

2021 Florida Legislative

Session Recap:

Strengthening Florida's Workforce through Agency Coordination, Dual Enrollment, and Financial Aid



June 2021

Introduction

The 2021 regular legislative session adjourned promptly on April 30. After an unpredictable year, where higher education budget cuts seemed imminent, in the end, thanks to additional state revenues and federal relief funds, the Legislature made minimal cuts and passed an unprecedented \$101.5 billion state budget. This includes appropriating more than \$6 billion of federal pandemic relief funds to state projects.

Of the 3,140 bills filed this session, 275 passed, including major education policy bills focused on early learning, school choice expansion, and higher education and workforce reform. While the Senate's earlier proposal to align financial aid and scholarships to in-demand fields was met with strong opposition, the legislature passed several policies to increase access to short-term credentials and incentivize students to enter in-demand fields.

This session recap provides an overview of the notable legislation, outlined in further detail below, that stands to impact Florida's postsecondary students and build a talent strong Florida, including:

- **CS/CS/SB 52 – Postsecondary Education**
- **CS/CS/HB 233 – Postsecondary Education**
- **CS/SB 366 – Educational Opportunities Leading to Employment**
- **CS/HB 847 – Florida Postsecondary Academic Library Network**
- **SB 1028 - Education**
- **SB 1108 – Education**
- **CS/HB 1261 – Higher Education**
- **CS/CS/HB 1507 – Workforce Related Programs and Services**

As of the date of this recap's release, all budget and (unless otherwise indicated) legislation are awaiting Governor DeSantis' signature.

Legislation Impacting Postsecondary Education

CS/CS/SB 52 – Postsecondary Education

Bill Sponsors: Appropriations Committee, Education Committee, Senator Ray Rodrigues (R - Fort Myers), and Senator Dennis Baxley (R - Ocala)

Senate Bill 52 focuses mainly on college-credit dual enrollment programs. The bill creates a Dual Enrollment Scholarship Program Fund within the Department of Education. Beginning the fall of 2021, the program will reimburse postsecondary institutions the cost of tuition, at a specified rate, and materials for private and home-schooled dual enrollment students. The bill would also reimburse institutions, beginning summer 2022, for all students – public, private, and home education school – participating in summer dual enrollment. The legislature appropriated \$15.6 million in fiscal year (FY) 2021-22 for the Dual Enrollment Scholarship Fund.

The bill also changes Florida College System's collegiate high school program to an Early College Program and specifies the program's intent as an accelerated track of full-time postsecondary coursework intended to produce an associate's degree (60 hours). Current law notes the objective is for students to graduate high school with one full year of college credit (30 hours). Under SB 52, charter schools will also be able to contract directly with their local college to establish an Early College Program.

The bill contains several other provisions related to higher education, including allowing state universities to implement bonus schemes for employees and clarifying that students in the custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or other specified individuals at the age of 18 are eligible for tuition waivers. The bill was amended to include a provision that allows colleges and universities with teacher preparation programs to develop teacher in-service activities for school districts and remove award limits for the Florida Postsecondary Transition Program grants. The effective date is July 1, 2021.

CS/CS/SB 366 – Educational Opportunities Leading to Employment

Bill Sponsors: Appropriations Committee, Education Committee and Senator Travis Hutson (R - St. Augustine)

CS/CS/SB 366, originally sponsored by Senator Travis Hutson, contains several provisions intended to increase student readiness for postsecondary education and the workforce. The bill requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to develop and implement alternative methods to the use of college placement test performance to assess college readiness for high school students' dual enrollment eligibility and course placement for Florida College System students. The bill will also create three mathematics pathways in the statewide articulation agreements that align mathematics courses to the specific needs of programs, meta-majors, and careers.

The bill encourages students to gain education and training while still in school by offsetting employers' costs and modernizing the Florida Ready to Work credential. To incentivize employers to expand work-based learning, the bill allows the Department of Education to

reimburse employers for certain student-related workers' compensation premiums, subject to appropriation (\$2 million this year).

