

2020 Florida Legislative Session Recap:

Postsecondary Finance, Student Financial Aid, and Dual Enrollment Bonus Funding



April 2020

Introduction

On March 20th, the 2020 Legislative session ended after extending a few days to finalize the 2020-2021 budget amidst the rapidly-evolving coronavirus situation. In total, legislators filed more than 3,500 bills, roughly 200 of which passed both chambers and were sent to Governor Ron DeSantis for approval. This session, policymakers were tasked with budget reprioritization exercises to identify areas of overspending with the goal to pay for hurricane relief, teacher salary increases, and coronavirus containment. In terms of higher education, legislators prioritized bills that focused on restructuring performance-based funding for universities and grant programs for students.

This session recap provides an overview of the notable legislation that stands to impact Florida's talent pool and postsecondary students. As of the date of this recap's release, all budget allocations and (unless otherwise noted) legislation are awaiting Governor Ron DeSantis' signature.

Highlights of Legislation Impacting Postsecondary Education

SB 72: Higher Education

After careful negotiations between the House and Senate, the Legislature unanimously passed Senate Bill 72, which updates performance-based funding for universities and makes changes to Florida student aid programs. The legislation, championed by Senator Kelli Stargel (R - Lakeland), closely matched HB 613 (sponsored by Ray Rodrigues, R - Ft. Myers Beach) and incorporated several elements of the House bill in its final version.

Performance Based Funding

Under current law, Florida's universities receive performance-based funding for their [performance on ten key metrics](#). These include measurements such as the average cost to the student, median wages of graduates working full-time, and four-year graduation rates. SB 72 adds two new metrics, beginning 2021-22, to the funding formula: success of transfer students (measured by the two-year graduation rates of AA transfer students) and Pell-eligible student completion (measured by the six-year graduation rates for students who received Pell Grants in their first year of college).

Preeminent Research Universities Programs

In addition to performance-based funding, Florida also offers money to universities that perform exceptionally well in certain key areas. Universities that meet 11 of 12 state-determined “benchmarks” of excellence are awarded the title of “preeminent research university” and receive additional funding.

Currently, the state has three preeminent research universities: University of Florida, Florida State University, and University of South Florida. Some benchmarks include average weighted GPA of 4.0 or greater for the incoming freshman class and a four-year graduation rate of 60% or higher. SB 72 modifies the current preeminence metric pertaining to students’ SAT scores by updating outdated language to reflect a scale of 1600 instead of 2400. The benchmark will also measure ACT scores for the first time.

Universities of Distinction

Currently, a university that meets six of the 12 preeminence benchmarks is designated an “emerging preeminent university” and is entitled to 25% of the funding amount awarded to preeminent universities. While SB 72 will allow emerging preeminent universities to maintain the designation, they will no longer receive the specified funding for emerging preeminence. Instead, to increase funding opportunities to all of Florida’s non-preeminent universities, SB 72 codifies the Florida Board of Governors’ “Universities of Distinction” program.

The Universities of Distinction program was developed by the Florida Board of Governors in response to a 2018 bill tasking them to create a program and funding mechanism to recognize areas of excellence at non-preeminent universities. Each non-preeminent university is required to elevate a specific area of excellence unique to their institution. This area of excellence must be aligned to the needs of the state’s workforce and relate to STEM industries, including supply chain management and transportation.

Bright Futures Florida Medallion Scholarships

SB 72 expands the Florida Medallion level Bright Futures scholarship, which currently covers 75% of tuition costs. Beginning with the 2020-21 school year, the scholarship will cover 100% of tuition and certain fees for students who attend Florida College System (FCS) institutions or 75% for students attending a State University System (SUS) institution. When the student is ready to transfer from a state college to a university, they will be able to retain their 100% coverage at the SUS institution if they meet certain academic criteria.

Florida Student Assistance Grant Programs (FSAG)

SB 72 revises the state’s largest need-based financial aid program—Florida Student Assistance Grant (FSAG). FSAG provides tuition assistance to students who are Florida

residents and meet certain eligibility requirements (such as completing the FAFSA) and attend a Florida public, private, or career postsecondary institution.

