to the dates the task was assigned to a specialist. Upon review of the data we found that, of the 15,360 records provided, 1,901 included an assignment date that was prior to the file being eligible for evaluation. We reviewed the remaining 13,459 files with an assignment date that was equal to or after the date the application was eligible for evaluation. On average, the applications were assigned to a specialist 53.8 days after the evaluation eligible date. See Figure 4. Once assigned, on average, specialists processed the applications and issued an SOE or a certificate within 4.4 days.

We additionally noted that BEC is currently assigning applications manually to specialists due to Versa lacking the functionality to automatically assign applications based on the first date in queue (oldest) or the oldest evaluation eligible date. This process is inefficient and adds to the supervisor’s workload. BEC would benefit from conducting a cost analysis for enhancing the Versa system in order to assign applications more efficiently. It would also benefit BEC to be able to view key dates, including but not limited to, the evaluation eligible dates, assignment dates to the specialists, and dates in queue on the user viewable screens in the Versa system.

Figure 4

	Count of Applications	Average Number of Days from Eval Eligible to Assignment
2019		
Jan	2863	66.8
Feb	1140	50.2
Mar	1142	40.9
Apr	965	39.2
May	1161	50.8
Jun	1360	50.2
Jul	1207	57.3
Aug	1006	70.9
Sep	502	69.1
Oct	442	66.0
Nov	339	50.8
Dec	305	41.2
2020		
Jan	556	32.4
Feb	471	25.5
Grand Total	13459	53.8

Section 1012.56, F.S, also states, “(b)The department shall issue a temporary certificate to a qualifying applicant within 14 calendar days after receipt of a request from an employer with a professional education competence demonstration program pursuant to paragraphs (6)(f) and (8)(b). The temporary certificate must cover the classification, level, and area for which the applicant is deemed qualified. The department shall electronically notify the applicant’s employer that the temporary certificate has been issued and provide the applicant an official statement of status of eligibility at the time the certificate is issued.” The Florida Temporary Certificate is issued after the individual is employed in a Florida school and his/her background screening has been cleared.

To determine compliance, we requested all applications with an employer request (3100 transaction code in the FPCLEAR_ISSUE_REQ queue) from January 1, 2019, through February 29, 2020. We analyzed 7,066 records. Based on the data provided, we determined, on average, BEC processed the applications in 14.6 days from the date the application arrived in the queue to the issuance of a certificate. We additionally noted that BEC processed 85.2% of the applications the same day the application entered the queue, and 10.3% remained in the queue between 15 and 645 days, exceeding the statutory requirement that they be processed within 14 days. Of the 7,066 records, 6,922 (98%) included background screening results on file prior to the receipt of a request from an employer. These applications were processed more quickly, averaging 11.7 days from the date the application entered the queue to the date a certificate was

issued. The remaining 144 (2%) applicants, on average, received a certification 153.8 days from the date they entered the queue.

Per Versa records, the majority of that time was waiting on background screening results to be submitted, averaging 124.5 days before the receipt of the screening results. Once BEC received the background screening results, they issued certificates in an average of 29.3 days. Per BEC staff, the districts should not submit the issue request without background screening results. If they receive a district issue request without the screening results, BEC will issue an SOE to the applicant that the required background screening results have not been received. The issue request remains in the queue until the screening results are provided and the background screening is cleared.

Per BEC staff, the delay in processing applications in compliance with the Florida Statutes was due to a backlog of educator certifications during the scope of the audit. In addition, January typically has an influx in applications due to teachers taking tests, and the applications slow in August. Further, BEC informed us that system improvements implemented over the last few years may have affected the validity of the data and associated reports during the audit. Not processing applications in compliance with the Florida Statutes could lead to delays in qualified teachers receiving certifications.

Recommendation

As stated above, we recommend BEC and DTI determine the required calculations and subsequent queries based on the needs of the program office, validate the calculations, and maintain documentation of the calculations and queries for future use. We recommend BEC ensure all applications are processed in the time frame allotted by the Florida Statutes and decrease the time between the date the applications are eligible for evaluation and the date assigned to a specialist. We recommend BEC conduct a cost analysis for enhancing the Versa system in order to assign applications more efficiently and timely. We recommend BEC cross-train team members on the certification process in the event additional staff is needed to process applications timely when application numbers surge. Finally, we recommend BEC consider moving District Issue Requests without associated background screening results to the release queue until the background screening results are appropriately provided and the application can be processed.