CS/HB 847 – Florida Postsecondary Academic Library Network

Bill Sponsors: Education & Employment Committee, Representative Cord Byrd (R – Jacksonville Beach) and Representative David Silvers (D – Lake Clarke Shores)

CS/HB 847 formally repeals the Complete Florida Plus program vetoed by Governor DeSantis last year and creates the Florida Postsecondary Academic Library Network. The Florida Postsecondary Academic Library Network would continue “essential” services from Complete Florida Plus, including access to distance learning courses, degree programs, and online advising services and maintaining a single online library, under the purview of the Board of Governors (BOG) and the Department of Education (DOE). The legislature appropriated \$21 million this year to fund the Network.

CS/HB 1261– Higher Education

Bill Sponsors: Education & Employment Committee, Representative Jackie Toledo (R – Tampa), and others

Throughout the legislative process, the Legislature amended CS/HB 1261 to include provisions that clarify and add institutional financial aid reporting requirements, require institutions to inform students about the outcomes related to their major or program choice, and provide targeted incentives to make college more affordable for specific student populations.

Buy One, Get One Free Tuition Waiver

The final bill includes the original “Buy One Get One Free” proposal which was narrowed to eight BOG determined in-demand STEM programs. Beginning with the 2021-22 academic year, for each course in the specified programs that a student pays for, they will receive an equivalent course for free. To be eligible for the waiver, students must be an in-state resident, initially enroll full-time at a state university for the Fall academic term immediately following high school graduation, and earn at least 60 semester credit hours towards a baccalaureate degree within two academic years of initial enrollment. The legislature appropriated \$25 million to reimburse institutions the cost of the free courses for students.

State University Free Seat Program

CS/HB 1261 includes the Free Seat Program originally in HB 845, requiring state universities to waive the tuition and fees for one online course for a Florida resident who is a veteran, an active-duty military, or a student who has not been enrolled in a postsecondary institution for more than five years. If the student continues in the online program, they will receive a 25% discount. The program is capped at 1,000 students systemwide each academic year.

Grandparent Out-Of-State Tuition Waiver

The Grandparent Tuition Waiver, initially proposed in HB 1273, was also added to CS/HB 1261. Starting in 2022-23, up to 350 top-performing out-of-state students with a grandparent who is a legal Florida resident will be eligible to receive the in-state tuition rate at a state university. To be eligible, students must earn a high school diploma that is comparable to a standard Florida high school diploma, achieve a combined SAT score no lower than the 89th national percentile or an equivalent ACT score, enroll as a full-time undergraduate student at a state university in the fall academic term immediately following high school graduation, and provide a written declaration by the student or the student's parent verifying the student's familial relationship to a grandparent who is a legal resident. The bill caps this waiver at 350 students systemwide.

State University Career Planning

CS/HB 1261 will require university boards to adopt procedures to ensure students receive career planning services in their freshman year, as initially proposed in SB 86. By 2022, the BOG must create an online dashboard that students can access with specific data, including graduate outcomes and debt. Additionally, students must attest that they have registered with the university career center and completed a career readiness training model before registering for courses in their second year.

Additionally, the bill provides COVID-19 liability protections to public and private postsecondary institutions and eliminates new out-of-state Benacquisto scholarships after the 2021-22 school year.

CS/CS/CS/HB 1507 – Workforce Related Programs and Services

Bill Sponsors: Education & Employment Committee, Appropriations Committee, Post-Secondary Education and Lifelong Learning Subcommittee, Representative Clay Yarborough (R – Jacksonville) and Representative Lauren Melo (R – Naples)

CS/CS/CS/HB 1507 is a systemwide approach to improving the state's workforce system. The bill provides an office to support collaboration between multiple agencies and institutions that receive funding to provide workforce education and training. The provisions in CS/HB 1505 – Workforce Programs and Services, including the consumer-based information portal, were added to CS/CS/CS/HB 1507 during the legislative process. As the bill was covered comprehensively in the [FCAN update](#), this recap will summarize the bill components, focusing on additional policies to encourage and ensure workforce programs provide training leading to in-demand jobs.

Reimagining Education and Career Help Office

To align the different agencies in Florida's workforce development system, HB 1507 creates the Reimagining Education and Career Help (REACH) Act, establishing the REACH Office within the Governor's Executive Office. The Governor would appoint a director to oversee operations of the REACH Office, and the office will serve as the dedicated expert on all things pertaining to Florida's education to workforce pipeline, including oversight of the Florida Talent Development

Council and coordination of state and federal workforce programs such as those within CareerSource and the DOE.

