

2018 Florida Legislative Recap:

State universities, Bright Futures and school safety impacted by new laws



Introduction

The 2018 Legislative session ended March 11, following a brief extension to finish up the budget. In total, 3,250 bills were filed and 200 passed this session. In addition to several education reforms, lawmakers' priorities included the opioid epidemic, transportation, the environment, tax cuts, economic growth and hurricane preparedness among others.

This 2018 session recap provides an overview of the notable legislation that stands to impact Florida college students.

Budget

Education remains a priority in this year's state budget, with \$23.5 billion – more than a quarter of the \$88.7 billion allocated in the [FY 2018-19 General Appropriations Act \(GAA\)](#) – dedicated to K-12 and postsecondary education. Education spending was second only to health and human services (\$37.1 billion). However, the governor [vetoed](#) \$64 million in spending, including some education programs.

Highlights:

Student Financial Assistance: The legislature increased funding for several state scholarship and financial aid programs. The **Florida Bright Futures Scholarship** receives an additional \$122.4 million (\$519.7 million total) for the next academic year, which increases funding back to pre-recession award levels for Academic Scholars (100 percent of tuition) and Medallion Scholars (75 percent of tuition). Additionally, Bright Futures funding now covers summer classes and textbooks for Florida Academic Scholar awards for the first time.

Bright Futures was not the only financial aid program to benefit. Funding doubled the state match for the **First Generation Matching Grant Program** to \$10.6 million. The legislature also

enacted the **Florida Farmworkers Student Scholarship Program** for farmworkers and the children of farmworkers. The legislature also maintained the \$120 million increase provided for the need-based **Florida Student Assistance Grant (FSAG)** from the previous fiscal year, which more than doubled the budget for the need-based aid program to \$269.4 million. The **Effective Access to Student Education Grant** (formerly Florida Resident Assistance Grant) also received an additional \$11.4 million in funding for \$126.8 million total.

Tuition: The budget keeps tuition rates the same for public colleges and universities for the fifth consecutive year.

Florida College System: The Florida College System received \$1.23 billion, including \$60 million for performance funding (same as previous year).

State University System: Public universities received an additional \$141 million this year, for a total of \$5.1 billion (a 2.9% increase). The universities received an additional \$20 million in performance funding (total \$560 million), \$25 million to advance preeminence, as well as funds to enhance recruitment of faculty and graduate degree programs at Florida public universities.

Public Safety: The legislature appropriated \$400 million to strengthen security at public PK-12 schools and provided more resource officers and mental health counseling in the aftermath of the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

Postsecondary Education

Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018 ([SB 4](#))

Bill Sponsor: Senator Bill Galvano (R-Bradenton)

The Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018, Chapter 2018-4 L.O.F. as approved by the governor, was a priority of the senate. It expands merit- and need-based financial assistance available to students. Starting with the 2017-18 academic year, the Bright Futures Scholarship Program Academic scholarships will cover 100 percent of tuition and specified fees, provide a \$300 book stipend for the fall and spring term, and beginning summer 2018, enable students to use their awards during the summer term. Starting fall 2018, the Medallion Scholars will increase to 75 percent of tuition and specified fees: starting summer 2019, students will be able to use their awards during the summer term. The bill also expands the Benaquisto (National Merit) Scholarship, increases the match for First-Generation Scholarships, and creates a Florida Farmworker Scholarship.

The law also provides additional accountability and university faculty, program and infrastructure enhancements. It changes the graduation rates for preeminence incentive and performance funding from 6-year to 4-year metrics and requires each university to develop plans to increase their 4-year graduation rates. It also establishes the State University Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program. The law creates the “Campus Free Expression Act,” which prohibits public higher education institutions from restricting expressive activities on campus, and requires that the University of South Florida System develop a plan to consolidate accreditation of the St. Petersburg and Sarasota/Manatee campuses.

Effective Date: March 11, 2018 except as otherwise provided

Appropriation: \$123,513,035 for FY 2018-19

Excess Credit Hour Surcharges ([HB 565](#))

Bill Sponsor: Representative Amber Mariano (R-Port Richey)

The bill, Chapter 2018-132 L.O.F. as approved by the governor, requires a state university to refund excess hour surcharge fees charged to students who complete a bachelor’s degree within 4 years, up to 12 credit hours. This could result in cost-savings to students. According to the Board of Governors, state universities may be required to refund up to \$2.4 million annually.

