

2026 Florida Legislative Session Update:

Laws Prioritizing Florida Students in Preeminent University Enrollment, Healthcare Education Programs, and Appropriations take center stage.



February 2026

*as of 2/22/2026

Introduction

The 2026 regular legislative session is scheduled to conclude on March 12th. Thus far, there are several bills filed that could impact the higher education landscape in Florida from access and operations points of view.

In terms of access, the legislature is considering bills that set percentage enrollment limits for non-Florida and international students at state universities, legislation that provides waived tuition and fees for active members of the Florida National Guard, and legislation supporting currently or formerly incarcerated individuals in workforce training in their higher education pursuits.

Operationally, campus safety is top of mind following the shooting at Florida State University last year. Legislation that expands the current K-12 Guardian program to public postsecondary institutions is making its way through both Chambers. Legislation is also proposed that establishes a new funding formula for Florida Colleges. The 2022-2023 Budget required Florida College Presidents to work with the Department of Education to develop and propose a new model that better accounts for institutional operational and program needs, and this session the legislature is considering codifying the resulting proposal. Additional legislation that expands the LINE fund beyond nursing programs to include other health science programs is moving forward.

The Senate proposed an \$115 billion budget while the House proposal is \$113.6 billion. Both proposals come in under the current Fiscal Year 2025-2026 budget of \$115.1 billion and the Governor's recommended budget of \$117.4 billion.

Last year, session extended beyond the normal 60-day length. While a similar extension this year is unclear at this point, legislators will be back in Tallahassee April 20-24th for a special session on congressional redistricting called by the Governor.

Building on FCAN's [2026 Legislative Preview](#), this mid-session update tracks the progress of these bills and developments in the state budget as of February 18th. FCAN

will publish a final 2026 session recap upon the legislature's adjournment detailing which legislation passed alongside the proposed 2026-2027 state budget.

Legislation Impacting Postsecondary Education

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

CS/SB 7038 and CS/HB 1279 – Education

Bill Sponsors: Senate Education Postsecondary Committee and Senate Appropriations Committee on PreK-12 Education; House Careers and Workforce Subcommittee and Representative Kincart Jonsson (R – Lakeland)

Senate Bill 7038 (originally SB 1052) and House Bill 1279 are similar bills that address various administrative aspects of state universities and Florida colleges. FCAN's [2026 Legislative Preview](#) fully explains the provisions.

Starting in 2030, the House bill would require each preeminent university to maintain a fall full-time, first-time-in-college enrollment ratio comprised of at least 95% Florida residents based on a 3-year average to be eligible for preeminent funding. Currently, Florida International University, Florida State University, the University of Florida, and the University of South Florida have achieved pre-eminent status, with the University of Central Florida expected to receive designation from the Board of Governors later this year. The bill sponsor commented in her presentation of the bill that roughly 20% of the freshman class at Florida's pre-eminent universities are comprised of non-Florida students, disadvantaging Florida students and taxpayers. Additionally, under the bill state universities would limit undergraduate enrollment of nonresident, noncitizen students to no more than 5% from any one country.

The Senate bill would allow private colleges to be reimbursed for tuition and instructional expenses of dual-enrolled public school students during fall and spring terms. Currently, reimbursement is available only for summer term courses. The bill also establishes a new funding model for the Florida College System that factors in the various operational and programmatic needs of different institutions. This is the result of 2022-2023 budget proviso language that required a new funding model to be created. Additionally, the bill adds a tuition and fee benefit for active members of the Florida State Guard depending on agency approval and space available.

The Senate bill has one more hearing left in the Senate Rules Committee before a full Senate vote. The House bill has one hearing left in the Education and Employment Committee before a full House vote.

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

Bill Sponsors: Senator Alexis Calatayud (R – Miami); House Education and Employment Committee, House Careers and Workforce Subcommittee, and Representative Kim Kendall (D – St. Augustine)

As described in [FCAN's Legislative Preview](#), Senate Bill 1300 and House Bill 325 are similar bills that establish programming for certain inmates to obtain Class A and Class B commercial drivers licenses while incarcerated. There are also provisions that incentivize employers for hiring previously incarcerated individuals.

The Senate bill has two hearings left before a full Senate vote. The House bill passed all committees of reference and is ready for a full House vote.

Other Relevant Bills

CS/SB 896 and CS/CS/HB 757 – School Safety

Bill Sponsor: Senate Criminal Justice Committee and Senator Don Gaetz (R – Crestview); House Judiciary Committee, House Budget Committee, and Representative Michelle Salzman (R – Escambia County)

Senate Bill 896 and House Bill 757 expand the Guardian Program to Florida Colleges and State Universities if they elect to participate. These bills would permit an employee or faculty member to serve as a guardian (armed personnel that are trained to prevent or stop active assailants) after becoming certified by a Sheriff's Department. The bill also authorizes Catholic schools to receive additional security funding, on par with Jewish schools.

The Senate bill has one hearing left in the Senate Appropriations Committee before a full Senate vote. The House bill passed all committees of reference and is ready for a full House vote.