Open Door Grant Program

CS/CS/CS/HB 1507 creates the Open Door Grant Program. The Open Door Grant Program would provide grants to eligible postsecondary technical centers and FCS institutions to cover up to two-thirds of the cost of short-term, high-demand programs—as identified under the Department of Education’s Rapid Credential Program—for each participating student upon graduation and attainment of a credential. The legislature appropriated \$35 million of the federal COVID relief funds appropriated to the state towards this program.

To be eligible, a student must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and:

- For a student who does not receive state or federal aid, at the time of enrollment, the student is must pay one-third of the program's cost and sign an agreement that requires them to either complete the program or pay an additional one-third of the program cost if they fail to complete. Grant funds can cover the student’s one-third portion of the program's cost for students in integrated education and training programs and students who do not have a high school diploma and meet requirements established by the DOE.
- For a student who receives state or federal aid, institutions can award grant funds to cover the unmet need after all eligible aid is has been applied.

Money-back Guarantee Program

Starting in the 2022-2023 academic year, school districts and FCS institutions will be required to select three workforce programs to refund tuition to eligible graduates who cannot find a job in their field of training within six months of successfully completing their program. The institutions can set eligibility criteria for the program and must present these criteria to the DOE by July 1, 2022. The DOE will prioritize institutions that successfully utilize the program in the review and approval of new workforce education programs.

Credentials of Value/Master Credential List

In Florida’s ongoing attempt to align education with the workforce, CS/CS/CS/HB 1507 provides a process to review Florida’s postsecondary program offerings from the credential level to the postgraduate level. The bill requires the CareerSource state board to appoint a committee to create a framework to identify both degree and non-degree credentials of value. The bill tasks the committee, titled the Credentials Review Committee, with establishing metrics and criteria to identify such credentials and creating a “Masters Credential List” which will include credentials eligible to receive workforce funds from state and federal sources.

Workforce Performance Funding Model

CS/CS/CS/HB 1507 also requires the Credentials Review Committee to design and implement a “returned-value” funding formula for school district technical centers and FCS institutions based on student employment and wages. The legislation specifies that this formula must emphasize improving the economic mobility of underserved populations.

One-Stop Consumer-First Workforce System

The bill creates an automated one-stop workforce system in collaboration with DEO, DOE, and the DCF. In order to minimize barriers to consumers, the system would have a single intake form shared by all three agencies. State employees who monitor the system will receive training to recognize and prequalify individuals likely eligible for services administered by other partner agencies. This way, Floridians would be notified of all the assistance for which they are qualified, and a case manager could guide them through the processes.

Integrating Academic and Employability Skills

Again, to align academic education and career readiness, the bill establishes a faculty taskforce to determine, in a transparent way, how the state can embed employability skills such as communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving into the general education core curriculum. Starting in the 2022-2023 academic year, all public postsecondary institutions must provide students with the opportunity to earn a nationally recognized digital credential demonstrating career readiness.

Other Relevant Bills

CS/CS/HB 233 – Postsecondary Education

Bill Sponsors: Education & Employment Committee, Post-Secondary Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, and Representative Spencer Roach (R – Orlando)

The centerpiece of CS/CS/HB 233 is an annual intellectual diversity survey to be administered at public colleges and universities. Beginning September 1, 2022, the State Board of Education (SBE) and Board of Governors (BOG) will be responsible for creating an “objective, nonpartisan and statistically valid” survey and publishing the results. The bill further encourages viewpoint diversity by preventing the SBE, BOG, FCS, and SUS institutions from “shielding” students from ideas that they may find “uncomfortable, unwelcome, disagreeable, or offensive.” The bill also allows students to video or audio record a lecture at public colleges and universities for specific purposes but prohibits publication without consent. The bill maintains that faculty research, lectures, writings, and commentary are protected expressive rights and allows for civil remedies for unauthorized publishing of recorded lectures.

Finally, the bill allows student government associations to appeal to a senior administrator for disciplinary actions, including suspension or removal from office. FCS and SUS institutions will also be required to adopt minimum protections into their student codes of conduct, such as the presumption of innocence, right to an impartial hearing officer, and places the burden of proof in an investigation on the institution. The effective date is July 1, 2022.