Management Response

Concur. During the period of time audited, the BEC was in the process of clearing a backlog of educator certification applications, which resulted in evaluation times greater than 90 days. Since that time, process changes, and system enhancements have been implemented that reduce the BEC's processing time. At this time, all evaluation queues are well within the 90 day statutory requirement. BEC will consult with DTI to produce a cost analysis for enhancing the Versa system to assign applications more efficiently to further reduce our processing time. Consistent with OIG recommendation, BEC has also started the process of cross training a backup unit of evaluators to process educator certification applications when application

numbers surge. This backup unit is comprised of staff from the contact center, the operations section, and the district support section.

Finding 3: Security Controls – User Access

Per Florida Administrative Code Rule 74-2.003, each agency shall ensure that access to information technology (IT) resources is limited to authorized users, processes, or devices, and to authorized activities and transactions.

Security Controls are intended to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data and IT resources. The audit disclosed that certain security controls related to user access need improvement to ensure that personally identifiable information is protected. We are not disclosing specific details of the issues in this report to avoid the possibility of compromising information. However, we have notified management of the specific issues. Without adequate security controls related to user access, the risk is increased that confidential data could be compromised.

Recommendation

We recommend that BEC improve security controls related to user access to ensure the continued protection of confidential data.

Management Response

Concur. Per OIG recommendation, the BEC will implement a new business process to ensure appropriate access privileges.

Observation: Communication Section

The Bureau of Educator Certification (BEC) offers technical assistance and support to applicants and district partners through the bureau's communication section. This section is comprised of 16 positions: a manager; a staff assistant; a records technician; two supervisors; 8 program specialist I positions; and 3 program specialist II positions. The program specialist I positions have the primary role of answering calls. The program specialist II positions are primarily tasked with responding to email requests and attending to visitors. They will assist with phone calls during certain times of the day to cover shortages and to help clear the call queue prior to office closure at the end of the day.

The communications section serves as the primary contact for applicants to receive information specific to their application, including the status of their applications. The BEC communications section also handles contacts regarding general certification information. Applicants may contact BEC in three ways:

- Telephone service - applicants may call a toll free hotline to speak with a customer service representative Monday through Friday (8:00 am - 4:30 pm) during normal department workdays;

- Email service - applicants can send BEC email communications using a contact entry form on the BEC website; and
- In-person service - applicants may schedule an office visit at DOE headquarters.

Calls:

Telephone calls are received through the Elite Multichannel phone system (EMC) and calls are directed to program specialists logged into the phone system. The EMC system prompts a call log page at the end of each call, requiring the specialist to manually select a call category and sub-category to document the reason for the call. This entry generates data for the work code report. Upon completion of the call, the specialist additionally documents the reason for the call in the contact history module within Versa. In addition to the work code report, BEC utilizes a daily call statistics report, which reflects the call volume and time spent daily on the phones as well as the average call times for each agent. However, this data is not readily accessible by BEC communications leadership and must be requested from DTI. The report was not available prior to April 25, 2019.

Call Time Per Agent:

We utilized the call statistic data to review call times per agent. We noted the call statistic data reflects calls by employee for a singular day. BEC currently does not have the report capability to review multiple agents throughout multiple days on the same report for trend analysis. Using the IDEA software, we merged all call reports by agent from April 25, 2019, through February 25, 2020, and calculated the average call time by agent per month. The data only identified one agent, a now former BEC employee, with an average call time per month over 10 minutes.

Call Volume and Categories:

Utilizing the work code report data, we reviewed call volumes from January 1, 2019, through February 29, 2020. We determined the highest call volumes occurred in January (9,997 calls), April (9,722 calls), June (9,721 calls) and July 2019 (8,966 calls). The majority of the calls, 66.2%, were categorized as calls from applicants regarding the status of their file. The next most common category was Miscellaneous with 9.1% of calls logged during our scope.

We reviewed the subcategories for the top two categories. For the File Status category, the majority of calls (76%) were subcategorized as “Status of Application/Certificate” (51,614 calls). The Miscellaneous category did not have any subcategories with all the calls being logged as “default.” Results are listed in Figures 5 and 6.

Figures 5&6

Total Calls by Category

Call Category	Total	% Value
File Status	67862	66.2%
Miscellaneous	9295	9.1%
Renewal/Reinstatement	6757	6.6%
On-line application	5694	5.6%
First Time Applicant	4538	4.4%
AddToCert	2647	2.6%
Materials Request	2151	2.1%
Course Approvals	1209	1.2%
Miscellaneous Missed	1064	1.0%
Non-certification questions	1027	1.0%
Foreign applicants	103	0.1%
Highly qualified/in-field	92	0.1%
Accreditation/State Approved programs	56	0.1%
Request for Call-back	17	0.0%
Total	102512	

Count of Subcategories

Subcategory	# of Calls
File Status	
Status of application/certificate	51614
Eligibility questions	7285
Documentation sent/received	4124
Moving from Temporary to Professional Certificate	3483
Correspondence sent/received	706
Testing information for eligibility	650
Miscellaneous	
Default	9295

We noted that the subcategories capture the basic reasons for the call. However, enhancement of the call subcategories could assist BEC leadership in identifying areas of concern, capturing events that may be of significance, or providing insight into potential improvements. For example, updating “status of application/certificate” to something slightly more nuanced such as “status of application/certificate – within 30 days” and “status of application/certificate – within 60 days” would allow leadership to identify at what time frames applicants begin to get concerned about the status of their application and brainstorm possible solutions. Using subcategories in Miscellaneous to capture system issues, or any out of the ordinary event of importance would provide BEC historical knowledge that could be beneficial to BEC management in identifying trends that may need to be addressed.