The legislation removes the prior statutory maximum award calculations and instead requires the legislature to determine the maximum amount on an annual basis (\$3,260 for 2020-21). The bill establishes stricter eligibility criteria for need-based aid linked to Pell-determined expected family contribution. Pending available funding, SB 72 will also allow FSAG recipients to use their award during the summer semester. The bill allows prioritization of awards to students who are within one semester of graduation or program completion.

Finally, for institutions, there will be changes to reporting deadlines and disbursement to FSAG grant recipients, including a biennial report and a financial audit of the funds provided.

Benacquisto Scholarship

The Benacquisto scholarship is a program that rewards students who have been recognized as a National Merit Scholar®. SB 72 adds a renewal requirement that recipients must be enrolled full-time unless they have less than 12 credit hours left to complete their degree. Under the new legislation, scholarship recipients will be able to renew their scholarship even if their or their family's residency status were to change. If students are unable to renew their scholarship due to a verifiable emergency, they can be granted an exception to retain their scholarship going forward.

Finally, to encourage scholarship recipients to finish their degrees in a timely manner, the bill limits award eligibility to students who graduated high school within the past five years and limits each student's award disbursement to ten semesters.

Opt-Out Option for Textbooks

Florida College System and State University System Boards of Trustees are required to develop innovative pricing techniques and payment options policies to reduce the cost of textbooks and instructional materials for students. Currently, students must choose to participate in these programs. SB 72 aims to potentially save students money by allowing institutions to automatically enroll students in their individual textbook affordability programs, providing students an opt-out option if they do not want to participate.

HB 171: Postsecondary Education for Certain Military Personnel

HB 171, championed by Representatives Mel Ponder (R – Destin), Adam Hattersley (D – Riverview), and Senator Tom Lee (R – Brandon), sailed unopposed through the House and Senate and was quickly signed into law by Governor DeSantis.

The bill requires the Board of Governors and the State Board of Education to utilize national best practices to develop a uniform system to award credit for experience and training obtained for military service. To accomplish this, by July 15, 2020, the Articulation Coordinating Committee (ACC), a K-20 advisory body appointed by the Commissioner of Education, must convene a working group with appointees from the Florida Board of Governors (BOG), the State Board of Education (SBE), and the Florida Department of Veteran Affairs to translate military experience into a standard set of relevant college credits or clock hours for career programs.

While many institutions currently offer credit for military training, HB 171 requires all of Florida's public colleges, universities, and career centers to honor the common military articulation system and also gives them the option to award additional credit for military service as they see fit. The bill also waives transcript fees for active duty service members or honorably discharged veterans and their immediate family members.

HB 7067: K-12 Scholarship Programs

In addition to changes to K-12 scholarship programs, HB 7067 makes changes to the bonus funding formula for school districts to include dual enrollment coursework and early college programs.

If this bill is signed into law, the K-12 full-time equivalent (FTE) funding formula, which provides school districts with state funding related to their full-time student population, would allow school districts to earn bonus funds for student who successfully complete dual enrollment courses individually or as a part of an early college program that enables qualified high school students to satisfy high school graduation requirements and earn an associate degree.

Districts would earn an additional award of 0.16 FTE for each early college program student who receives an "A" grade or higher, 0.08 FTE for a non-early college program student who receives an "A" grade or higher, and .30 FTE for a student earning an associate degree with a 3.0 GPA or higher. Fifty percent of the funds that school districts accrue from bonus dual enrollment and early college FTE must be used to expand and support these programs

Previously, districts could only qualify for bonus funding for students who succeeded in Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Advanced International Certification Education (AICE) classes. This bill recognizes successful dual enrollment course completion in the bonus funding formula for the first time.

The bill, which was carried by the House Appropriations Committee, House Education Committee, and Representative Jennifer Sullivan (R – Apopka), additionally addresses modifications to K-12 Scholarships.

Budget Allocations

After last-minute considerations for coronavirus relief, the joint budget conference shifted session into overtime before the House and Senate finally concluded Thursday, March 20th. The 2020-21 budget, before Governor vetoes, totals 93.2 billion, the largest in Florida's history. The budget includes \$25 million in funding to combat the coronavirus outbreak, \$100 million to supplement the salaries of veteran teachers, and \$500 million to fulfill Governor Ron DeSantis' vision of raising the minimum salary for teachers to \$47,500.

