

# 2026 Florida Legislative Session Preview:

Property Taxes, Increasing Accountability for Family Empowerment Scholarships, and Expanding Opportunities in Rural Communities are on the Agenda



January 2026

\*as of 1/12/2026

## Introduction

Florida's 2026 Legislative Session is scheduled to start on Tuesday, January 13<sup>th</sup>.

Both Chambers have signaled their priorities and interests – Senate President Ben Albritton announced the refiling of “Rural Renaissance” legislation and a bill on school choice scholarships. House Speaker Daniel Perez has indicated congressional redistricting, artificial intelligence, and a healthcare package headlined as “Florida’s New Frontier in Healthcare” will be discussed. Additionally, both House and Senate as well as the Governor have indicated a strong interest in property tax reform.

The education subcommittees leading up to this year’s legislative session have highlighted the return on investment for baccalaureate degrees, increased enrollment and expanding career technical education programs, and concerns stemming from universal choice.

It is anticipated that lawmakers will take a more conservative approach to budget decisions again this year, as strategic decisions made during last session significantly improved the state’s near-term financial position. The Long-Range Financial Outlook projects a \$3.8B surplus in 2026-27, compared to a \$2.8B projected deficit from Fall 2024. State expenditures are expected to exceed revenues during fiscal years 2027-2028, and 2028-2029.

The 2026 session could reshape access to college for thousands of Florida students. Here’s what to watch and why it matters for a [Talent Strong Florida](#).

## Budget

Governor Ron DeSantis has recommended a \$117.36 billion budget for FY 2026-2027, an increase of more than \$1 billion compared to the current 25-26 FY budget. The [Floridians First](#) budget outlines the Governor's priorities for the coming year.

Florida's SAIL to 60 Goal calls for 60% of working age Floridians to achieve a degree or credential by 2030. To this end, the Governor has continued to invest in several workforce initiatives and increased operational funding for higher education.

Funding for the Workforce Development Capitalization Grant Program, to grow career and technical education (CTE) is restored to \$100 million, an increase of \$60 million over the current funding amount.

New this year, \$6 million is dedicated to expanding the K-12 Guardian Program to state colleges and universities.

The numbers in the parentheses will show if program funding has increased or decreased compared to the current year fiscal budget. Highlights include:

- Funding for **Bright Futures Scholarship Program** at \$692 million, fully funding anticipated student enrollment. (+\$55.8 M)
  - Anticipates funding 11,851 additional students.
- Funding for the **Florida Student Assistance Grant** (FSAG) at \$269 million. (No Change)
  - Maintains maximum award for FSAG of \$3,260.
  - FSAG funding has not increased since 2017 despite population growth and significant increases in total cost of attendance due to housing, transportation, and food.
- \$1.9 billion in state operating funds for the Florida College System (FCS) and \$4 billion for the State University System (SUS). (+\$90M for FCS,+\$100M for SUS)
  - \$90M for FCS towards the funding model and faculty and recruitment incentive
  - Additional \$100M for SUS Recruitment and Retention Incentive
- **Performance funding** for the FCS and SUS is recommended at \$30 million and \$645 million, respectively. (FCS no change, SUS no change)
- \$20 million for the **Pathways to Career Opportunities** Grant Program with \$5 million to continue the Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Program. (No Change)
- \$20 million in **Performance-based Incentives for CTE students** attending school district career technical centers and Florida Colleges. (No Change)

- \$130 million in continued funding for two programs implemented in 2022 to enhance Florida’s nursing workforce: (1) The Prepping Institutions, Employers and Learners through Incentive for Nursing Education (**PIPELINE**) program funded at \$100 million and (2) The Linking Industry to Nursing Education (**LINE**) program funded at \$30 million. (No Change)
- \$35 million for the **Open Door Grant Program** to provide funding to school districts and Florida College institutions to support enrollment and completion in Career and Technical programs that lead to certain credentials, certificates, or degrees. (No change)
- Maintaining tuition rates at Florida’s colleges and universities at 2014 levels.

## Policy

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Unless otherwise indicated, all proposed bills would take effect July 1, 2026.

