

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

BILL #: CS/CS/CS/CS/HB 1 Education

SPONSOR(S): Education Quality Subcommittee and Education & Employment Committee and PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee and Choice & Innovation Subcommittee, Tuck, Plasencia and others

TIED BILLS: None. **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** CS/CS/SB 202

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 83 Y's

27 N's

GOVERNOR'S ACTION: Approved

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/CS/CS/CS/HB 1 passed the House on March 17, 2023, and subsequently passed the Senate on March 23, 2023.

For decades, Florida has been a national leader in providing high quality education options for its parents and students. In addition to a myriad of public options, Florida offers scholarship programs that allow parents of eligible students to register and attend private schools that may better serve a student's particular needs or to provide educational options for students with disabilities. These programs primarily consist of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship (FTC), the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students attending private school (FES-EO), and the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with disabilities (FES-UA).

The bill increases the number of students with disabilities served under the FES-UA by increasing scholarship growth rates from 1 percent to 3 percent of Florida's exceptional education students, annually. Additionally, the bill requires a participating private school to inform a parent that a student attending the school with a disability is not entitled to the special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The bill expands eligibility for the FTC and FES-EO scholarships to any student who is a resident of Florida and is eligible to enroll in kindergarten through grade 12 in a public school. The bill establishes the personalized education program as a parent directed educational choice option and authorizes the student to participate in FTC. The bill retains the priority for FTC and FES-EO scholarships for those students whose household income does not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) and creates a second priority for households with income not exceeding 400 percent of the FPL.

Under the bill, each parent of an eligible student will receive an empowerment savings account to choose among a variety of options to customize their child's K-12 education. The bill expands the scope of authorized uses for scholarships.

To provide additional clarity to participants, the bill aligns the parental and student responsibilities for recipients of FTC and FES-EO scholarships as well as aligns the provisions governing how long an award remains in force and when an account must be closed. The bill requires that SFOs review student eligibility annually, approve all expenditures prior to disbursing any funds from the empowerment savings account, and notify parents that participation in a scholarship program does not guarantee enrollment in a private school. Additionally, the bill requires SFOs to jointly develop purchasing guidelines for authorized uses of scholarship funds and publish them to their websites.

Additionally, the bill authorizes any public school in Florida to permit a student to enroll part-time and provides that the student will be funded proportionally based on their time of attendance or as contracted services. The bill provides flexibility for traditional public schools as it relates to educator certificate requirements, transportation, cost per student station, capital improvement funding, transfer of student records, and the online course requirement for high school graduation. The bill requires the Commissioner of Education to develop an online portal that allows parents to choose the best educational choice options for their student. The bill also requires the State Board of Education, with input from stakeholders, to report to the Governor and Legislature recommended repeals and revisions to the education code to reduce regulation on public schools.

The estimated fiscal impact on state government expenditures is \$209.6 million. See Fiscal Analysis.

The bill was approved by the Governor on March 27, 2023, ch. 2023-16, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2023, except as otherwise provided.

This document does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill sponsor or House of Representatives .

STORAGE NAME: h0001z1.DOCX

DATE: 5/17/2023

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Background

For decades, Florida has been a national leader in providing high quality education options for its parents and students. In addition to a myriad of public options, Florida offers scholarship programs that allow parents of eligible students to register and attend private schools that may better serve a student's particular needs or to provide educational options for students with disabilities. The three scholarship programs, include:

- The Family Empowerment Scholarship Program, consisting of a scholarship for students attending private school (FES-EO) and a scholarship for students with a disability (FES-UA);¹
- Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program (FTC);² and
- The Hope Scholarship Program (HOPE).³

Private schools must meet specific criteria in order to be eligible to participate in Florida's scholarship programs⁴ and the Department of Education (DOE)⁵ and Commissioner of Education (commissioner)⁶ are tasked with implementation and oversight responsibilities. Florida's scholarship programs are administered by Scholarship-funding Organizations (SFO) approved by the DOE.⁷

Private School Participation in Scholarship Programs

Present Situation

While each scholarship program has unique requirements for private schools, there are common criteria that each private school must meet in order to participate in any of the state's scholarship programs.⁸ A private school may be sectarian or nonsectarian, must meet Florida's definition of a private school,⁹ be registered with the state, and be in compliance with all the requirements of a private school.¹⁰ Additionally, a private school must:¹¹

- comply with 42 U.S.C. s. 2000d which prohibits excluding a person from participation in federally assisted programs on the grounds of race, color, or national origin;
- notify the DOE of its intent to participate in a scholarship program;
- notify the DOE of any changes in the school's name, director, mailing address, or physical location within 15 days of the change;
- provide the DOE or the SFO all required documentation for student registration and payment;
- annually complete and submit to the DOE a notarized scholarship compliance statement that includes certification that all school employees and contracted personnel with direct student contact have undergone required background screening and met the screening standards;
- demonstrate fiscal soundness in accordance with statutory requirements;
- meet applicable state and local health, safety, and welfare laws, codes, and rules;
- employ or contract with teachers that meet specified requirements;

¹ Section 1002.394, F.S.; *see also* rule 6A-6.0952, F.A.C.

² Section 1002.395, F.S.; *see also* rule 6A-6.0960, F.A.C.

³ Section 1002.40, F.S.; *see also* rule 6A-6.0951, F.A.C.

⁴ Section 1002.421(1), F.S.

⁵ Section 1002.421(2), F.S.

⁶ Section 1002.421(3), F.S.

⁷ *See* ss. 1002.394(11) and 1002.395(6) and (15).

⁸ *See* s. 1002.421, F.S.

⁹ *See* s. 1002.01(2), F.S.

¹⁰ Section 1002.421(1), F.S.

¹¹ Section 1002.421(1)(a)-(r), F.S.; *see also* r. 6A-6.03315, F.A.C.

- maintain a physical location in the state at which each student has regular and direct contact with teachers;
- provide to parents, either on a website or in other written form, information regarding the school's programs, services, and classroom teacher qualifications;
- provide the parent, at least on a quarterly basis, a written report of the student's progress;
- cooperate with a parent who wants a student to participate in Florida's statewide, standardized assessments; and
- adopt policies establishing standards of ethical conduct for educational support employees, instructional personnel, and school administrators.

In addition to the requirements above, if a private school receives more than \$250,000 in scholarship funds in one year, the school must hire an independent certified public accountant (CPA) who must verify that the school meets the requirements outlined in the agreed-upon procedures.¹² The procedures are developed jointly with the SFOs, accrediting associations that are members of the Florida Association of Academic Nonpublic Schools, and the DOE,¹³ and are reviewed biennially.¹⁴ The procedures must determine whether the school:

- has been verified as eligible by the DOE;
- has an adequate accounting system, financial controls, and a process for deposits and classification of scholarship funds; and
- has properly expended scholarship funds.¹⁵

A school must submit the CPA's report annually to the SFO that awarded the majority of the scholarship funds by September 15. Schools that receive more than \$250,000 solely through FES-UA must submit the report to the DOE.¹⁶

If a school fails to meet any of the above requirements, or has consecutive years of material exceptions listed in the CPA's report, the commissioner may determine that the private school is ineligible to participate in a scholarship program.¹⁷

The commissioner is authorized to permanently deny or revoke the authority of an owner or operator to establish or operate a private school in the state if the commissioner decides that the owner or operator is operating or has operated an educational institution in the state or another state or jurisdiction in a manner contrary to the health, safety, or welfare of the public.¹⁸

The DOE is required to maintain a disqualification list that includes the following:

- The identity of each person who has been permanently denied an educator certificate or whose educator certificate has been permanently revoked and has been placed on the list as directed by the Education Practices Commission.
- The identity of each person who has been permanently disqualified by the commissioner from owning or operating a private school that participates in state scholarship programs.
- The identity of each person who has been terminated, or has resigned in lieu of termination, from employment as a result of sexual misconduct with a student.
- The identity of each person who is ineligible for educator certification or employment.¹⁹

¹² Section 1002.421(1)(q), F.S. *See also* Step Up for Students, Agreed Upon Procedures, School Financial Report Requirement, Florida School Choice Programs, <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/for-schools-providers/agreed-upon-procedures/?highlight=agreed-upon%20procedures> (last visited Apr. 25, 2023).

