



**THE FLORIDA SENATE**  
**SENATOR JOE NEGRON**  
*President*

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** All Senators  
**FROM:** Joe Negron, President  
**SUBJECT:** Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018  
**DATE:** August 30, 2017

---

As the new academic year begins, on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of students who are realizing their dreams of a college or university education, I wanted to once again thank you for your support. I am very grateful for your commitment and leadership over the last year as we worked together to boost the strength and competitiveness of our state's higher education system as a primary economic engine for sustainable economic development and growth in high-paying jobs.

I am proud that our efforts to increase need-based student financial aid by more than 80 percent resulted in an expansion of access to the Florida Student Assistance Grant for nearly 109,000 previously unfunded college and university students, for an expected total of 234,000 students served by this program. Also, as we promised families nearly a year ago, over 46,500 college and university students are realizing the benefits of our work to expand the Bright Futures Academic Scholar Award, which increased these merit-based scholarship funds to cover 100 percent of tuition and fees, plus a \$300 stipend for books for each of the fall and spring semesters. Meanwhile, universities are actively using funds we provided in the General Appropriations Act (GAA) to hire additional faculty, reduce class size, expand programs, and upgrade aging infrastructure and research laboratories.

Our key funding investments, implemented through the GAA, will ease financial burdens that delay on-time graduation, while at the same time provide our universities the tools they need to compete as national destination institutions, and ensure a significant return on investment to Florida taxpayers. Students and families deserve the opportunity to plan for their investment in a college or university education. Likewise, universities need the ability to engage in long-term planning. As I emphasized in my memo last month, our task during the 2018 Session is to build on these funding investments with key policy enhancements to make these important changes permanent.

August 30, 2017

Page 2

Today, I am pleased to announce that Senator Galvano filed Senate Bill 4, the Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018. This legislation specifically builds on the state university and student financial aid portions of the higher education agenda the Senate advanced last year, with some modifications in several key areas.

- In addition to securing full funding for the Bright Futures Florida Academic Scholar award starting this academic year, Senate Bill 4 also reinstates funding for the Bright Futures Florida Medallion Scholar Award at 75 percent of tuition and fees for fall and spring semesters, beginning in the 2018-19 academic year. Together, these two changes ensure the permanent expansion of the Bright Futures Scholarship for the approximately 94,000 students expected to qualify for new or renewed Bright Futures Academic and Medallion Scholarships.
- Senate Bill 4 provides a transition period for universities seeking preeminence status to adjust to the new 4-year graduation rate for full-time students. The bill clarifies that any university having earned preeminent or emerging preeminent status, based on the 2018 determination under current metrics, can maintain that status for the 2018-19 academic year and receive 2018-19 preeminence funds accordingly.
- Finally, Senate Bill 4 requires universities to publicly adopt flexible tuition and fee policies that incentivize on-time graduation through increased flexibility and cost-saving benefits for students. Specifically, block tuition policies must maximize accelerated credits, minimize excess hours, and enable students' flexibility to earn at least 30 credits across any combination of fall, spring, or summer terms of the academic year.

For your convenience, below is a summary of key Senate Bill 4 provisions. In the coming weeks, Senator Hukill will file additional legislation designed to increase the competitiveness of our nationally ranked Florida College System. I look forward to discussing this important legislation with you when we return to Tallahassee next month.

#### **Summary of Senate Bill 4 – The Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018**

##### **PRESERVE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES**

Senate Bill 4 expands merit-based and need-based financial aid funding and establishes flexible tuition policies available to families so every student in Florida who qualifies and earns the privilege to attend one of our state universities has the opportunity to pursue a higher education.

### **Expands Student Financial Assistance and Support**

- **Expands need-based state aid, and university or college gift aid, for students with demonstrated financial need.**
  - Expands the First Generation Matching Grant Program to include community college students and doubles the state match for private donations supporting the program (2:1 match).
  - Creates a new Florida Farmworker Student Scholarship for children of migrant families to earn technical and college credentials.
- **Expands merit-based state gift aid for high-performing students.**
  - Reinstates full funding of the Bright Futures Florida Academic Scholar award at 100 percent of tuition and fees, plus \$300 in fall and spring semesters to cover instructional materials and other costs, beginning in this 2017-2018 academic year.
  - Guarantees funding for 2018 summer term tuition and fees for Bright Futures Florida Academic Scholar awards.
  - Reinstates funding for the Bright Futures Florida Medallion Scholar award at 75 percent of tuition and fees for fall and spring semesters, beginning in fall semester of the 2018-2019 academic year.
  - Expands Benacquisto Scholarship awards (full cost of attendance) to recruit out-of-state National Merit Scholar award winners.

### **Establishes Flexible Tuition and Fee Policies**

- Requires universities to implement an institutional block tuition and fee policy for full-time, in-state, undergraduate resident students.
  - Fall 2018 semester implementation for at least the entering freshman class – may be extended to include other students.
  - Must accommodate full-time student enrollment in at least 30 credits across any combination of fall, spring, or summer terms of the academic year.
  - Must maximize accelerated and transfer credit to facilitate on-time graduation and minimize excess hours.
  - Must be publicly approved by university boards of trustees and the Board of Governors, with updates and progress reports provided to the Legislature.

### **Increases Student Access to Internship and Job Opportunities**

- Requires each state university to use labor market projections and related degree production analyses to identify internship opportunities for students to benefit from industry experts and mentors, earn industry certifications, and become employed in high-demand fields.

### **RECRUIT AND RETAIN TOP FACULTY**

Senate Bill 4 expands and enhances policy and funding tools state universities can leverage to recruit and retain the very best faculty, enrich professional and graduate school strength and viability, and bring aging infrastructure and research laboratories into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **Establishes World Class Faculty Scholar Program**

- Creates the World Class Faculty Scholar Program to help universities recruit, recognize, and retain exemplary faculty, research scholars, and expert teams, as funded in the GAA.

#### **Establishes University Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program**

- Creates the University Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program to promote quality and excellence in university professional schools, and improve graduate study outcomes in high-impact fields of medicine, law, and business, as funded in the GAA.

### **ELEVATE UNIVERSITY DISTINCTION AND NATIONAL PROMINENCE**

Senate Bill 4 ensures universities remain accountable to Florida taxpayers by refining university performance expectations to incentivize and reward state university performance excellence and recognition in academics, instruction, research, and community accomplishments and achievements.

#### **Incentivizes On-Time Graduation of Full-Time Students**

- Refines university performance expectations to incentivize and reward institutions for graduating full-time bachelor degree students in four years.
  - Preeminent State Research University: Upgrades the graduation metric to a 4-year graduation rate of 60 percent or higher. The current metric is a 6-year rate at 70 percent or higher. The bill provides one transitional year for any university having earned preeminent or emerging preeminent status based on the 2018 determination under current metrics to maintain that status for the 2018-19 academic year and receive 2018-19 preeminence funds accordingly.
  - University Performance Incentive Funding: Updates metrics to specify a 4-year graduation rate and require benchmarks for the “access” metric that reward institutions for performance success in serving Pell grant students.
- Tightens state university relationships with their direct-support organizations’ leadership, use of funds, and public disclosure activities.

#### **Promotes State University Programs of Excellence**

- Directs the Board of Governors to establish standards and measures to recognize, enhance, and promote individual degree programs in state universities across the system, which reflect national excellence, prominence, and distinction.