The lack of access to call data limits the ability of BEC management to track call trends and use the data to better streamline the function of the communications team. While the daily report does give supervisors a tool to view staff efficiency on a given day, not having the ability to view the activity over a period of time limits their ability to identify trends, pinpoint issues, and adjust efforts accordingly.

Recommendation - Calls

The BEC call center serves as a front line for BEC and the department. In order for BEC leadership to make decisions that will positively impact applicants, call center agents, management, and the overall public image of BEC and the department, BEC should have access to comprehensive call center metrics using real time and historical data. Ensuring that these

metrics align with the application cycles, analyzing available data, and making decisions based on these metrics, the BEC communications team can create a culture of continuous data-driven improvement.

We recommend that BEC identify the data and metrics that would best serve their needs and work with DTI to find a mechanism for obtaining that data either internally developed or purchased. Whether it is in the form of a reporting module, email reports, or a call center dashboard, the information should be easily accessible for management. Call centers are often reactionary to outside events (such as a growing backlog in processing applications), and management should have the ability to use data to identify and address these events. Additionally, BEC can enhance call subcategories in their call tracking module to assist BEC leadership in identifying areas of concern, capturing events of significance, and making needed improvements. We also recommend BEC consider enhancing the current applicant Versa interface so applicants can easily retrieve information regarding their current application status through an online portal. This could alleviate the bulk of the calls to the call center where applicants are simply checking the status of their application.

Ultimately, BEC could conduct a cost benefit analysis to determine if it would be more cost effective and efficient to outsource the call center and email contact center for routine calls and emails.

Emails:

Responding to emails and assisting visitors is the primary function of the program specialist II positions. These activities are tracked in accordance with Office Visitors, Material Requests and EdCert Email Statistic Procedures, and each day's activity is logged into one spreadsheet. The number of emails received, the number of emails processed, and the number of days from the date of receipt until the agent processed the email is manually entered into the tracking sheet. Versa has a manual "contact history" where email exchanges can be entered and system generated communication (letters) are automatically recorded, but applicants are not emailing BEC through Versa, so the system does not record any incoming communications.

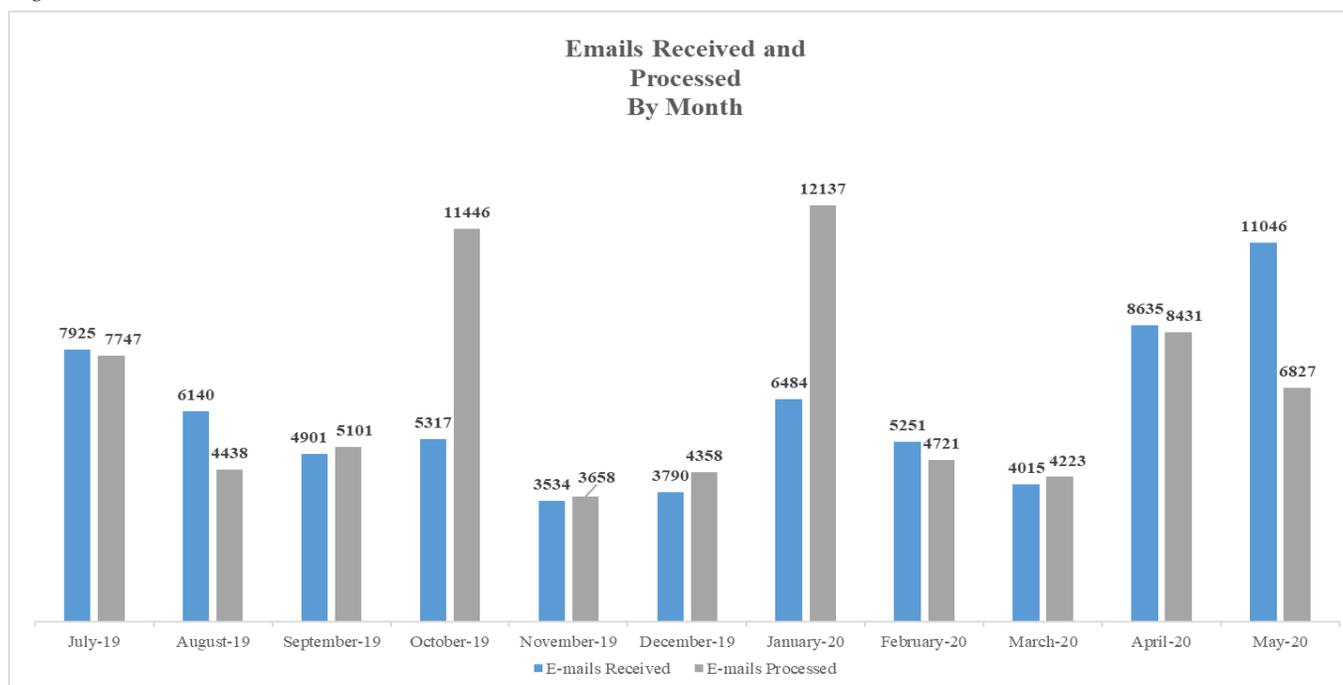
When reviewing the daily activity sheet, we noted that the log includes the below fields:

