Florida Legislative Updates and History for State Scholarship and Grant Programs

Office of Student Financial Assistance

August 2020

The bill revises a number of policies related to the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program, the Florida Student Assistance Grant Program (FSAG) and the Benacquisto Scholarship Program.

Specifically, the bill modifies the scholarship programs below as follows:

**Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program:**

- Beginning in the fall 2021 semester, Bright Futures Florida Medallion Scholarship (BFFMS) students enrolled in an associate degree program at a Florida College System (FCS) institution will receive 100 percent of tuition and specific fees. Upon completing an associate degree, a student may use his or her award to pursue a baccalaureate degree and receive 75 percent of tuition and specific fees.
- Relocates language from Florida Statutes to the General Appropriations Act with respect to the additional stipend for textbooks and college-related expenses for Bright Futures Florida Academic Scholars (BFFAS).

**Florida Student Assistance Grant Program:**

- Relocates language from Florida Statutes to the General Appropriations Act with respect to the Maximum Annual Award Amount. For the 2020-21 academic year, the maximum annual award amount has increased to $3,260.
- Expands the eligible student population to students with one and one-half times the maximum Pell Grant-eligible family contribution to 8566 for the 2020-21 academic year.
- Requires institutions to report all students eligible for a disbursement.
- Initiates priority funding for FSAG recipients who are within one semester from completing a degree or certificate.
- Establishes reconciliation requirements for fall and spring term funding.
- Creates FSAG summer funding by means of requirements, deadlines, procedures and priority funding.
- Establishes specific audit requirements for each of the four FSAG programs.

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Benacquisto Scholarship Program:

- Restricts initial eligibility for students designated as a “National Achievement Scholar.”
- Clarifies eligibility requirements for students seeking initial eligibility.
- Specifies students must be enrolled full-time to receive scholarship funding.
- Allows eligible students to receive a final term disbursement if they have fewer than 12 credit hours remaining to complete their first baccalaureate degree.
- Clarifies that a student’s renewal status will not be affected by subsequent changes in the student or the family’s residency status.
- Provides additional scholarship length clarification by specifying students may receive the award for up to five years following high school graduation and may not receive the award for more than 10 semesters.
- Adds language related to institutional appeals for students failing to meet the renewal requirements due to a verifiable illness or other documented emergency pursuant to section 1009.40(1)(b)4, Florida Statutes.

You may access the 2020 Florida Legislative bills via Online Sunshine.
The bill revises merit-based financial aid funding available to students to help address the financial needs of students and their families.

Specifically, the bill modifies the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program to:

⇒ Remove the requirement that students enroll in a Florida postsecondary education institution within 2 years of graduation from high school.
⇒ Eliminate the 45 credit hour annual restriction in the award of a scholarship.
⇒ Specify the eligibility of a student, who enrolls in the pilot program at the University of Florida, to receive an award during the fall term.
⇒ Extend the annual deadline, from August 31 to December 31, for when a student who graduates from high school midyear must apply for the scholarship.
⇒ Revise examination score requirements for award eligibility to align the ACT® and SAT® examination scores with the SAT® national percentile ranks.
⇒ Require Bright Futures Gold Seal CAPE award recipients to maintain a cumulative grade point average of 2.75 on a 4.0 scale to renew eligibility.

You may access the 2019 Florida Legislative bills via Online Sunshine.

The bill establishes the “Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018” which, among other modifications, expands merit-based and need-based financial aid funding available to students to help address the financial needs of students and their families.

Specifically the bill:

- Modifies the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program to allow:
  - Florida Academic Scholars (FAS) award amount to cover 100 percent of public postsecondary education institution tuition and specified fees, plus $300 per fall and spring for textbooks and college-related expenses.
  - Florida Medallion Scholars (FMS) award amount to cover 75 percent of public postsecondary education institution tuition and specified fees, beginning in the fall 2018 semester.
- Expands the Benacquisto Scholarship Program for qualified students from out-of-state who enroll in a baccalaureate degree program in the 2018-2019 academic year or thereafter; and who meet the specified requirements to qualify for the scholarship. The bill exempts students from the payment of out-of-state fees and specifies that the award amount for the students is equal to the institutional cost of attendance for a Florida resident less the student’s National Merit Scholarship.
- Creates the Florida Farmworker Scholarship Program for farmworkers and the children of farmworkers who meet the specified scholarship eligibility criteria. The bill allows the Department of Education to award up to 50 scholarships annually. The recipient is eligible for an award equal to 100 percent of tuition and specified fees at a public postsecondary education institution in Florida. Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for the award.
- Expands the First Generation Matching Grant Program by revising the state-to-private match requirements from a 1:1 match to a 2:1 match, and codifies the inclusion of Florida College System institutions as eligible program participants.
- Renames the William L. Boyd, IV, Florida Resident Access Grant Program as the William L. Boyd, IV, Effective Access to Student Education Grant Program.

House Bill 5003: Implementing the 2018-19 General Appropriations Act, Chapter 2018-10, L.O.F.

The bill authorizes 2018 fall term awards for University of Florida Innovation Academy students, when summer funding is provided for other Bright Futures recipients, for off-campus or online coursework.

You may access the 2018 Florida Legislative bills via Online Sunshine.
Florida Bright Futures Scholarship – Florida Academic Scholars (FAS)
- Changes the FAS award amount to cover 100% of tuition and applicable fees at a public institution or comparable amount at a nonpublic institution.
- Provides FAS recipients an additional $300 for textbooks and college-related expenses (fall and spring).
- Provides 2018 summer funding for FAS award recipients.