¹³ Section 1002.395(6)(o)2., F.S.

¹⁴ Section 1002.395(6)(o)1.b., F.S.

¹⁵ Section 1002.395(6)(o), F.S.

¹⁶ Section 1002.421(1)(q), F.S. Effective July 1, 2022, students participating in the McKay Scholarship joined the Family Empowerment Scholarship under educational options for students with disabilities.

¹⁷ Section 1002.421(1)(a)-(r), F.S. (flush left provisions and the end of the paragraph)

¹⁸ Section 1002.431(3)(c), F.S.

¹⁹ Section 1001.10(4)(b), F.S.

An individual may be removed from the disqualification list if the person demonstrates:

- A completed law enforcement investigation resulted in an exoneration or no conviction or finding of guilt and a completed investigation and proceeding, as applicable, by the responsible education agency resulted in a finding that the person did not commit disqualifying conduct;
- The person was not the subject of the report of disqualifying conduct and was included on the disqualification list in error or as a result of mistaken identity; or
- The employer that submitted the person for inclusion on the disqualification list requests that the person be removed and submits documentation to support the request.²⁰

Effect of the Bill

The bill provides additional information for parents of students with disabilities considering private schools by requiring that a private school participating in any of the state's scholarship programs provide parents, either by publishing on the school's website or in writing, a statement that a parentally placed private school student with a disability does not have an individual right to receive some or all of the special education and related services that the child would receive if enrolled in a public school under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The bill expands the commissioner's oversight powers of private schools participating in Florida's scholarship programs by allowing her or him to permanently deny or revoke the authority of an owner, officer, or director to establish or operate a private school in the state, and include such individual on the disqualification list maintained by the DOE, if the commissioner determines that the owner, officer, or director has operated an educational institution that closed during the school year. An individual may be removed from the disqualification list if the individual reimburses the department or eligible SFO the amount of scholarship funds received by the educational institution during the school year in which it closed.

Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program

Present Situation

The FTC was created in 2001 and enables taxpayers to make private, voluntary contributions to a SFO, to expand educational opportunities for families that have limited financial resources, and enables Florida's children to achieve a greater level of excellence in their education.²¹ The FTC is funded with contributions to SFOs from taxpayers who receive a tax credit for use against their liability for corporate income tax, insurance premium tax, severance taxes on oil and gas production, self-accrued sales tax liabilities of direct pay permit holders or alcoholic beverage taxes on beer, wine, and spirits and rental or license fees.²² The tax credit is equal to 100 percent of the eligible contributions made.²³ SFOs use these contributions to award scholarships for the cost of tuition and fees at an eligible private school or transportation expenses to a Florida public school in which a student is enrolled and that is different from the school to which the student was assigned.²⁴

The DOE, the Department of Revenue (DOR), and the Division of Alcoholic Beverages and Taxes (DABT) cooperatively administer the FTC.²⁵

²⁰ Section 1001.10(4)(c), F.S.

²¹ Section 1002.395(1)(b), F.S.

²² Section 1002.395(1) and (5) and s. 212.099(2), F.S. Information and documentation provided to the DOE and the Auditor General relating to the identity of a taxpayer that provides an eligible contribution under this section shall remain confidential at all times. Section 1002.395(6)(q), F.S. (flush-left provision at end of section).

²³ Sections 220.1875(1), 212.099(2), and 1002.395(5), F.S.

²⁴ Section 1002.395(6)(d), F.S. An eligible contribution is a monetary contribution from a taxpayer to an eligible nonprofit SFO. The taxpayer may not designate a specific child as the beneficiary of the contribution. Section 1002.395(2)(e), F.S.

²⁵ Section 1002.395(5) and (12), F.S.

FTC Scholarship Eligibility

The FTC provides scholarships to students, with priority given to children from low-income families and those who are in foster care or out-of-home care.²⁶ Contingent upon available funds, a student is initially eligible for a FTC scholarship if he or she meets one or more of the following criteria:

- The student is on the direct certification list²⁷ or the student's household income level does not exceed an adjusted maximum percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), which is set at 400 percent of the FPL (\$111,000²⁸ for a family of four) for the 2022-2023 school year.²⁹
- The student is currently placed, or during the previous state fiscal year was placed, in foster care or in out-of-home care.³⁰
- The student is a sibling of a student participating in the FTC scholarship and the siblings reside in the same household.³¹

Once a student qualifies for a FTC scholarship based on household income during their initial eligibility year, the student continues to be eligible until he or she graduates from high school or turns 21 years old, whichever occurs first, regardless of household income level in subsequent years.³² A scholarship recipient is not required to reapply annually, however, a SFO may require a recipient to annually confirm their continued participation in the program.³³

A student is ineligible for a scholarship under the FTC if the student is:³⁴

- enrolled in a school operating for the purpose of providing educational services to youth in Department of Juvenile Justice commitment programs;
- receiving a FTC scholarship from another eligible SFO;
- receiving any other state-sponsored K-12 educational choice scholarship;
- participating in a home education program;
- participating in a private tutoring program;
- participating in a virtual school, correspondence school, or distance learning program that receives state funding pursuant to the student's participation unless the participation is limited to no more than two courses per school year; or
- enrolled in the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind.

²⁶ Section 1002.395(3)(b), F.S. (flush left provision at end of subsection). Priority for an initial FTC scholarship must be given to a student whose household income level does not exceed 185 percent of the FPL (\$51,337.50 for a family of four for the 2022-2023 school year) or who is in foster care or out-of-home care. *See also* Step Up for Students, *Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Parent Handbook* (July 2022), at 3, available at <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-2023-FTC-Parent-Handbook-Final-Draft.pdf>.

²⁷ *See* s. 1002.395(2)(c), F.S. "Direct certification list" means the certified list of children who qualify for the food assistance program, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program, or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations provided to the DOE by the Department of Children and Families.

²⁸ United States Department of Health & Human Services, U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines Used to Determine Financial Eligibility for Certain Federal Programs, Chart showing multiples of the poverty guidelines for 2022, available at <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>.

²⁹ Section 1002.395(3)(b)1., F.S. In 2021, the Florida Legislature aligned the FTC student eligibility household income requirements to those of the Family Empowerment Scholarship. Chapter 2021-27, L.O.F. Under current law, for eligibility income requirements, the FPL may be increased by 25 percentage points in the fiscal year following a fiscal year in which more than 5 percent of the allowable scholarships have not been funded. The eligibility for the 2021-2022 school year was set at 375 percent of the FPL. *See also* Step Up for Students, *Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Parent Handbook* (July 2022), at 3, available at <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-2023-FTC-Parent-Handbook-Final-Draft.pdf>.

³⁰ Section 1002.395(3)(b)2., F.S.

³¹ Section 1002.395(3), F.S. (flush left provision at end of subsection).

³² *Id.*

³³ *See* Step Up for Students, *2022-2023 Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Parent Handbook* (July 2022), at 4-5, available at <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-2023-FTC-Parent-Handbook-Final-Draft.pdf>;

AAA Scholarship Foundation, *2021-2022 Parent and School Handbook - Florida Income-Based Scholarship Program*, at 5, available at https://www.aascholarships.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Parent-and-School-Handbook_FL_2021-22_v3_rev20220616.pdf.

³⁴ Section 1002.395(4), F.S.