### SB 250 – Rural Communities

**Bill Sponsor:** Senator Corey Simon (R – Tallahassee)

Senate Bill 250, commonly referred to as the “Rural Renaissance” bill, is one of the Senate’s priority legislative packages aimed at enhancing the economic, healthcare, and educational offerings in rural communities. This bill was refiled this year after not passing during the 2025 session. Education highlights include:

#### ***Expands Services and Funding of Regional Consortia***

Regional Consortia are cooperative agreements among smaller school districts that exist to share resources amongst each other. The bill expands their services to include professional learning, college, career, and workforce development, business and operational services and provides additional funding.

#### ***Student Loan Repayment***

The Rural Incentive for Professional Educators (RIPE) program is created within the Department of Education to attract and retain education professionals to rural counties. Eligible staff at public or private schools within fiscally constrained counties can apply to receive loan repayment assistance of up to \$15,000 over five years.

The bill passed its one committee of reference ahead of the 2026 session and is ready for a full Senate vote.

## **SB 320 / HB 963 – Administrative Efficiency in Public Schools**

**Bill Sponsors:** Senator Corey Simon (R – Tallahassee) and Representative David Smith (R – Winter Springs)

Senate Bill 320 and House Bill 963 are identical bills refiled this year after not passing during the 2025 session. These bills amend regulatory aspects of public schools including creating more pathways into the teaching profession. The bills allow school boards to determine the minimum qualifications for nondegree teachers of career programs and expand issuers of temporary teaching certificates to include regional educational consortia. The bills also extend the renewal period for professional certifications from 5 to 10 years if certain conditions are met.

SB 320 passed its first of two committees of reference ahead of the 2026 session.

## **SB 372 / HB 307 – Public Postsecondary Tuition and Fee Waivers for Sheriff’s Office Employees**

**Bill Sponsors:** Senator Jay Trumbull (R – Panama City) and Representative Chad Johnson (R – Chiefland)

Senate Bill 372 and House Bill 307 are identical bills that expand the state employee tuition waiver program to full-time sheriff’s office employees. Under these bills, sheriff’s office employees could receive waived tuition and fees to enroll in up to 6 credit hours per term at a state university or college, subject to approval of their agency. This would extend a benefit currently available to state employees, potentially increasing college access for law enforcement families, though fiscal impact is unclear at this time.

## **SB 448 / HB 417 – Career and Academic Planning for Middle and High School Students**

**Bill Sponsors:** Senator Kristen Arrington (D – Kissimmee) and Representative Allison Tant (D – Tallahassee)

Senate Bill 448 and House Bill 417 are identical bills that require earlier notification of career, technical, and postsecondary planning to students and their families. These bills require school boards to provide a list of CTE programs to students and their families starting at the end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade and each year thereafter. The bills also require middle schools to hold a career and academic planning meeting for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students and their parents before students enter high school to explain postsecondary options and financial aid supports.

## **SB 720 – Resident Status for Tuition Purpose**

**Bill Sponsor:** Senator Rosalind Osgood (D – Fort Lauderdale)

Senate Bill 720 would allow previously incarcerated individuals to establish Florida residency for educational purposes through documentation that was valid prior to their incarceration. This bill was passed by the Florida Legislature in 2024, however, was vetoed by the Governor. It was refiled in 2025 and passed one of its assigned committees, but did not advance further.

## **SB 920 – Mathematics Education**

**Bill Sponsor:** Senator Don Gaetz (R – Crestview)

Senate Bill 920 establishes an applied algebra course for each of the CTE career clusters, further connecting math concepts and skills to those needed in industry professions. The bill would require this course to be incorporated into the existing secondary math pathways for CTE and be equivalent to Algebra 1 for high school graduation and postsecondary consideration. Additionally, the bill requires collaboration between the Department of Education and Lastinger Center at the University of Florida to recommend an artificial intelligence tool to support mathematics instruction in K-12, for consideration of the legislature.

## **SB 1052 / HB 1279 – Education**

**Bill Sponsors:** Senator Erin Grall (R – Vero Beach) and Representative Kincart Jonsson (R – Lakeland)

Senate Bill 1052 and House Bill 1279 are similar bills that carry the Department of Education’s legislative priorities and address various administrative aspects of state universities and Florida colleges.