Student Loan Debt
- Requires a postsecondary institution that disburses state financial aid to annually provide each student receiving student loans with the following up-to-date information:
  - An estimate of the student’s total amount of borrowed student loans.
  - An estimate of the student’s total potential loan repayment amount.
  - An estimate of the student’s monthly loan repayment amount.
  - The percentage of the borrowing limit that the student has reached.
- Provides that an institution does not incur liability for providing the specified information.

Minority Teacher Education Scholars Program
- Allows a student to receive funds who is enrolled in one of Florida’s private colleges.
- Requires the student to be admitted into a teacher education program before having earned more than 18 credit hours of upper-division-level courses in education.
- Allows a student to use the scholarship to pursue a graduate degree with a major in education, leading to initial certification.

Florida Fund for Minority Teachers, Inc.
- Removes the following requirements:
  - New scholarships must be granted to students who are in their junior year.
  - Renewal scholarships be granted to rising seniors.
Florida Bright Futures Scholarship

Reinstatement Timeframe for Service Obligations
For 2012-13 high school graduates and thereafter, the student who has a full-time religious/service obligation lasting at least 18 months is eligible for an extended reinstatement/renewal timeframe.

Home-educated Students
The higher test score requirement of 1220 SAT or 27 ACT for the Florida Medallion Scholars award is eliminated.

Bright Futures Service Hours:
Approved service hours may now include business or government internships, work for nonprofit community service organizations, or activity on behalf of candidates for public office.

Except for credit earned through service-learning courses adopted pursuant to s. 1003.497 F.S., the student may not receive remuneration or academic credit for the service work performed.

Bright Futures Gold Seal CAPE Scholars:
The Florida Gold Seal CAPE (Career and Professional Education Act) Scholars award is created. High school students graduating in 2016-17 are eligible for a Florida Gold Seal CAPE* Scholars award if they earn 5 postsecondary credit hours through CAPE industry certifications and complete at least 30 hours of volunteer service work.

Students initially eligible in the 2017-18 academic year may receive an award for specific applied technology diplomas, technical degree programs or career certificate programs.

Once CAPE students complete a technical degree program that articulates into a higher degree, expanded funding will be available for an eligible Bachelor of Science degree or Bachelor of Applied Science degree.

Florida Incentive Scholarship
The Florida Incentive Scholarship is renamed the Benacquisto Scholarship.
Florida Bright Futures Scholarship

Expanded opportunities for volunteer service work made available to students working toward a Bright Futures Scholarship. The school district or private school will approve service work that includes, but is not limited to, a business or government internship, work for a nonprofit community service organization or activity on behalf of a candidate for public office.

The hours of service work must be documented in writing and the document must be signed by the student, the student’s parent or guardian and a representative of the organization for which the student performed the service work.

These expanded opportunities are effective until July 1, 2016.

Except for credit earned through service-learning courses adopted pursuant to s. 1003.497 F.S., the student may not receive remuneration or academic credit for the service work performed.
Rosewood Family Scholarship

Expanded the Rosewood Family Scholarship to award 50 students tuition and fees, not to exceed $6,100, at a public postsecondary institution.

Florida Incentive Scholarship

Created the Florida Incentive Scholarship to award National Merit® or National Achievement Scholars® who stay in Florida for their postsecondary education.
Repealed the requirement for initial and renewal Bright Futures students, Florida Resident Access Grant students, and Access to Better Learning and Education Grant students to submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) each year prior to disbursement of their award.

Beginning July 1, 2013, students are not required to file the FAFSA to receive funds from these programs.
Eligible Bright Futures students enrolled in the pilot program at the University of Florida may receive an award for no more than two semesters in a fiscal year. Summer funding is available for those students.

Students graduating from high school in 2012-13 are eligible to accept an initial Bright Futures award for two years following high school graduation and to accept a renewal award for five years following high school graduation.

Initial and renewal Bright Futures students must submit a complete and error-free Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) each year prior to disbursement of their award.

Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars graduating in 2011-12 may receive an award for 100% of the number of hours required to complete only one of the following programs at a Florida public or eligible Florida private postsecondary institution:

- Applied Technology Diploma, up to 60 credit hours or equivalent clock hours.
- Technical Degree Education Program, not to exceed 72 credit hours or equivalent clock hours.
- Career Certificate Program, not to exceed 72 credit hours or equivalent clock hours.

Students who graduate from high school mid-year may submit a Florida Financial Aid Application no later than August 31 prior to the student’s graduation, be evaluated for Bright Futures, and, if eligible, receive funding in the spring term following the student’s high school graduation. These students will be evaluated for renewal of their scholarships at the end of their first full year (fall through spring) of funding.
Students are required to submit a complete, error free FAFSA for Bright Futures, Florida Resident Access Grant, and Access to Better Learning and Education Grant initial and renewal eligibility any time prior to disbursement.

**Increase in community service requirement** for all three Bright Futures award levels. Bright Futures Florida Academic Scholars (FAS), Florida Medallion Scholars (FMS), and Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars (GSV). During the 2011-12 academic year, and thereafter, the required community service hours to be completed for the following awards are:

- **FAS** – 100 hours (increased from 75 hours).
- **FMS** – 75 hours (increased from 0 hours).
- **GSV** – 30 hours (increased from 0 hours).

The Florida Department of Education is required to approve home education community service hours for Bright Futures initial eligibility.

**Increase in Bright Futures Florida Medallion Scholars award test scores for high school students graduating in the 2013-14 academic year.**

- 1020 increased to 1170 for SAT.
- 22 increased to 26 for ACT.
- 1070 SAT increased to 1220/23 ACT increased to 27 for home educated students.