FTC Scholarship Award Amount

A FTC scholarship may be used to cover the tuition and fees for a student to attend an eligible private school.³⁵ The scholarship amount awarded to a student who received a scholarship in the 2018-2019 school year, who remains eligible, and who is enrolled in an eligible private school is the greater of:³⁶

- the calculated amount for a student to attend an eligible private school is 95 percent of the unweighted full-time equivalent (FTE) basic program funds³⁷ the student would generate in the school district in which the student resides based on grade level, plus a per-full-time equivalent share of funds for all Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) categorical programs,³⁸ except for the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) guaranteed allocation,³⁹ or
- a percentage of the unweighted FTC funding amount for the 2018-2019 state fiscal year as follows:
 - eighty-eight percent of the unweighted FTE for grades K-5;
 - ninety-two percent of the unweighted FTE for grades 6-8; and
 - ninety-six percent of the unweighted FTE for grades 9-12.

For students initially eligible in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, the calculated scholarship amount is 95 percent of the unweighted FTE basic program funds the student would generate in the school district in which the student resides based on grade level, plus a per-full-time equivalent share of funds for all FEFP categorical programs, except for the ESE Guaranteed Allocation.⁴⁰

Effective with the 2021-2022 school year, the Legislature increased the FTC scholarship amount to be the full amount provided for the student, from the previously 95 percent calculated amount.⁴¹ The maximum scholarship award amount for the 2021-2022 school year was \$7,408 per student.⁴²

In lieu of a scholarship for enrollment in a private school, a student may receive a scholarship for transportation to a public school other than the public school to which the student was assigned.⁴³ The transportation scholarship award must be an amount equal to the school district expenditure per student riding a school bus, as determined by the DOE, or \$750, whichever is greater.⁴⁴

During the 2021-2022 school year, 85,612 students were awarded a FTC scholarship.⁴⁵

Responsibilities of FTC Scholarship Recipients

Participation in the FTC scholarship requires parents and students to fulfill the following responsibilities:

³⁵ Section 1002.395(6)(c)1., F.S.

³⁶ Section 1002.395(11)(a) F.S. (2020).

³⁷ Florida Department of Education, *2021-22 Funding for Florida School Districts*, available at <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7507/urlt/Fefpdist.pdf>. Basic program funds are used to fund kindergarten and grades 1-12.

³⁸ Section 1011.62(6)(a), F.S. Categorical program funds are state funding allocations earmarked for certain programs or initiatives that can only be spent for the specific purposes of those programs or initiatives. These funds comprise a portion of total state funds for public school operations and are in addition to base state FEFP funds.

³⁹ Section 1002.395(11)(a)1., F.S.

⁴⁰ Section 1002.395(11)(a)2., F.S. (2020).

⁴¹ Section 1002.395(11)(a)2., F.S. (2021); *See also* s. 5, ch. 2021-27, L.O.F. The calculated scholarship award amount of the full amount provided for the student, effective with the 2021-2022 school year, is for a FTC scholarship recipient initially eligible in the 2019-2020 school year and thereafter, and a student initially eligible in the 2018-2019 school year if the calculated amount is greater than the scholarship award in the 2018-2019 school year.

⁴² Florida Department of Education, *FTC Scholarship Program: Fact Sheet* (Oct. 2022), available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/5606/urlt/FTC-Oct-2022-line.pdf>.

⁴³ Section 1002.395(11)(a)3., F.S.

⁴⁴ *Id.* Effective for the 2022-2023 school year, the previous transportation scholarship amount of up to \$750 was revised to allow for the amount of the transportation expenditure by the school district for the student, or \$750, whichever is greater. Section 13, ch. 2022-154, L.O.F.

⁴⁵ Florida Department of Education, *Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program: June 2022 Quarterly Report* (June 2022), available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7558/urlt/FTC-Jun-2022-Q-Report.pdf> [hereinafter *June Quarterly Report*].

- Parents must select an eligible private school,⁴⁶ apply for admission, and notify the school district when the student is withdrawn from a public school.
- Students must attend school (unless excused by the school for illness or good cause).
- Students and parents must comply with the private school's published policies.
- Require that the student participating in the scholarship program takes the norm-referenced assessment offered by the private school.⁴⁷
- Parents must restrictively endorse (sign) the scholarship check for the private school and are prohibited from designating any individual or entity associated with their student's private school as their attorney for purposes of endorsing scholarship payment checks or approving a fund transfer before deposit.
- Parents must authorize the SFO to access information necessary to determine income eligibility, including information held by state and federal agencies.⁴⁸

Disbursement of FTC Scholarship Award

The SFO sends scholarship payment checks quarterly to each student's school of enrollment, after the school completes the attendance verification. The school then notifies the parent that the check has arrived and asks the parent to come in to the school to restrictively endorse (sign) the check in order for the school to deposit the check.⁴⁹

A SFO may also make scholarship payments directly to eligible private schools by funds transfer (including debit cards, electronic payment cards, or any other means the DOE deems commercially viable or cost-effective). Payments must be approved by the parent before the funds are deposited.⁵⁰

School Attendance

With few exceptions, Florida law requires all children who will be six years of age on February 1, of each school year and are less than 16 years of age to attend school regularly. Children who will be five years of age by September 1, of each school year are eligible for public kindergarten.⁵¹

State law directs district school boards to establish attendance policies defining excused or unexcused absences or tardiness. Specific criteria for determining whether an absence or tardiness is excused or unexcused are determined by the district school board.⁵² The parent of a student who is absent from school must justify the absence, and the absence is evaluated based on the school board's attendance policies.⁵³

Regular attendance, as required under the law, can be satisfied by attendance in:⁵⁴

- a public school supported by public funds;
- a parochial, religious, or denominational school;
- a private school supported in whole or in part by tuition charges or by endowments or gifts;
- a home education program; or

⁴⁶ A private school is eligible to participate in the FTC if they meet statutory criteria for participation in state scholarship programs under s. 1002.421(1), F.S., annually administer or make provisions for students in grades 3 through 10 to participate in one of the nationally norm-referenced tests identified by the DOE or the statewide assessments and report the student's scores to a selected state university, and administer the statewide assessments if the private school chooses to offer the statewide assessments. Section 1002.395(8)(a)-(b), F.S.; *See also* r. 6A-6.03215, F.A.C.

⁴⁷ The parent and student may also elect to participate in the statewide, standardized assessment administered by the school district. The parent is responsible for transporting the student to the assessment. Section 1003.394(10)(a)6., F.S.

⁴⁸ Section 1002.395(7)(a)-(g), F.S.

⁴⁹ Section 1002.395(11)(b), F.S.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ Section 1003.21(1)(a), F.S.

⁵² Section 1003.24, F.S. (flush-left provisions at end of section).

⁵³ Section 1003.26, F.S.

⁵⁴ Section 1003.01(13), F.S.

- a private tutoring program.

Home Education Programs

Home education is a parent-directed educational option that satisfies the requirement for regular school attendance. Florida laws protecting home education became effective in 1985. For the 2021-2022 school year 152,109 students participated in home education programs throughout Florida.⁵⁵

Home education students are eligible, as provided by law, to participate in a number of district and state programs such as:

- interscholastic extracurricular student activities;⁵⁶
- the Bright Futures Scholarship Program;⁵⁷
- dual enrollment programs;⁵⁸
- admission to Florida College System institutions;⁵⁹
- admission to state universities;⁶⁰ and
- a FES-UA scholarship.⁶¹

Additionally, school districts may provide home education students special education-related services or career and technical courses and programs.⁶² School districts must make industry certification, national assessments, and statewide, standardized assessments offered by the school district available to home education students.⁶³ The DOE is also required to provide access to testing and evaluation services at diagnostic and resource centers to home education students.⁶⁴

Effect of the Bill

The bill expands eligibility for FTC scholarships to include any student who is a resident of Florida and is eligible to enroll in kindergarten through grade 12 in a public school. The parent of an eligible student will receive an empowerment savings account to choose among a variety of options to customize their child's K-12 education. In addition to expanding FTC eligibility, the bill makes the following changes:

Personalized Education Programs

The bill establishes the personalized education program as a parent directed educational choice option that must be registered with a SFO that administers FTC scholarships. The bill authorizes students in personalized education programs to participate in the FTC scholarship program and establishes personalized education programs as a mechanism to satisfy mandatory school attendance requirements. Students in a personalized education program are provided access to the same programs and services as home education program students.

