

State program may make hiring easier

October 2, 2007 | Source: [Orlando Sentinel](#)

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Florida employers are getting a new pitch from the state: a credentialing program for prospective workers that will eliminate much of the "guesswork" from hiring. The "Florida Ready to Work" program, a pilot project in Tampa, St. Petersburg, Jacksonville and Walton County that began last April, is now rolling out statewide. Radio, newspaper and billboard advertising will start appearing in Orlando next month. But it's available now to both employers and job seekers, said Colleen Englert, executive director of the program, which is a joint partnership of the Florida Department of Education and the state Agency for Workforce Innovation.

Information on the program is available at floridareadytowork.com or by calling, toll-free, 1-866-429-2334. The \$17 million state program has a dual purpose, Englert said: To give job seekers "a way to prove they have the right skills and attitudes to do job, and a way for employers to measure job skills before they hire and determine if the employee is ready for work." During its pilot phase, the program has issued about 15,000 credentials to job seekers and has signed up roughly 40 employers that have supplied profiles for the jobs they're trying to fill. The profiles outline the specific skills needed for specific jobs, allowing high schools, vo-tech centers and community colleges to tailor instruction for their students. A Florida Ready to Work Credential requires a minimum score of 3 -- on a 1 to 7 scale -- on three work-related assessments: applied math, reading for information and locating information. There is also an optional assessment measuring workplace attitude and customer-service skills. Free online training is available to students and job seekers of all ages, Englert said. Meanwhile, companies "can send prospective employees to be tested for free." Employers spend thousands of dollars on each new hire, she noted. "This is a tool the state has put into place for employers that costs them nothing."