

2026 State Policy Priorities: A Focus On Affordability

Florida maintains strong workforce and talent development aspirations. Florida's SAIL to 60 Goal aims to increase the percentage of Floridians, ages 25-64, with a high-value postsecondary certificate, degree, or training experience to 60% by 2030. Currently, we are at **55.1%**.


US News & World Report ranks Florida the #1 state for higher education, an achievement reached each of the past nine years, based on low tuition and fees and robust graduation rates. The same rankings place Florida 33rd-best in debt at time of graduation, emphasizing that tuition and fees alone do not dictate affordability. Gallup-Lumina polling finds that more than half (56%) of never-enrolled and previously enrolled adults indicated cost as a "very important" reason why they haven't pursued an education beyond high school. Among current students, many report they cannot cover the cost of a \$500 emergency.

The **Florida College Access Network's** 2026 state policy priorities focus on an issue that remains top of mind for current students and prospective students alike – Affordability. Cost of attendance continues to be the largest barrier to higher education.

Efforts to support students afford and complete their higher education offer broad returns. These investments are a net gain to both the student – as any form of postsecondary education beyond high school increases earning potential – and adds to the state's economy. Building on this potential, a 10% increase in college enrollment in Florida could generate an additional \$8.38 billion annually, factoring in individual earnings, social benefits, and economic impacts.

FCAN supports the following policy priorities for 2026 and beyond:

Expand Access to the Florida Student Assistance Grant (FSAG)

- The FSAG is a need-based state grant program for resident, undergraduate students who demonstrate financial need. Different versions of the FSAG grant exist for students enrolled in a technical college, state college, state university, or private institution. Current grant awards are between \$200 to \$3,260 for eligible students.
 - Annual appropriations for the program do not cover all eligible degree-seeking students. During the 2023-2024 academic year, only 59% of eligible applicants attending a public institution received an award, leaving 39,189 students, or **41% of the eligible pool without FSAG aid**.
 - The annual appropriation for FSAG has remained stagnant at \$269 million since 2017, despite a significant number of eligible students who are left without funding each year, rising inflation, and continued population growth.
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- Ensuring all eligible students receive meaningful aid will help additional Florida residents earn their postsecondary degree or credential, **reduce reliance on student debt**, and contribute to our statewide attainment.
- A student must apply for the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** to qualify for FSAG. HB 1255 passed during the 2025 session requires instruction on the FAFSA within the mandatory financial literacy course high school students take. Ensuring that educators receive the proper training and resources to deliver FAFSA instruction is important for students to benefit from federal and state financial aid.

Support Emergency Based Aid Programs for Students

- The primary reason students drop out of college is due to financial challenges; many students report they cannot cover a \$500 emergency and at least 25% of students run out of money 5 or more times a year.
 - Emergency aid is a **critical retention and completion tool** for supporting students as they face emergency economic barriers that might disrupt their education beyond high school.
 - Over 75% of Florida students who left college before completing their degree said it was due to financial reasons.
- **Providing resources – either directly, on a matching basis, or through policies that provide flexibility to existing aid sources** - to postsecondary financial aid offices can strengthen or establish Emergency Aid Programs and support students during times of crisis, keeping them enrolled in their degree programs, and alleviating added financial stress.

Strengthen Dual Enrollment Financial and Outcome Reporting

- Dual enrollment (DE) is an acceleration option for students in grades 6-12 to enroll in postsecondary education courses and simultaneously earn credit towards both a high school diploma and college and/or career credit at no cost.
- **Opportunities exist to strengthen reporting by including local finances and outcomes from dual enrollment, enabling tracking of trends over time on students' college and career paths.**
 - Dual Enrollment, unlike other acceleration options, exists in partnership between school districts and post-secondary institutions. Acceleration incentive funding reports for dual enrollment should enable an **accounting of payments to and expenses borne by FCS and SUS institutions**, in the name of **financial transparency**.
 - Dual Enrollment **outcomes** – specifically annual credits earned from successful completion and longer-term postsecondary enrollment and completion – should be included in **annual reporting** to better understand **return on taxpayer investment**.