### **The Senate Bill:**

***Requires US Citizenship or Lawful Presence in Admissions to Public Higher Education Institutions and State Financial Aid Awards***

Admission criteria to a state university, college, or school district adult education program is limited to citizens of the United States or those lawfully present.

### ***New Funding Model for Florida College System***

A new funding model for the Florida college system is proposed that factors in program offerings, completions, college size, and regional cost differentials among several attributes. The bill requires collaboration between college presidents and the Department of Education when determining overall costs for each institution.

### ***Adds Tuition and Fee Benefit for Florida State Guard***

Benefits of active members of the Florida State Guard are expanded to include waived tuition and fees at a state university or college. Under this bill, up to 6 credit hours can be waived per term, subject to approval of their agency.

### **The House Bill:**

#### ***Places a Cap on Foreign Student Enrollment at State Universities and Florida Colleges***

State universities and colleges would be limited in enrolling foreign students, defined as noncitizens and lacking permanent residency status in the United States, to no more than 10% of total enrollment and no more than 5% of total enrollment may be foreign students from any one specific country.

#### ***Clarifies 4-Year Graduation Rate for University Preeminence and University Performance Funding Applies to 120 Semester Hour Baccalaureate Programs***

The House bill clarifies that the 4-year graduation rate of 60% required for institutions to qualify as Preeminent State Research Universities, applies to baccalaureate degree programs with a maximum of 120 semester hours. University performance-based funding tied to the 4-year graduation rate for first-time-in-college students is also clarified to apply to baccalaureate degrees with a maximum of 120 semester hours.

The bill further clarifies that state universities that fail to maintain a full-time, first-time-in-college enrollment ratio of at least 95% residents for tuition purposes are ineligible for preeminence funding.

#### ***State Board of Education to Develop Weighted Grading System for Certain Courses***

The House bill requires the State Board of Education to develop a uniform weighted grading system for honors and articulated acceleration courses for school districts to calculate high school grade point averages.

## **Both Bills:**

Both bills create incentives similar to those currently awarded to Advanced Placement test results (additional FTE membership and teacher bonuses) for new accelerated courses developed by the Department of Education.

Both bills reduce the time for state universities and colleges to submit comments on proposed AA specialized transfer degrees, from 60 days to 30 days. Additionally, state universities and colleges are restricted from mandating institution-wide courses as a graduation requirement if it conflicts with the credits needed for the AA specialized transfer degree.

## **SB 1170 – Education**

**Bill Sponsor:** Senator Alexis Calatayud (R – Miami)

Senate Bill 1170 requires the REACH Office, which is tasked with coordinating Florida's workforce system, to provide information on earnings outcomes in certain certificate and degree pathways. This information is accessible to the public and would help individuals better understand earnings potential through different pathways.

## **SB 1194 – Artificial Intelligence in Education**

**Bill Sponsor:** Senator Shevrin Jones (R – Miami Gardens)

Senate Bill 1194 creates statewide standards on the use of artificial intelligence by schools and students in K-12. Teachers in grades six through twelve are required to teach additional AI topics, including digital literacy and ethics.

## **SB 1276 / HB 721 – Foreign Students Enrolled in Public Postsecondary Educational Institutions**

**Bill Sponsors:** Senator Jonathan Martin (R – Fort Myers) Representative Berny Jacques (R – Seminole)

Senate Bill 1276 and House Bill 721 place a cap on foreign student enrollment at Florida universities and colleges to 10% of the total number of students enrolled at the institution. Students who are citizens of another country and who are not permanent residents of the United States would fall under this rule. FCAN's recent analysis found international students contribute to Florida's degree production and are positioned to fill critical STEM workforce needs.

## **SB 1300 / HB 325 – Education and Workforce Development for Current and Former Inmates**

**Bill Sponsors:** Senator Alexis Calatayud (R – Miami) and Representative Kim Kendall (D – St. Augustine)

Senate Bill 1300 and House Bill 325 are similar bills that would allow inmates with 2 years or less on their sentence to take courses towards certification in commercial driving. There are also provisions that incentivize employers for hiring previously incarcerated individuals.