The bill establishes the following responsibilities for parents and students receiving a FTC scholarship while participating in a personalized education program:

- Apply to an eligible SFO to participate in the program by a date set by the SFO. The request must be communicated directly to the SFO in a manner that creates a written or electronic record of the request and the date of receipt of the request.

⁵⁵ Florida Department of Education, *Home Education Program*, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/5606/urlt/HomeEd-Sept-2022.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Section 1002.41(4), F.S.

⁵⁷ Section 1002.41(5), F.S.

⁵⁸ Section 1002.41(6), F.S.

⁵⁹ Section 1002.41(7), F.S.

⁶⁰ Section 1002.41(8), F.S.

⁶¹ Section 1002.394(4)(b)4., F.S.

⁶² Section 1002.41(10)-(11), F.S.

⁶³ Section 1002.41(12), F.S.

⁶⁴ Section 1002.41(9), F.S.

- Sign an agreement with the SFO and annually submit a sworn compliance statement to the SFO to satisfy or maintain program eligibility, including eligibility to receive and spend program payments, by:
 - Affirming that the program funds are used only for authorized purposes serving the student's educational needs and that the parent will not receive a payment, refund, or rebate of any funds provided under this section.
 - Affirming that the parent is responsible for all eligible expenses in excess of the amount of the scholarship and for the education of his or her student.
 - Submitting a student learning plan⁶⁵ to the SFO and revising the plan, at least annually before program renewal.
 - Requiring the student to take a nationally norm-referenced test identified by the DOE or a statewide, standardized assessment and provide assessment results to the SFO before renewal.
 - Renewing participation in the program each year.
 - Procuring the services necessary to educate the student. When the student receives a scholarship, the district school board is not obligated to provide the student with a free appropriate public education.

For a scholarship student participating in a personalized education program, a SFO must:

- Maintain a signed agreement from the parent which constitutes as complying with the state's attendance requirements.
- Receive eligible student test scores, and beginning with the 2027-2028 school year, annually report the assessment data to the state university selected by the DOE to analyze such data.
- Provide parents with information, guidance, and support to create and annually update a customized student learning plan for their student. The SFO must maintain the plan and allow parents to electronically submit, access, and revise the plan continuously.
- Upon submission by the parent of an annual student learning plan, fund a scholarship for a student determined eligible.

With regard to personalized education program students, the bill prohibits a SFO from further regulating, exercising control over, or requiring documentation beyond the requirements prescribed under the law.

The bill provides SFOs with the following schedule for funding FTC scholarships to eligible students that are enrolled in a personalized education program:

- For the 2023-2024 school year, no more than 20,000 scholarships may be funded.
- For the 2024-2025 through 2026-2027 school years, the number of funded scholarships may increase by 40,000 each year.

Beginning with the 2027-2028 school year, and every school year thereafter, every eligible personalized education program student will have access to an empowerment account to customize their education.

FTC Scholarships

For all students receiving a FTC scholarship, the bill expands the authorized uses of FTC scholarship funds in an empowerment savings account to include:

- Instructional materials, including digital materials and Internet resources.
- Curriculum, which is a complete course of study for a particular content area or grade level, including any required supplemental materials and associated online instruction.
- Tuition and fees associated with full-time or part-time enrollment in a home education instructional program, an eligible postsecondary educational institution or a program offered by

⁶⁵ The bill defines student learning plan to mean a customized learning plan developed by a parent, at least annually, to guide instruction for their student and identify the goods and services that are needed to address the academic needs of the student.

the postsecondary educational institution,⁶⁶ an approved preapprenticeship program,⁶⁷ a private tutoring program, a virtual program offered by a department-approved private online provider, the Florida Virtual School as a private paying student, or an approved online course.

- Fees for nationally standardized, norm-referenced achievement tests, Advanced Placement Examinations, industry certification examinations, assessments related to postsecondary education, or other assessments.
- Contracted services provided by a public school or school district, including classes. A student who receives services under a contract is not considered enrolled in a public school for scholarship eligibility purposes but rather attending a public school on a part-time basis.
- Tuition and fees for part-time tutoring services or fees for services by a choice navigator.

The bill clarifies that for a scholarship awarded to a student enrolled full-time in a private school, a parent agrees to have the SFO commit scholarship funds for tuition and fees at the private school before using account funds for any other authorized use and that a parent is responsible for all eligible expenses in excess of the amount of the scholarship.

The bill retains the requirement that priority for FTC scholarships be given to those students whose household income does not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level or who are in foster care or out-of-home care. The bill adds a second priority group for students whose household income is greater than 185 percent of the federal poverty level, but less than or equal to 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Additionally, the bill expands the eligibility for public school transportation scholarships to all students eligible for a scholarship.

The bill updates the parent and student participation responsibilities for the FTC scholarship by requiring the parent to meet with the private school's principal or the principal's designee to review the school's academic programs and policies, specialized services, code of student conduct, and attendance policies before enrollment.

The bill updates the requirements of the FTC scholarship to be more closely aligned with the FES-EO by providing that a student is not eligible for a FTC scholarship while he or she is:

- Enrolled in a public school, including, but not limited to, the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, the College-Preparatory Boarding Academy, a developmental research school authorized under the law, or a charter school. A 3- or 4-year-old child who receives services funded through the FEFP is considered to be a student enrolled in a public school;
- Enrolled in a school operating for the purpose of providing educational services to youth in a Department of Juvenile Justice commitment program;
- Receiving any other state-sponsored K-12 educational choice scholarship;
- Not having regular and direct contact with his or her private school teachers unless he or she is enrolled in a personalized education program;
- Participating in a home education program;
- Participating in a private tutoring program unless he or she is enrolled in a personalized education program; or
- Participating in virtual instruction that receives state-funding pursuant to the student's participation.

The bill requires a FTC scholarship to remain in force until:

- The SFO determines that the student is not eligible for program renewal;
- The commissioner suspends or revokes program participation or use of funds;
- The student's parent has forfeited participation in the program for failure to comply with statutorily required parental and student responsibilities;

⁶⁶ Unless the program is subject to a statutory fee exemption or the dual enrollment scholarship.

⁶⁷ Unless the program is subject to a statutory fee exemption. The preapprenticeship program must also comply with all applicable requirements of the DOE pursuant to chapter 1005.

- The student enrolls in a public school, however, if a student enters a Department of Juvenile Justice detention center for a period of no more than 21 days, the student is not considered to have returned to a public school on a full-time basis for that purpose; or
- The student graduates from high school or attains 21 years of age, whichever occurs first.

The bill requires that a SFO establish and maintain an empowerment savings account for each eligible student and must maintain records of accrued interest retained in the student's account. The parent of an eligible student must approve each payment prior to the SFO transferring funds to the account by funds transfer. The SFO may permit eligible students to use program funds by paying for the authorized use directly, then submitting a reimbursement request to the eligible SFO. However, a SFO is authorized to require the use of an online platform for direct purchases of products so long as this does not limit a parent's choice of curriculum or academic programs. Additionally, if a parent purchases a product identical to one offered by a SFO's online platform for a lower price, the SFO must reimburse the parent the cost of the product. Reimbursements are allowed for items not on the platform.

A student's empowerment savings account must be closed, and any remaining funds will revert to the state, after:

- Denial or revocation of program eligibility by the commissioner for fraud or abuse, including, but not limited to, the student or student's parent accepting any payment, refund, or rebate, in any manner, from a provider of any services; or
- Two consecutive fiscal years in which an account has been inactive.

Additionally, the SFO is required to verify a student's eligibility each fiscal year, prior to granting a scholarship for that fiscal year. A student whose participation in the program is not renewed may continue to spend scholarship funds that are in his or her account from prior years unless the account must be closed. The bill establishes a cap of \$24,000 as the maximum amount a SFO is permitted to maintain in an individual student's empowerment savings account for a FTC scholarship.