CS/CS/SB 1028 – Education

Bill Sponsors: Appropriations Committee, Education Committee, and Senator Travis Hutson (R – St. Augustine)

CS/CS/SB 1028 contains a series of provisions related to charter schools, including allowing public colleges and universities to sponsor charter schools in multiple districts and allowing for the opening of additional university lab schools if the purpose is to serve families on a military installation. Governor DeSantis signed CS/CS/SB 1028 into law on June 1, 2021.

CS/CS/SB 1108 – Education

Bill Sponsors: Appropriations, Judiciary Committee, and Senator Manny Diaz (R – Hialeah Gardens)

Senate Bill 1108 contains several K-12 provisions effective July 1, 2021. Specifically, it updates the postsecondary civic literacy requirement to allow high school students who complete a high school course in civic literacy and pass an assessment, such as U.S. Government or via an accelerated mechanism like dual enrollment, to be exempt from the postsecondary civic literacy requirement. The bill also requires Florida public high schools to administer the SAT or ACT to all 11th grade students.

The legislature amended the bill throughout session to continue flexibility in innovative learning models. It adds a pilot to allowing students to blend in-person or virtual instruction with self-paced online models as well as extends the timeframe of the competency-based education pilot. Additionally, it requires 11th and 12th grade students to learn how the Florida voting process works, using a uniform primary and general election ballot.

Budget

State universities received a total of \$2.851 billion in operating funds, an increase of \$151 million. Additionally, the state will release the 6% holdback from FY 2020. Highlights include:

- No tuition increases
- \$560 million for the state university performance funding (level funded)
- \$11.8 million for Florida Postsecondary Academic Library Network (\$20.8 million total)
- \$25 million for incentives for Programs of Strategic Emphasis (Buy One, Get One Free)

The Florida College System will receive \$1.39 billion in operating funds, a \$90 million increase. Additionally, the state will release the 6% holdback from FY 2020. Highlights include:

- No tuition increases
- \$14 million for students earning industry certifications in high-skill, high-demand areas at Florida colleges (level funded)
- \$25 million in additional performance funding for state colleges through the 2+2 Student Success Incentive Fund and the Work Florida Student Success Incentive Fund
- The \$30 million allocated to Student Success from FY 2020 was added to the college system's base funding

- \$9.1 million for the Florida Postsecondary Academic Library Network (\$20.8 million total)
- \$35 million for the Open Door Grant Program

Financial aid programs in the state received strong support, while policymakers continue to look at the state and student return on investment of these funds. Highlights include:

- *EASE Tuition Assistance Grant*: After early disagreements about the EASE grant, which provides tuition assistance to Florida residents attending eligible independent, non-profit schools, the program ended up level-funded, but with some caveats. Institutions will be required to report the most recently available performance data on several metrics, including access, retention, graduation, job placement, and affordability. Schools that fall below the systemwide average on more than two of the five metrics will receive non-recurring funds and have to disclose to their students why those funds are non-recurring.
- *Access to Better Learning and Education (ABLE)*: This year, the legislature eliminated funding for the Access to Better Learning and Education (ABLE) grant program, a tuition assistance grant for students at eligible private for-profit institutions.
- *Bright Futures*: House and Senate budget leaders agreed to suspend a \$300 per semester stipend that top-level Bright Futures recipients get each year to offset the cost of textbooks but provided additional resources to support open-educational resources for all students.

Workforce development received a total of \$526 million. Highlights include:

- \$6.5 million for students earning industry certifications in high-skill, high-demand areas at career technical centers
- \$10 million for the Governor's Pathways to Career Opportunities Grant Program to establish or expand pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs for high school and college students

Other notable items in this session's budget include:

- \$15.6 million for Dual Enrollment Scholarships
- \$21.3 million in operating funds for Florida's four Historically Black Colleges and Universities
- \$100 million (from Federal pandemic relief funds) to support Workforce IT Systems






Florida College Access Network (FCAN) leads the collaborative movement to ensure every Floridian achieves an education beyond high school and a rewarding career. We envision a Florida working together where education is the pathway to economic mobility for all

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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