The finalized budget included major postsecondary education budget items such as funding for SUS performance, universities of distinction programs, state financial aid programs, and a new funding formula for the FCS.

State University System Performance Funding (\$560 million): Once again, state university performance funding was held level with last year at \$560 million. This \$560 million is generated through cost-sharing between the state, which will provide approximately \$265 million, and the SUS institutions, which will collectively provide the remaining \$295 million.

State University System Preeminence Funding (\$30 million): The Legislature set aside \$30 million to help preeminent universities build upon their preeminence status and improve their national rankings.

Universities of Distinction Funding (\$15 million): The Legislature replaced funding for institutions with emerging preeminent status with a program that awards all non-preeminent universities with funding to address recommendations from The Florida Council of 100 and Florida Chamber to increase the output of high-caliber talent from the SUS and to make Florida a place where talent thrives. The program will highlight each non-preeminent university's unique areas of competency and promote them on a state and national level.

Florida College System Student Success Incentive Funding (\$30 million): The Legislature maintained \$30 million in the budget to support college efforts to improve the success of students enrolled in associate of arts degree programs to complete critical college credit courses, graduate with associate of arts degrees, and transfer to baccalaureate degree programs.

Florida College System Tiered-Funding Model (\$22.9 million): The goal of the new tiered-funding model is to better align college funding with student body growth and demand. This model groups institutions into seven tiers based on enrollment size and includes funding components that consider such factors as institutional growth, workforce alignment, and base funding.

Complete Florida (\$29 million): Complete Florida is a state-funded program that helps adults with some college credit obtain a degree or credential. The 2020-21 budget allocation represents a \$6 million increase from last year's allocation.

Historically Black Private Colleges and Universities (\$33 million): Florida's three private HBCUs, Bethune-Cookman University, Edward Waters College, and Florida Memorial University, received \$33 million, a substantial increase in funding from the \$12 million they were allotted in last year's budget.

Pathways to Career Opportunities (\$10 million): The Pathways to Career Opportunities Grant Program maintained \$10 million in funding from last year. The program, currently in its second year, has provided grant funding to develop or grow apprenticeship and preapprenticeship programs in 17 school districts, 11 colleges, one university, and five private entities.

Workforce Diploma Program (\$1.5 million): The Workforce Diploma program helps adults over the age of 22 earn a high school diploma and develop employability and career technical skills. The \$1.5 million in nonrecurring funds will be provided to the FLDOE to create and implement the program.

Bright Futures Scholarship Program (\$651.7 million): The state's largest merit-based scholarship received an additional \$56.7 million in funding, bringing the total to \$651.7 million for approximately 108,500 student scholarships.

Florida Student Assistance Grant (FSAG) (\$280 million): Up roughly \$11 million dollars from last year, this program provides need-based grant aid to degree-seeking, resident, undergraduate students who demonstrate substantial financial need and are enrolled in participating public and private postsecondary institutions. FSAG is the state's largest need-based aid program.

Effective Access to Student Education (EASE) Program (\$116.7 million): The EASE program provides tuition assistance to Florida undergraduate students who attend eligible private, non-profit colleges or universities. It received an increase of about \$2.5 million more than last year due to a projected increase of eligible students. The program is one of the few state grant programs that doesn't consider financial need in prioritizing grant awards. Legislators considered a bill that would have added a need-based requirement to receive the grant, but the proposal ultimately failed.






Florida College Access Network (FCAN) is Florida's first collaborative network committed to ensuring all Floridians have the opportunity to achieve an education beyond high school and prosper in Florida's dynamic economy. Our mission is to create and sustain a statewide network that catalyzes and supports communities to increase college and career preparation, access, and completion for all Florida students.

As a nonpartisan organization, FCAN strives to expand knowledge of research, data, policies and practices that impact postsecondary access and attainment in Florida. This preview is intended as an educational resource and does not constitute an endorsement or opposition to any specific bill or legislation.

For more research and data from FCAN, visit www.floridacollegeaccess.org/research-and-data/.

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