## **SB 1458 – Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education and HB 899 – Task Force on Artificial Intelligence in Public Postsecondary Education**

**Bill Sponsors:** Senator Tracie Davis (D – Jacksonville) and Representative Leonard Spencer (D – Gotha)

Senate Bill 1458 and House Bill 899 are similar bills that seek to review and make recommendations on artificial intelligence usage and its impacts within the State University System and Florida College System. The Senate bill creates a study group, while the House bill creates a taskforce. Both require a report with findings and recommendations to the Governor, Senate President and House Speaker by December 1, 2026.

## **CS/HB 121 – Nursing Education Programs**

**Bill Sponsor:** Health and Human Services Committee and Representative Toby Overdorf (R – Palm City)

House Bill 121 is a refiled bill that passed in the 2025 session but was vetoed by the Governor. The bill changes timelines for probationary status for professional and practical nursing programs that do not meet specific graduation requirements, requires programs to develop an exit examination to ensure graduates are prepared for the NCLEX nursing certification exam and includes provisions to ensure early identification of students needing support. The bill also requires institutions that fail to meet certain graduation rates to provide remediation or tuition reimbursement for students who do not pass the NCLEX.

HB 121 passed favorably through both of its referred committees ahead of the 2026 session. It is ready for a full House vote.

## HB 723 – Rural Counties

**Bill Sponsor:** Representative Shane Abbott (R – DeFuniak Springs)

House Bill 723 creates the Rural District Graduate Placement Incentive Pilot Program. The program provides bonuses to school districts and charter schools in fiscally constrained counties that increase the number of high school graduates, earn a Career and Professional Education (CAPE) industry certification while in high school, and that become employed in that industry following graduation. Bonus funds must be reinvested in the workforce education programs. The bill also requires workforce development boards and education consortia to help rural school districts and charter schools increase employment outcomes of students that earned CAPE credentials.

## What's Not on the Agenda

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### Need-based Aid to Increase College Affordability

As described earlier, the Governor's proposed budget does not include expansion of the Florida Student Assistance Grant to resolve the unmet need, and to date no proposals have emanated from either legislative chamber. During the 2023 – 2024 academic year, there were 43,337 unfunded eligible students across all grant types. Funding for the FSAG has remained stagnant at 2017 levels despite increased enrollments into postsecondary programs and increased inflation.

### Emergency Aid

Several state universities and colleges have implemented emergency aid programs, just-in-time micro-grants to students who are faced with acute financial issues in colleges. However, Florida lacks a statewide emergency aid policy for students. It is understood that an emergency can derail a student's ability to stay enrolled and graduate. A statewide policy can provide uniform eligibility criteria, funding guidance, monitoring of student outcomes, and help Florida better understand the circumstances Florida students face impacting their education.

## How to Stay Informed

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FCAN encourages education stakeholders to stay engaged throughout the 2026 Legislative Session as these proposals have the potential to affect college access, student success, and the vitality of Florida's communities.

### **The Process**

The constitutionally required Legislative Session lasts 60 days at minimum, running this year through March 13. During session, legislators are responsible for passing the state budget.

Most bills are assigned to two to three committees of reference, where they must receive favorable votes before advancing to the full House or Senate. Once a bill is approved by the full House or Senate, it is sent to the other chamber for further consideration. A bill must be passed by each chamber in order to be sent to the Governor for his signature, enacting the bill into law.

### **Bill Tracking**

The Florida [House](#) and [Senate](#) offer free bill trackers that can alert you to bill updates. These alerts can be sent to your email or accessed on the website.

### **Calendars**

Calendars for committees and session are available on the [House](#) and [Senate](#) homepages.

### **The Florida Channel**

All committee meetings and sessions of the House and Senate can be viewed live and for rewatch on [The Florida Channel](#).

### **Know Your Elected Officials**

If you live in Florida, you are a constituent of a State Representative and State Senator. Find your elected officials [HERE](#).



Florida College Access Network (FCAN) leads the statewide collaborative movement to strengthen Florida by ensuring every Floridian attains education beyond high school toward a rewarding career. We envision a thriving Florida working together where education is the pathway to economic mobility and a prosperous economy for all.

This report is intended as an educational resource and does not constitute an endorsement of or opposition to any specific bill or legislation.

For more research and data from FCAN, visit [www.floridacollegeaccess.org/research-and-data/](http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/research-and-data/).

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