CS/SB 176 and HB 77 – Public Postsecondary Education Safety Policies and Procedures

Bill Sponsor: Senate Appropriations Committee on Higher Education and Senator Tina Polsky (D – Boca Raton); Representative Marie Woodson (D – Hollywood)

Currently, there is no requirement for institutions to consistently make available guidance on internal and external reporting of threats which can cause confusion for

students, staff, and anyone involved when concerns arise. Both bills require Florida colleges and state universities to adopt and implement written safety procedures for preventing, reporting, and responding to threats, making them publicly accessible.

The Senate bill passed favorably off the Senate floor and was sent to the House for consideration. The House bill has yet to be heard in committee.

SB 254 and CS/HB 121 – Nursing Education Programs

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

Senate Bill 254 and House Bill 121 are similar bills aimed at enhancing accountability of nursing education programs.

Both bills require nursing programs to establish entrance criteria, early identify students who are likely to need assistance, administer an exit exam that assesses a student’s readiness for the National Council of State Boards of Nursing Licensing Examination (NCLEX), and provide remediation to students that do not pass the exit exam or NCLEX. The Senate bill would encourage all nursing programs to offer a graduate nursing preceptorship to their graduates to provide opportunities for clinical and nonclinical training, as well as require the Center of Nursing to establish standards for such graduate nursing preceptorships. The Senate bill would also allow the Department of Health to issue temporary provisional nursing licenses.

As described in [FCAN’s 2026 Legislative Preview](#), House Bill 121 is a refiled bill that passed in the 2025 session but was vetoed by the Governor. The Governor vetoed the 2025 version citing concerns about regulatory burdens on nursing programs.

The Senate bill has two more committees of reference before a full Senate vote. The House bill passed favorably from the House and was sent to the Senate for consideration.

CS/SB 1246 and CS/HB 1325 – Linking Industry to Nursing Education Fund

Bill Sponsor: Senate Appropriations Committee on Higher Education and Senator Tracie Davis (D – Jacksonville); House Careers and Workforce Subcommittee and Representative Erika Booth (R – St. Cloud)

These are similar bills that expand the Linking Industry to Nursing Education (LINE) Fund. The LINE fund was established in 2022 to provide matching grants to institutions

of higher education that partner with healthcare providers. Those funds would support the nursing education to workforce pipeline.

The Senate version expands the list of programs eligible for LINE funding beyond nursing to support in-demand programs in health science. The DOE will determine the list of programs as well as the program criteria. The Senate bill also adds more flexibility in what type of donation qualifies for matching grants from the state. Specifically, the bill would allow contributions from an educational institution's direct service organization and by individuals or entities that are not health care partners (*currently only health care partner's dollars are matched*) to be matched by the state.

The House version solely focuses on expanding options for what may qualify for matching grants from the state to include nonmonetary contributions.

The Senate bill passed all committees of reference and is ready for a full Senate vote. The House bill has one more hearing in the House Education and Employment Committee before a full House vote.

CS/SB 1376 and CS/HB 1115 – Grants for Genetic Counseling Education

Bill Sponsor: Senate Education Postsecondary Committee and Senator Danny Burgess (R – Zephyrhills); House Careers and Workforce Subcommittee and Representative Adam Anderson (R – Palm Harbor)

These identical bills create a new grant program within the State University System to support graduate level genetic counseling programs to help address the shortage of genetic counselors in the state. Grants can be used to establish an accredited program at a state university, recruit and retain faculty, provide financial assistance to students enrolled in the program, and for clinical rotation costs.

The Senate bill has two committees of reference left before a full Senate vote. CS/HB 1115 passed favorably from the House and was sent to the senate for consideration.

SB 250 – Rural Communities

Bill Sponsor: Senator Corey Simon (R – Tallahassee)

As described in [FCAN's 2026 Legislative Preview](#), Senate Bill 250, commonly referred to as the "Rural Renaissance" bill, is one of the Senate's priority legislative packages aimed at revitalizing rural communities in Florida. This bill was refiled this year after not passing during the 2025 session.

Education highlights include strengthening regional consortia and establishing a student loan repayment program. Regional consortia are combinations of smaller school districts, lab schools, and Florida Schools for the Deaf and Blind that have agreed to share resources amongst each other to provide greater outcomes for students. The bill increases funding for regional consortia composed of four or more school districts from \$50,000 per district to \$150,000 per district. Regional consortia services are also expanded to provide college, career, and workforce development, as determined by each consortium's board of directors. Additionally, the bill establishes the Rural Incentive for Professional Educators Program (RIPE) to provide student loan repayment of up to \$15,000 to incentivize teachers and administrators to establish residency and employment in rural areas of opportunity.

The bill passed unanimously from the Senate chamber and was sent to the House for consideration.

CS/SB 1504 and CS/HB 1343 – Insurance Customer Representative Licensing Qualifications

Bill Sponsor: Senate Banking and Insurance Committee and Senator Alexis Calatayud (R – Miami); House Insurance and Banking Subcommittee and Representative Hodgers (R – Viera)

These bills provide an additional option for individuals to qualify for an insurance customer representative license, introducing the knowledge and skills required for the insurance industry in high school. The bill establishes a half credit course in insurance and personnel finance to be available to school districts starting with 2027-2028 school year. Completion of this course listed on a student's diploma would count toward licensure.