- Materials Requests Received and Processed – Captures material requests processed.
- Visitors Assisted – Captures the number of visitors assisted by BEC.
- Emails processed – Captures all emails responded to on that date.
- Emails received – Captures the sum of emails received on that date and the number of emails received and processed that same day.
- Emails left in EdCert – Captures the count of all emails remaining in the inbox that were received the day prior.

We combined the activity logs for the period of July 1, 2019, through May 29, 2020, using CaseWare IDEA data analysis software to review the data. We then separated the data into two categories: daily activity and count of days. We determined, on average, BEC receives approximately 6,000 emails per month with July 2019, April 2020, and May 2020 showing a significantly higher volume. BEC responds to between 62% and 224% of emails on a monthly

basis. We noted that the two months with the highest percentage of emails processed, October 2019 and January 2020, correlated with email blasts sent out to clear portions of the email backlog. The email blasts are not direct responses to individual emails but provide non-application specific information to a large batch of older emails, inviting the applicant to respond back to BEC via a new email if their issue has not been resolved. BEC will then assist the applicants who respond. Because the email blasts are used for older emails, BEC has found that many of those applicants have since called and had their questions answered prior to BEC responding to their email. See figure 7.

Figure 7



We noted that the log does not account for the continuous roll over of emails from previous days. By not including older, unread emails, supervisors may not be aware of the size of the backlog as it is accumulating. We additionally reviewed email response times. We determined that BEC processed 16.66% of emails within 7 days of receipt, 2.4% within 8-14 days, 2.24% within 15-21 days, 9.45% within 21-30 days, 28.63% within 31 to 60 days of receipt, and 40.62% over 61 days from receipt. This includes the email blasts used to address email backlogs. ⁵

Email blasts are not a scheduled activity but have been sent approximately every three months. Prior BEC communications leadership prioritized calls over emails which current management had to address. Additionally, program specialists assigned to work on emails also assist with calls during the day when they are experiencing a high volume of calls.

⁵ We noted BEC logged the total number of emails processed daily. However, errors in the sums of the email response times on the daily reports may skew the calculated percentages.

Review of incoming and processed emails reflect BEC communications is processing emails at a pace close to the rate of incoming emails. However, the emails that roll over, creating a backlog, are only addressed quarterly. Versa has a manual “contact history” that can be entered and will record system generated communication (letters) but applicants are not emailing BEC through Versa, so the system does not record any incoming communications.

Recommendation- Emails

We recommend BEC enhance their email tracking capability to replace the various manual recording processes with consistent automated capturing of email activity over time. This should include information about the subject of emails received to identify common issues that may need management intervention. In addition to the number of emails received per day and number of emails processed per day, BEC should consider capturing the number of emails processed by employee, the length of time it takes to respond to emails, and a rolling number of emails that await processing. Finally, we recommend BEC consider conducting a cost benefit analysis for the procurement of a mass email management program to assist in managing the volume of emails received and capturing meaningful data to analyze the efficiency of the email response process.

Closing Comments

The Office of the Inspector General would like to recognize and acknowledge the Bureau of Educator Certification and the Division of Technology and Innovation and staff for their assistance during the course of this audit. Our fieldwork was facilitated by the cooperation and assistance extended by all personnel involved.

To promote accountability, integrity, and efficiency in state government, the OIG completes audits and reviews of agency programs, activities, and functions. Our audit was conducted under the authority of section 20.055, F.S., and in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, published by the Institute of Internal Auditors, and Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General, published by the Association of Inspectors General. The audit was conducted by Elie Emile and Melissa Melendez del Rosario and supervised by Tiffany Hurst, CIA, Deputy Inspector General.

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