The bill requires that a SFO must award for annual or partial-year scholarships an amount equal to or greater than 75 percent of all estimated net eligible contributions and all funds carried forward from the prior state fiscal year remaining after administrative expenses, before funding any scholarships to students determined eligible for an FES-EO scholarship. The bill requires a SFO to submit to the DOE, beginning September 30, 2023, quarterly reports that provide the estimated and actual amounts of the net eligible contributions and all funds carried forward from the prior state fiscal year.

The bill permits reimbursements for scholarship program expenditures to continue until the account balance is expended or remaining funds have reverted to the state.

The bill defines a choice navigator to mean an individual who assists parents with the selection, application, and enrollment in educational options that address the academic needs of their student. A choice navigator must be a person who holds a valid Florida educator's certificate, a person who holds an adjunct teaching certificate, a person who has a bachelor's degree or a graduate degree in the subject area in which instruction is given, a person who has demonstrated a mastery of subject area knowledge, or a person certified by a nationally or internationally recognized research-based training program as approved by the DOE. The bill requires any consultations between a choice navigator and a parent to be at a mutually agreed upon location and prohibits a choice navigator from overseeing or exercising control over the curricula or academic program of a personalized education program student.

The bill expands the definition of eligible postsecondary educational institution to include approved higher education institutions which participate in distance education through reciprocity agreements.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a private nonprofit organization with the goal of improving student access to distance learning. NC-SARA helps states, institutions, policymakers, and students understand the purpose and benefits of participating in these reciprocity agreements. There are currently more than 2,200 institutions in 49 member

The bill revises the definition of an eligible contribution under FTC to mean a monetary contribution from a taxpayer, subject to the restrictions provided in s. 1002.395, to an eligible SFO pursuant to ss. 212.099, 212.1832, 1002.395, and 1002.40.

Family Empowerment Scholarship Program

Present Situation

The FES program provides children of families in Florida with educational options to achieve success in their education, including children of families with limited financial resources, children of law enforcement and military families, and children with disabilities.⁶⁹ The scholarship program includes two types of scholarships where one assists eligible students to pay for the tuition and fees associated with attendance at a private school or transportation to another public school (FES-EO), and the other provides access to additional education options for a student with a disability by covering the cost of a variety of approved items, including: contracted services, curriculum, instructional materials, tutoring, specified education programs, and specialized services (FES-UA).⁷⁰ Each scholarship has unique student eligibility requirements, program requirements, award calculation methodologies, and allowable expenditures.⁷¹

FES-EO Eligibility

A student is eligible for a scholarship to attend private school if the student meets the following criteria:⁷²

- The student is on the direct certification list⁷³ or the student's household income level does not exceed 185 percent of the FPL;
- The student is currently placed, or during the previous state fiscal year was placed, in foster care or in out-of-home care;
- The student's household income level does not exceed an adjusted maximum percent of the FPL, which is set at 400 percent of the FPL (\$111,000⁷⁴ for a family of four) for the 2022-2023 school year;⁷⁵
- The student is a sibling of a student who is participating in the FES-EO and the siblings reside in the same household;
- The student is a dependent child of a member of the United States Armed Forces, including a reservist,⁷⁶ or
- The student is a dependent child of a law enforcement officer.

states, including Florida, participating in such reciprocity agreements, greatly expanding access to educational options for Florida's students. NC-SARA, *About NC-SARA*, <https://www.nc-sara.org/about-nc-sara> (last visited Apr. 25, 2023).

⁶⁹ Section 1002.394, F.S.; *see also* r. 6A-6.0952, F.A.C.

⁷⁰ Section 1002.394(3)(a) and (3)(b), F.S. The John M. McKay Scholarship for Students with Disabilities Program and the Gardiner Scholarship Program were previously offered as two separate scholarships for students with disabilities before the programs were consolidated under the FES-UA. The Gardiner Scholarship was repealed effective July 1, 2021, s. 2, ch. 2021-27 L.O.F. The McKay Scholarship was repealed effective July 1, 2022, s. 3, ch. 2021-27, L.O.F.

⁷¹ Section 1002.394, F.S.

⁷² Section 1002.394(3)(a)1.-6., F.S.

⁷³ "Direct certification list" means the certified list of children who qualify for the food assistance program, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program, or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations provided to the DOE by the Department of Children and Families. Section 1002.395(2)(c), F.S.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ Section 1002.394(3)(a)3., F.S. The Federal Poverty Level may be increased by 25 percentage points in the fiscal year following a fiscal year in which more than 5 percent of the allowable scholarships have not been funded. The eligibility for the 2021-2022 school year was set at 375 percent of the FPL.

⁷⁶ A member of the United States Armed Forces means a member of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, or Space Force, including a Reservist. Rule 6A-6.0952(2)(f), F.A.C.

A student is ineligible for a scholarship under the FES-EO or FES-UA if the student is:⁷⁷

- enrolled in a public school, including, but not limited to, the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, the College-Preparatory Boarding Academy, a developmental research school, or a charter school;
- enrolled in a Department of Juvenile Justice commitment program;
- receiving any other state-sponsored K-12 educational choice scholarship;
- not having regular and direct contact with his or her private school teacher, unless the student has an eligible disability and is awarded a scholarship under the FES-UA and the student is enrolled in the private school's transition-to-work program or a home education program;
- participating in a private tutoring program, unless the student has an eligible disability and is awarded a scholarship under the FES-UA; or
- participating in a virtual instruction program.

FES-EO eligibility continues for a student receiving a scholarship to attend private school until the student returns to a public school, graduates from high school, or turns 21 years old, whichever occurs first, regardless if the student's household income exceeds the FPL cap in subsequent years.⁷⁸ A scholarship recipient who maintains continued eligibility is not required to reapply annually, however, a SFO may require a recipient to annually confirm their continued participation in the program.⁷⁹

Number of Available FES-EO and FES-UA Awards

For the 2019-2020 school year, a maximum program capacity for FES-EO scholarships was established at 18,000 students. Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, the maximum number of students participating in the scholarship program increases by one percent of the state's total K-12 FTE student membership each year.⁸⁰ The maximum program capacity does not include the following students who are excluded:⁸¹

- Students who are a dependent child of a law enforcement officer or a member of the United States Armed Forces, a foster child, or an adopted child; or
- Students who meet the eligibility requirements of being on the direct certification list or meet household income requirements or students placed in foster care or out-of-home care and either spent the prior school year in attendance at a Florida public school, or beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, is eligible to enroll in kindergarten.

In the 2021-2022 school year, 77,141 FES-EO scholarships were awarded to eligible students seeking a scholarship to attend private school.⁸²

For the 2022-2023 school year, the maximum number of FES-UA scholarships is established at 26,500 students.⁸³ Beginning with the 2023-2024 school year, and annually thereafter, the maximum number of students participating in the scholarship program annually increases by one percent of the state's total ESE FTE student membership, not including gifted students.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Section 1002.394(6)(a)-(f), F.S.

⁷⁸ Section 1002.394(5)(a), F.S.

⁷⁹ See Step Up for Students, *2022-2023 Family Empowerment Scholarship for Educational Options Parent Handbook* (July 2022), at 12-13, available at <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-2023-FES-EO-Parent-Handbook-Final-Draft.pdf>; AAA Scholarship Foundation, *2021-2022 Parent and School Handbook-Florida Income-Based Scholarship Program*, at 5, available at <https://www.aaascholarships.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Parent-and-School-Handbook-FL-2021-22-v3-rev20220616.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Section 1002.394(12)(a)1., F.S.

⁸¹ Section 1002.394(12)(a)1.a.-b., F.S.

⁸² Adam Emerson, Florida Department of Education, *School Choice Overview*, presentation before the Choice & Innovation Subcommittee, (Jan. 19, 2023), available at <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loaddoc.aspx?PublicationType=Committees&CommitteeId=3243&Session=2023&DocumentType=Meeting+Packets&FileName=cis+1-19-23.pdf>.

⁸³ Section 1002.394(12)(b)1., F.S.

