

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

BILL: CS/SB 364

SPONSOR: Education Committee

SUBJECT: Accelerated High School Graduation Options

DATE: February 5, 2004 REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Dormady</u>	<u>O'Farrell</u>	<u>ED</u>	<u>Favorable/CS</u>
2.	<u>Armstrong</u>	<u>Newman</u>	<u>AED</u>	<u>Fav/1 amendment</u>
3.	_____	_____	<u>AP</u>	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

This bill revises current law relating to 3-year high school graduation programs. The bill requires that additional information be provided to students and their parents concerning high school graduation options and requires a student and the student's parent to meet with school personnel for further explanation prior to selecting a 3-year high school graduation program.

The bill raises the grade point average and other requirements for students choosing the accelerated 3-year high school college preparation option and eliminates the 3-year high school career preparation option from statute. It permits students who already chose an accelerated high school graduation program in 2003-2004 to continue their chosen program with all current requirements intact.

The bill requires students to select the 3-year accelerated graduation program by the end of 9th grade and provides exceptions to this rule for certain students. The bill provides that students may change to the 4-year program at any time and requires students to change to the 4-year program under certain circumstances. It requires students who seek academic graduation honors to complete the requirements of the standard 4-year graduation program.

This bill substantially amends s. 1003.429 of the Florida Statutes.

This bill should have a minimal impact on public school funding.

The bill will take effect July 1, 2004.

II. Present Situation:

Section 1003.429, F.S., was adopted in 2003. The section permits high school students to choose to complete an 18-credit, 3-year high school graduation program in lieu of the standard 24-credit, 4-year program set forth in s. 1003.43, F.S. Data were not available to determine how many students statewide chose to pursue one of the 3-year high school graduation programs in 2003-2004, but anecdotal evidence from school districts indicates that participation levels were low.

Prior to the adoption of these statutory 3-year programs, some school districts already had accelerated graduation programs in place. Under these programs, students were still required to complete 24 credits for graduation, but they completed this course load on an accelerated 3-year schedule. These programs still exist in some school districts.

Current s. 1003.429, F.S. – Accelerated program options currently available under state law

Under s. 1003.429, beginning in the 2003-2004 school year, any student scheduled to graduate in 2004 and thereafter was permitted to select one of three high school graduation program options: completion of the general requirements for high school graduation pursuant to s. 1003.43, F.S. (a 4-year program); completion of a 3-year college preparatory program; or completion of a 3-year career preparatory program. A student meeting all statutory requirements for his or her chosen program is awarded a standard high school diploma.

Under the law, districts are required to provide each student in grades 6 through 12 and their parents with the various graduation options and their respective curricula, so that students and parents may select the postsecondary education or career plan that best fits their needs. This information must include a timeframe for achieving each graduation option. If a student fails to select a graduation option, the student is considered to have selected the 4-year, 24-credit general requirements for high school graduation set forth in s. 1003.43, F.S.

The 3-year standard college preparatory program set forth in the section requires successful completion of 18 credits in grades 9 through 12, distributed as follows:

- 4 credits in English, with a major concentration in composition and literature;
- 3 credits in mathematics at the Algebra I level or higher from a list of courses that qualify for state university admission;
- 3 credits in natural science, two of which must have a laboratory component;
- 3 credits in social sciences;
- 2 credits in the same foreign language, unless the student can demonstrate competency in a language other than English; and
- 3 credits in electives.

The 3-year standard career preparatory program set forth in the section also requires successful completion of 18 credits in grades 9 through 12, distributed as follows:

- 4 credits in English, with a major concentration in composition and literature;
- 3 credits in mathematics, one of which must be Algebra I;

- 3 credits in natural science, two of which must have a laboratory component;
- 3 credits in social sciences;
- 2 credits in the same foreign language, unless the student can demonstrate competency in a language other than English; and
- 3 credits in electives.

District school boards are not permitted to establish course requirements for the accelerated 3-year high school graduation options in excess of the requirements set forth in statute.

Students pursuing the 3-year accelerated high school graduation options are required to earn passing scores on the FCAT and achieve a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale in the courses required by the chosen graduation option.

Concerns regarding the accelerated programs

Some general concerns voiced regarding the 3-year accelerated options include:

- The possibility that college preparatory students will not be scholastically prepared for the rigors of a 4-year university curriculum. Possible remedies suggested for this issue include making the 3-year college preparation option more rigorous academically, by requiring additional credits or college-level coursework.
- The possibility that a student might, under current law, choose a 3-year graduation option early in their high school career and then not be permitted to change to the 4-year track if they later determined that the 3-year track was disadvantageous.
- The insufficiency of the requirements of the 3-year career preparation track regarding vocational credits. No vocational credits are required, and at most students would likely take 3 credits of vocational classes to meet their 3-credit elective requirement. District personnel perceive that skills learned in 3 vocational classes are not sufficient to make a student readily employable in a skilled position after early graduation.
- The fact that students graduating at age 16 or 17 are not old enough to enlist in the military.
- Anecdotal evidence that the majority of the students pursuing the 3-year accelerated graduation options, especially the 3-year career preparation option, are motivated merely by a desire to leave high school early and that many of these students will graduate without having a post-secondary career or educational plan in place.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

CS/SB 364 would amend the 3-year accelerated high school graduation options that were adopted last year.

The bill eliminates the existing 3-year accelerated career preparation program and raises requirements for participation in the 3-year college preparation program. The bill requires that at least 6 of the 18 credits required for the program be earned in either Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate classes and that one of the 3 required social sciences credits must include instruction about democracy and the history and principles of the United States.

Under CS/SB 364, in order to remain in the 3-year accelerated college preparation program, students will have to maintain a GPA of 3.5 overall in the program and receive at least a “B” in every one of the 18 required courses for the program. Students who are not on track to meet all statutory requirements at the end of their 10th grade year will be required to change to the standard 4-year graduation option set forth in s. 1003.43, F.S. Additionally, students who receive lower than a “B” in any required course at any time will automatically be required to change to the standard 4-year graduation option.

The bill requires district school boards to provide each student in grades 6 through 9 with information about the various high school graduation options, including curriculum requirements for those options. It requires students and parents to meet with school personnel to get an explanation of relative requirements, advantages and disadvantages of the various options before choosing the 3-year program, and it also requires students to get the written consent of their school principal, school guidance counselor, and parent before choosing the 3-year program. The bill specifically permits students who choose the 3-year program to change to the standard 4-year program at any time.

Students who already chose an accelerated high school graduation program in 2003-2004 would be permitted to continue in their chosen program with all current statutory requirements intact.

The bill requires students to choose an accelerated graduation option before the end of 9th grade, but provides exceptions for students who weren't able to choose the accelerated option during the 9th grade because of illness or because they transferred into the public schools from a private school or from out-of-state. These students would, however, still have a deadline of choosing the accelerated option by the end of their first semester of 10th grade.

The bill would require students who want to compete for academic graduation honors such as valedictorian or salutatorian of their graduating class to complete the standard 4-year graduation program.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:**A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

By eliminating the 3-year career preparatory program and by making more rigorous the requirements for the 3-year college preparatory program, fewer students will participate than would have under the original program, possibly causing public school enrollment estimates for funding to increase. Any such increase should be relatively small.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

#1 by the Appropriations Subcommittee on Education:

Revises the credit requirement for social sciences from three credits, one of which is to include instruction on democracy and United States history, to three credits to include one in American history, one in world history, one-half in economics, and one-half in American government.

This amendment then makes the social sciences credit requirement the same as for students who pursue a four-year standard high school diploma.