The Senate bill has one hearing left in the Senate Rules Committee before a full Senate vote. The House bill has passed all committees of reference and is ready for a full House vote.

CS/CS/SB 1036 and CS/CS/HB 753 – School Counselors

Bill Sponsor: Senate Education PreK-12 Committee, Senate Rules Committee, and Senator Alexis Calatayud (R – Miami); House Education Administration Subcommittee and Representative Christine Hunschofsky (D – Parkland)

These bills exempt school counselors from meeting general educator certification requirements unrelated to counseling credentials, removing barriers to the profession.

The Senate bill passed all committees of reference and is ready for a full Senate vote. The House bill has one hearing left in the House Education and Employment Committee before a full House vote.

CS/CS/SB 1266 – Cybersecurity Internships and CS/CS/CS/HB 1081 – Cybersecurity Experiential Learning

Bill Sponsor: Senate Appropriations Committee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development; Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee, and Senator Alexis Calatayud (R – Miami); House Education and Employment Committee, House Budget Committee, House Careers and Workforce Subcommittee and Representative Tyler Sirois (D – Merritt Island)

Both bills create the Cybersecurity Experiential Learning Program to accelerate Florida’s clearance-ready cybersecurity workforce through student internships and Industry-aligned curriculum. The program would be available to all state universities, Florida colleges, and private postsecondary institutions in the 2026-2027 academic year.

The Senate bill has one committee left in the Senate Appropriations Committee before a full Senate vote. The House bill has passed all committees of reference and is ready for a full House vote.

Budget

Mid-February marked the halfway point of Florida’s 2026 legislative session. Both chambers passed their initial budget proposals and are ready to head into budget conference. The Senate has released its budget plan SB 2500 at \$115 billion with the House proposing \$113.6 billion (HB 5001).

Each chamber is holding the line on in-state tuition at public postsecondary institutions. At the same time, the House higher education conforming bill (HEB 26-01) shifts the ability to set out-of-state fees for nonresident students from the Board of Governors to University Boards of Trustees, granting individual universities greater authority to set prices for nonresidents. This is not included in the Senate’s bill.

Listed below are the allocations for major higher education programs within each chamber’s budget proposal.

- SUS operating funds: \$3.8 billion (S) and \$3.7 billion (H)
 - Both Chambers allocated \$645 million for performance-based funding.
 - The Senate allocated \$100 million in preeminent university funding.

- FCS operating funds: \$1.8 billion (S) and \$1.7 billion (H)
 - The House and Senate allocated \$20 million in performance-based incentives for CAPE Industry Certifications.
 - The Senate allocated \$90 million to the funding model to recruit and retain faculty.
- Post Secondary Guardian Program: \$6 million from both chambers to certify and train school guardians at public postsecondary institutions.
- Private Colleges and Universities: \$191.5 million (S) and \$188.4 million (H)
 - Each chamber proposed a total of \$136.9 million for the Effective Access to Student Education (EASE) Grant, with maximum funding at \$3,500 per student. There are slight differences in funding for the EASE Plus Incentive Program, targeting students enrolled in high quality in-demand programs.
- Florida Student Assistance Grant (FSAG): \$269.4 million from both chambers.
- Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program: \$705.2 million from both chambers.
- Dual Enrollment Scholarship Program: \$18.1 million from both chambers.
- Student Success Incentive Funds: \$30 million from both chambers.
 - \$17 million each for 2+2 Student Success Incentive Funding.
 - \$13 million each for Work Florida Student Success Incentive Funding.
- Workforce Education funding includes the following:
 - Open Door Grant Program: \$35 million (S) and \$20 million (H).
 - Pathways to Career Opportunities Grant Program: \$20 million from both chambers. This funding includes \$5 million for the Grow Your Own Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Program Expansion.
 - Workforce Development Capitalization Grant Program: \$80.7 million (S) and \$40 million (H).
- Strategic Statewide Initiatives:
 - The Senate allocates \$5 million to the GATE Program while the House allocates \$8.5 million. The GATE Program is designed to help students that have left high school reengage with their education by providing a pathway to achieve their high school diploma and earn a CTE credential.

The chambers will now negotiate differences in conference committee, with final budget approval required before the March 12th session end date.

What's Not on the Agenda

Expanded Need-based Aid to Increase College Access

The proposed budgets do not expand the Florida Student Assistance Grant (FSAG) to resolve the unmet need. FSAG is Florida’s need-based aid, providing grants ranging \$200 to \$3,260 to eligible students at state universities, state colleges, technical colleges, and private institutions. During the 2023 – 2024 academic year, there were 43,337 unfunded eligible students across all grant types. For lower-income students, that gap can mean working more hours, taking on additional debt, delaying enrollment, or abandoning their postsecondary goals. Funding has remained frozen at \$269.4 million since 2017, despite enrollment growth and inflation that have eroded the program’s purchasing power.

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

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 a 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.

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