Effective Date: July 1, 2018

Postsecondary Fee Waivers ([HB 75](#))

Bill Sponsor: Representative Mel Podner (R-Destin)

The bill, Chapter 2018-8 L.O.F. as approved by the governor, allows Florida College System institutions to waive fees for active duty members of U.S. Armed Forces using Department of Defense (DOD) Military Tuition Assistance (MTA), which prevents these students from incurring out of pocket costs for college-related fees.

Effective Date: July 1, 2018

Education for Prisoners ([HB 1201](#))

Bill Sponsors: Representatives Larry Ahern (R-Seminole) and Larry Lee, Jr. (D-Fort Pierce)

The bill, Chapter 2018-104 L.O.F., was approved by the governor. The bill allows postsecondary workforce funds to be used to educate inmates with less than two years remaining on their sentences. It also authorizes Department of Corrections to contract with a district school board,

the Florida Virtual School, or a charter school to provide educational services to prisoners in county detention facilities.

Effective Date: July 1, 2018

Supermajority Vote for Tax and Fee Increases ([HJR 7001](#))

Joint Resolution by Ways and Means Committee

The legislature approved a proposed amendment to the state constitution to require a two-thirds affirmative vote by each chamber of the legislature to impose or raise a state tax or fee, including tuition. The resolution has been filed with the secretary of state and will be included on the November 2018 ballot.

K-12

Education ([HB 7055](#))

By the House Education Committee

A number of House priority issues were combined into this omnibus K-12 bill, Chapter 2018-6 L.O.F. as approved by the governor. The bill includes a number of provisions to expand school choice, including the "Hope Scholarship," which provides a voucher for students to enroll in private schools if they have been bullied in public schools. The scholarship will be funded from sales tax on vehicle purchases. The bill also expands the Gardiner Scholarship program and modifies the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program. The bill removes a requirement that home education and private school students pay for instructional materials for dual enrollment courses. It also removes the requirement that private schools pay postsecondary institutions for students taking dual enrollment courses. The bill also includes a number of provisions related to charter schools, school district flexibility, and collective bargaining.

Effective date: The Hope Scholarship provisions are effective March 11; the remainder of the bill becomes effective July 1, 2018

Appropriation: \$14,000,000 for FY 2018-19

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act ([SB 7026](#))

By the Senate Appropriations Committee

The bill, Chapter 2018-3 L.O.F. as approved by the governor, represents the legislature's response to the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland. The bill imposes a 3-day waiting period for the purchase of rifles and other long gun sales, bans bump stocks, and increases the age limit to 21 for any gun purchase.

The bill also provides funding to strengthen school security and provide more resource officers and mental health counseling.

Effective Date: March 9, 2018

Appropriation: \$400,000,000 for FY 2018-19

High School Graduation Requirements ([HB 577](#))

Bill sponsors: Representatives David Silvers (D-West Palm Beach) and Nicholas Duran (D-Miami)

The bill, Chapter 2018-154 L.O.F., as approved by the Governor, allows students who earn credit for completing a Department of Education registered apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship programs to use those credits to satisfy high school graduation requirements for performing arts, speech and debate, practical arts or electives.

Effective Date: If approved by the governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2018

Other relevant bills and updates

Community College Competitiveness Act of 2018 ([SB 540](#))

Bill Sponsor: Senator Dorothy Hukill (R-Port Orange)

Senate Bill 540, also known as the "Community College Competitiveness Act of 2018," stalled in the latter weeks of session and ultimately did not pass. The bill included a number of proposals including changes to governance and accountability for the state's 28 Florida College System institutions. Other proposed changes included additional oversight and limits of bachelor's degree programs offered by state and community colleges, including a 20 percent cap on

upper-level, undergraduate enrollment at each FCS institution and a 10 percent cap for the system as a whole.

Higher Education (HB 909)

Bill Sponsor: Representative Bob Rommel (R-Naples)

The bill, which passed all of the House committee stops but did not make it through the final legislative stretch, codified the Higher Education Coordinating Council’s (HECC) Rise to 55 goal to increase the postsecondary attainment rate in Florida: for 55% of Floridians to hold a postsecondary degree or credential by the year 2025. The bill recognizes the work that the HECC has done to increase awareness of postsecondary programs, and would encourage continued efforts in raising awareness of local resources to assist students, promote public and private partnerships to encourage students to apply to postsecondary programs and financial aid, and provide recommendations to the legislature on ways to ensure that finances are not a barrier to completion.



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. Our vision for Florida is Goal 2025: For 60% of working-age Floridians to hold a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential by the year 2025.

As a nonpartisan organization, FCAN strives to expand knowledge of research, data, policies and practices that impact postsecondary access and attainment in Florida. This legislative overview is intended as an educational resource and does not constitute an endorsement or opposition to any of the legislative proposals described herein.