⁸⁴ *Id.*

The maximum program capacity does not include the following students who are excluded:⁸⁵

- Students who received specialized instructional services under the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK) during the previous school year;
- Students who are a dependent child of a law enforcement officer or a member of the United States Armed Forces, a foster child, or an adopted child; or
- Students who spent the prior school year in attendance at a Florida public school or received a McKay Scholarship in the 2021-2022 school year.

In the 2021-2022 school year, 25,049 FES-UA scholarships were awarded to eligible students with a disability.⁸⁶

Priority for FES-EO Awards

A participating SFO must award a FES-EO scholarship in accordance with the priorities established in law. For a student seeking a scholarship to attend private school, the award priority must be given to a student whose household income level does not exceed 185 percent of the FPL or who is in foster care or out-of-home care.⁸⁷

FES-EO Award Amount

The FES-EO is funded through the FEFP with a scholarship awarded by a SFO.⁸⁸ A FES-EO scholarship award amount for a student to attend an eligible private school is calculated as 100 percent of the school districts funding per student, including all categorical funds, except for the ESE guaranteed allocation.⁸⁹ The DOE determines the appropriate student scholarship funding amount and cross-checks scholarship students with public school enrollment to avoid duplication.⁹⁰

Upon receiving documentation which verifies a student's participation in the scholarship from the SFO, the DOE must transfer scholarship funds to the SFO for disbursement to parents of participating FES-EO students.⁹¹ Initial scholarship payments are made after the SFO verifies the student's admission acceptance to an eligible private school, with all subsequent scholarship payments occurring upon verification of continued enrollment and attendance at the private school.⁹² Any scholarship payment made by warrant must be delivered by the SFO to the private school of the parent's choice, and the parent must restrictively endorse (sign) the payment.⁹³

⁸⁵ Section 1002.394(12)(b)1.a.-c., F.S.; *see also* Florida Department of Education, State Board of Education August 18, 2021 Agenda, *Family Empowerment Scholarship Program Presentation*, at 5, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/19998/urlt/6-3.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Adam Emerson, Florida Department of Education, *School Choice Overview*, presentation before the Choice & Innovation Subcommittee, (Jan. 19, 2023), available at <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loaddoc.aspx?PublicationType=Committees&CommitteeId=3243&Session=2023&DocumentType=Meeting+Packets&FileName=cis+1-19-23.pdf>.

⁸⁷ Section 1002.394(3)(a), F.S. (flush left provision at end of subparagraph).

⁸⁸ Section 1002.394(8)(a)2., (11)(a)1., (11)(b)1., and (12)(a), F.S. The department must notify the SFO that scholarships may not be awarded in a school district in which the scholarship award will exceed 99 percent of the school district's share of the state FEFP funds as calculated by the department. Section 1002.394(8)(a)13., F.S.

⁸⁹ Section 1002.394(12)(a)2., F.S.; *see also* Step Up For Students, *Income-Based Scholarship Programs Basic Scholarship Amounts for 2022-23*, available at https://www.stepupforstudents.org/wp-content/uploads/Step-Up-For-Students_Income-Based-Scholarship-Amounts.pdf.

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ Section 1002.394(12)(a)5., F.S. Scholarship payments are made to the SFO on or before September 1, November 1, February 1, and April 1 of each year. Rule 6A-6.0952, F.A.C.

⁹² Section 1002.394(12)(a)6., F.S.

⁹³ Section 1002.394(12)(a)6., F.S.; *see also* s. 1002.394(10)(a)7., F.S.

For each FES-EO scholarship, the DOE must cross-check the list of participating scholarship students with public school enrollment and adjust payments to a SFO and school districts based upon these results when the FEFP is recalculated.⁹⁴

Responsibilities of FES-EO Recipients

Parents and students receiving a FES-EO scholarship must fulfill the following responsibilities:⁹⁵

- Select the private school and apply for the admission of his or her student.
- Request the scholarship by a date established by the SFO, in a manner that creates a written or electronic record of the request and the date of receipt of the request.
- Inform the applicable school district when the parent withdraws his or her student from a public school to attend an eligible private school.
- Require his or her student participating in the program to remain in attendance throughout the school year unless excused by the school for illness or other good cause.
- Meet with the private school's principal or the principal's designee to review the school's academic programs and policies, customized educational programs, code of student conduct, and attendance policies prior to enrollment.
- Require that the student participating in the scholarship program takes the norm-referenced assessment offered by the private school.⁹⁶
- Restrictively endorse the warrant, issued in the name of the parent, to the private school for deposit into the private school's account. The parent may not designate any entity or individual associated with the participating private school as the parent's attorney in fact to endorse a scholarship warrant.

Responsibilities of FES-UA Recipients

Parents and students receiving a FES-UA scholarship must fulfill the following responsibilities:⁹⁷

- Apply to an eligible SFO to participate in the program by a date set by the SFO in a manner that creates a written or electronic record of the request and the date of receipt of the request.
- Sign an agreement with the SFO and annually submit a sworn compliance statement to the SFO to satisfy or maintain program eligibility, including eligibility to receive and spend program payments by:
 - Affirming that the student is enrolled in a program that meets regular school attendance requirements.
 - Affirming that the program funds are used only for authorized purposes serving the student's educational needs; that any prepaid college plan or college savings plan funds contributed will not be transferred to another beneficiary while the plan contains funds contributed from the FES-UA scholarship; and that they will not receive a payment, refund, or rebate of any funds provided under this section.
 - Affirming that the parent is responsible for all eligible expenses in excess of the amount of the scholarship and for the education of his or her student by, as applicable:
 - Requiring the student to take a norm-referenced assessment or the statewide, standardized assessment;⁹⁸
 - Providing an annual home education program evaluation; or

⁹⁴ Section 1002.391(8)(a)14., F.S. The FEFP is calculated five times throughout the year to arrive at each year's final appropriations. See Florida Department of Education, *2021-22 Funding for Florida School Districts*, at 25, available at <https://www.fdoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7507/urlt/Fefpdist.pdf>.

⁹⁵ Section 1003.394(10)(a)6., F.S.

⁹⁶ The parent and student may also elect to participate in the statewide, standardized assessment administered by the school district. The parent is responsible for transporting the student to the assessment. Section 1003.394(10)(a)6., F.S.

⁹⁷ Section 1002.394(10)(b), F.S.

⁹⁸ However, students with disabilities for whom the physician or psychologist who issued the diagnosis or the IEP team determines that standardized testing is not appropriate are exempt from this requirement. Section 1002.394(9)(c), F.S.

- Requiring the child to take any preassessments and postassessments selected by the provider if the child is 4 years of age and is enrolled in a program provided by an eligible VPK provider.⁹⁹
- Affirming that the student remains in good standing with the provider or school if those options are selected by the parent.
- Enrolling his or her child in a program from a VPK provider, a school readiness provider, or an eligible private school if either option is selected by the parent.
- Renewing participation in the program each year.
- Procuring the services necessary to educate the student.

Authorized uses for FES-EO Awards

A FES-EO scholarship may be used to cover the tuition and fees for a student to attend an eligible private school including the cost of any assessment fee required by the participating private school and any costs to provide a digital device, including internet access, to the student.¹⁰⁰ A scholarship in the amount of \$750 or an amount equal to the school district expenditure per student riding a bus, whichever is greater, may also be awarded to an eligible student¹⁰¹ enrolled in a Florida public school which is different from the school to which the student was assigned or in a lab school, if the school district does not provide the student with transportation to the school.¹⁰²

Authorized uses for FES-UA Awards

A FES-UA scholarship for an eligible student with a disability may be used to cover the following expenses:¹⁰³

- Instructional materials, including digital devices, digital periphery devices, and assistive technology devices that allow a student to access instruction or instructional content and training on the use of and maintenance agreements for these devices;
- A complete course of study for a particular content area or grade level, including any required supplemental materials and associated online instruction;
- Specialized services¹⁰⁴ by approved providers or by a hospital in this state which are selected by the parent;
- Tuition or fees associated with full-time or part-time enrollment in a home education program, an eligible private school, an eligible postsecondary educational institution or a program offered by the postsecondary educational institution, a private tutoring program authorized, a virtual program offered by an approved private online provider, the Florida Virtual School as a private paying student, or an approved online course;
- Fees for nationally standardized, norm-referenced achievement tests, Advanced Placement Examinations, industry certification examinations, assessments related to postsecondary education, or other assessments;
- Contributions to the Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Program or the Florida College Savings Program for the benefit of the eligible student;
- Contracted services provided by a public school or school district, including classes;¹⁰⁵
- Tuition and fees for part-time tutoring services;

⁹⁹ A student with disabilities for whom the physician or psychologist who issued the diagnosis or the IEP team determines that a preassessment and postassessment is not appropriate is exempt from this requirement. Section 1003.394(10)(b)2.c.(III), F.S.

¹⁰⁰ Section 1002.394(12)(a)2., F.S.

¹⁰¹ Section 1002.394(12)(a)4., F.S. The student must be on the direct certification list, the student's household income level does not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty index, or the student is placed in foster care or in out-of-home care.

¹⁰² Section 1002.394(12)(a)4., F.S. The district expenditure per student riding a school bus is the amount determined by the DOE.

¹⁰³ Section 1002.394(4)(b)1.-15., F.S.

¹⁰⁴ Specialized services may include, but are not limited to, applied behavior analysis services, services provided by speech-language pathologists, occupational therapy services, services provided by physical therapists, or services provided by listening and spoken language specialists.

¹⁰⁵ A student who receives services under such a contract is not considered enrolled in a public school for scholarship eligibility purposes.

- Fees for specialized summer education programs or specialized after-school education programs;
- Transition services provided by job coaches;
- Fees for a home education student's annual evaluation of educational progress by a state-certified teacher;
- Tuition and fees associated with a VPK or school readiness program;
- Fees for services provided at a center that is a member of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International; or
- Fees for services provided by a therapist who is certified by the Certification Board for Music Therapists or credentialed by the Art Therapy Credentials Board, Inc.

Effect of the Bill

FES-EO Scholarship

The bill expands eligibility for FES-EO scholarships to include any student who is a resident of Florida and is eligible to enroll in kindergarten through grade 12 in a public school. The parent of an eligible student will receive an empowerment savings account to customize their child's K-12 education.

The bill expands the authorized uses of FES-EO scholarship funds in an empowerment savings account to include:

- Instructional materials, including digital materials and Internet resources.
- Curriculum, which is a complete course of study for a particular content area or grade level, including any required supplemental materials and associated online instruction.
- Tuition and fees associated with full-time or part-time enrollment in an eligible postsecondary educational institution¹⁰⁶ or a program offered by the postsecondary educational institution,¹⁰⁷ an approved preapprenticeship program,¹⁰⁸ a private tutoring program, a virtual program offered by a department-approved private online provider, the Florida Virtual School as a private paying student, or an approved online course.
- Fees for nationally standardized, norm-referenced achievement tests, Advanced Placement Examinations, industry certification examinations, assessments related to postsecondary education, or other assessments.
- Contracted services provided by a public school or school district, including classes. A student who receives services under a contract is not considered enrolled in a public school for scholarship eligibility purposes but rather attending a public school on a part-time basis.
- Tuition and fees for part-time tutoring services or fees for services by a choice navigator.

To reflect the expanded authorized uses beyond just tuition and fees at a private school, the bill provides that the scholarship amount shall be the calculated amount the student would have generated through the FEFP, rather than the lesser amount of either the calculated funds or the cost of tuition and fees. However, the bill clarifies that for a scholarship awarded to students enrolled full-time in a private school, funds must be used for tuition and fees at the private school prior to any other authorized use and that parents are responsible for all eligible expenses in excess of the amount of the scholarship. The bill requires the parent of a recipient of a FES-EO scholarship to agree to have the SFO commit scholarship funds on behalf of his or her student for tuition and fees prior to using scholarship funds for other authorized services.

The bill retains the requirement that priority for FES-EO scholarships be given to those students whose household income does not exceed 185 percent of the FPL or who are in foster care or out-of-home

¹⁰⁶ "Eligible postsecondary educational institution" includes institutions that offer distance learning under a reciprocity agreement. *See, supra*, text accompanying note 68.

¹⁰⁷ Unless the program is subject to a statutory fee exemption or the dual enrollment scholarship.

¹⁰⁸ Unless the program is subject to a statutory fee exemption. The preapprenticeship program must also comply with all applicable requirements of the DOE pursuant to chapter 1005.

care. The bill adds a second priority group for students whose household income is greater than 185 percent of the FPL, but less than or equal to 400 percent of the FPL. Additionally, the bill expands the eligibility for public school transportation scholarships to all students eligible for a scholarship. The bill removes the existing FES-EO scholarship growth provisions.

The bill requires a FES-EO scholarship to remain in force until:

- The SFO determines that the student is not eligible for program renewal;
- The commissioner suspends or revokes program participation or use of funds;
- The student's parent has forfeited participation in the program for failure to comply with statutorily required parental and student responsibilities;
- The student enrolls in a public school, however, if a student enters a Department of Juvenile Justice detention center for a period of no more than 21 days, the student is not considered to have returned to a public school on a full-time basis for that purpose; or
- The student graduates from high school or attains 21 years of age, whichever occurs first.

The bill requires that a SFO establish and maintain an empowerment savings account for each eligible student and must maintain records of accrued interest retained in the student's account. The parent of an eligible student must approve each payment prior to the SFO transferring funds to the account by funds transfer.

A SFO may permit a FES-EO student to use program funds by paying for the authorized use directly, then submitting a reimbursement request to the eligible SFO. However, a SFO is authorized to require the use of an online platform for direct purchases of products so long as this does not limit a parent's choice of curriculum or academic programs. Additionally, if a parent purchases a product identical to one offered by a SFO's online platform for a lower price, the SFO must reimburse the parent the cost of the product. Reimbursements are allowed for items not on the platform.

A student's empowerment savings account must be closed, and any remaining funds will revert to the state, after:

- Denial or revocation of program eligibility by the commissioner for fraud or abuse, including, but not limited to, the student or student's parent accepting any payment, refund, or rebate, in any manner, from a provider of any services; or
- Two consecutive fiscal years in which an account has been inactive.

Additionally, the SFO is required to verify a student's eligibility each fiscal year, prior to granting a scholarship for that fiscal year. A student whose participation in the program is not renewed may continue to spend scholarship funds that are in his or her account from prior years unless the account must be closed. The bill establishes a cap of \$24,000.00 as the maximum amount a SFO is permitted to maintain in an individual student's empowerment savings account for a FES-EO scholarship.

The bill permits reimbursements for program expenditures to continue until the account balance is expended or remaining funds have reverted to the state.

The bill requires the DOE to transfer eligible student scholarship funds, beginning August 1, to an SFO.

The bill removes the requirement for a school district where a scholarship student resides to provide the student information about locations and times for the statewide, standardized assessment. The bill retains the requirement for a school district where the private school that the student attends is located provide locations and times for a student to take statewide, standardized assessments, upon the parent's request.

FES-UA Scholarship

To increase the number of eligible students with disabilities served by the scholarship, the bill increases the scholarship capacity from 1 to 3 percent of the state's total ESE student membership annually.

The bill also expands the authorized uses of a FES-UA scholarship to include preapprenticeship programs¹⁰⁹ or fees for services provided by a choice navigator. Additionally, FES-UA students may now use scholarship funds for distance learning at postsecondary educational institutions with reciprocity agreements. The bill clarifies that a FES-UA recipient receiving contracted services provided by a public school or school district shall be considered to be attending public school on a part-time basis.

The bill requires private schools accepting FES-UA scholarships to discuss with a parent, before enrollment, the school's academic programs, and policies and specialized services which may meet a student's individual needs.

The bill provides schools districts with additional flexibility when developing a matrix of services for a nonpublic school student receiving an FES-UA scholarship, by authorizing the school district to rely on the evaluation reports and plans of care developed by a licensed professional when completing the matrix of services.

The bill establishes a cap of \$50,000.00 as the maximum amount a SFO is permitted to maintain in an individual student's empowerment savings account for a FES-UA scholarship.

DOE Scholarship Oversight and SFO Administration

Present Situation

DOE Oversight

The DOE must fulfill the following responsibilities for all state scholarship programs:¹¹⁰

- Annually verify the private schools eligible to participate.
- Establish a toll-free hotline to provide parents and private schools with information about participating in the scholarship programs.
- Establish a process to allow individuals to notify the DOE of violations of state law relating to a scholarship program.
- Annually receive and retain from every participating private school a notarized, sworn compliance statement certifying compliance with state law.
- Coordinate with the entities conducting the health inspections and fire inspections for private schools to obtain copies of the inspection reports directly from the entities.
- Provide, at no cost to the school, the statewide, standardized assessments and any related materials for administering the assessments.
- Conduct site visits to schools entering a scholarship program for the first time. A school is not eligible to receive scholarship funds until a satisfactory site visit is completed and the school complies with all other requirements in law.
- Maintain a list of nationally norm-referenced tests identified for purposes of satisfying scholarship program assessment requirements.¹¹¹

The DOE is authorized to conduct site visits to any private school participating in a state scholarship program that has received a complaint about a violation of state law or state board rule or has received a notice of noncompliance or a notice of proposed action within the previous two years.¹¹² The DOE must annually submit, by December 15, a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives which describes its implementation of the accountability

¹⁰⁹ Unless the program is subject to a statutory fee exemption. The preapprenticeship program must also comply with all applicable requirements of the DOE pursuant to chapter 1005.

¹¹⁰ Section 1002.421(2)(a), F.S.

¹¹¹ Sections 1002.394(8)(a)3. and 1002.395(9)(e), F.S.

¹¹² Section 1002.421(2)(b), F.S.

measures in the scholarship programs, any substantiated allegations or violations of law or rule by a private school, and the corrective action taken.¹¹³

The DOE is required to issue a project grant award to a state university, to which participating private schools must report the scores of participating scholarship students on the nationally norm-referenced tests or the statewide assessments administered by the private school in grades 3 through 10.¹¹⁴ The state university must annually report to the DOE on the student performance of participating students:¹¹⁵

- On a statewide basis. The report shall also include, to the extent possible, a comparison of scholarship students' performance to the statewide student performance of public school students with socioeconomic backgrounds similar to those of students participating in the scholarship program; and
- On an individual school basis. The annual report must include student performance for each participating private school in which at least 51 percent of the total enrolled students in the private school participated the FTC program in the prior school year.

Scholarship Funding Organizations

Florida's scholarship programs are administered by DOE approved SFOs.¹¹⁶ Presently, there is one application cycle annually for entities desiring to serve as a SFO. Applications, containing the information required by law, must be submitted to the DOE by September 1 of the year before the school year the organization intends to offer scholarships.¹¹⁷ A SFO must be a state university; or an independent college or university that is eligible to participate in the William L. Boyd, IV, Effective Access to Student Education Grant Program, located and chartered in this state, is not for profit, and is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; or is a Florida based charitable organization that complies with scholarship program requirements.¹¹⁸ There are currently two SFOs approved to administer the FES-EO, the FES-UA, the FTC, the HOPE, and the Reading Scholarship Programs.¹¹⁹

As a part of their duties of management and distribution of scholarships, current law authorizes a SFO to use from tax credit contributions received up to 2.5 percent (FES) and 3 percent (FTC) of the total amount of scholarships funded by the SFO for administrative expenses.¹²⁰

Effect of the Bill

DOE Oversight

The bill requires the DOE to include coordination with and the reporting by SFOs of personalized education student assessment data in the grant award issued to a state university for the compiling and

¹¹³ Section 1002.421(2)(c), F.S.

¹¹⁴ Section 1002.395(9)(f), F.S.

¹¹⁵ Section 1002.395(9)(f)1., F.S.

¹¹⁶ Florida Department of Education, *Scholarship Funding Organizations*, <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/sfo/> (last visited Apr. 25, 2023).

¹¹⁷ Section 1002.395(15), F.S.

¹¹⁸ Section 1002.395(1)(f), F.S.

¹¹⁹ Florida Department of Education, *Scholarship Funding Organizations*, <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/sfo/> (last visited Apr. 25, 2023). Specifically, the A.A.A. Scholarship Foundation administers FTC, FES-EO, and FES-UA scholarships while Step Up for Students administers FTC, FES-EO, FES-UA, HOPE, and Reading Scholarship Program scholarships. See A.A.A. Scholarship Foundation, *Florida Parents*, <https://www.aascholarships.org/parents/florida/> (last visited Apr. 25, 2023) and Step Up For Students, *Scholarships to Give Florida Students Educational Options*, <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/scholarships/> (last visited Apr. 25, 2023).

¹²⁰ Sections 1003.394(11)(a)4. and 1003.395(6)(j)1., F.S. For SFOs offering FTC scholarships, the organization may use eligible contributions for administrative expenses only if they have had no findings of material weakness or material noncompliance in its annual financial audit for the preceding 3 fiscal years. Section 1003.395(6)(j)1., F.S.

analysis of scholarship recipient assessment data. The bill expands the required report under this grant to cover all private schools at which a scholarship student attended rather than only those schools where 51 percent or more of the students received scholarships. Additionally, the bill requires the report to include performance on an individual school basis for the FTC, FES-EO, and Hope scholarship programs. Beginning with the 2027-2028 school year report, and annually thereafter, the report must include assessment data from personalized education students on a statewide basis reported by SFOs.

The bill also requires that the DOE report, as part of the determination of full-time equivalent membership, all students who are receiving a FES scholarship program and funded in the FEFP. The DOE must inform SFOs that students may not be submitted for FES funding after February 1, each year.

The bill requires the DOE to annually publish its list of nationally norm-referenced tests identified for purposes of satisfying scholarship program assessment requirements.

To assist school districts in their budgeting processes, the bill requires the DOE to report to school districts the consensus estimate of FTC and FES-EO enrollment in the subsequent school year.

The bill requires that the DOE have at least two application periods for charitable organizations to apply to be SFOs in Florida.

SFO Administration

To provide guidance to scholarship recipients on allowable expenditures under Florida's scholarship programs, the bill requires SFOs to participate in a joint development of agreed-upon purchasing guidelines. The jointly developed purchasing guidelines must be provided to the commissioner and published to the SFO's website by December 31, 2023, and annually thereafter. The guidelines remain in effect until there is unanimous agreement to revise the guidelines and the revisions must be provided to the commissioner and published within 30 days of any such revisions.

The bill authorizes a SFO that administers the FES-EO or FES-UA scholarship to use up to 3 percent of the total funded scholarships for administrative expenses if the SFO expended 75 percent of tax credit revenue on FTC scholarships the prior fiscal year.

The bill authorizes an out-of-state nonprofit organization that administers a scholarship program in another state to use financial audits from the other state program as a basis for satisfying statutory requirements for administrative expenses. An organization would, therefore, be authorized to use contributions for administrative costs, if it can demonstrate 3 years of clear financial audits while administering another state's scholarship program. The audits must be for the preceding three fiscal years and be free of material misstatements and going concern issues.

The bill requires SFOs to notify parents that participation in the FTC or FES-EO scholarship programs does not guarantee enrollment at any particular private school. Additionally, the bill requires a SFO to commit funds on behalf of the student for tuition and fees for which the parent is responsible at the private school before using the funds for other authorized services.

School Choice Portal

To increase transparency of Florida's school choice options, and provide parents with access to all information on the options available to them, the bill requires the commissioner to develop an online portal that allows parents to choose the best educational choice options for their student. The portal, at a minimum, must:

- Recommend educational options based on questions about the student, including the needs and interests of the student.
- Advise parents on the recommended educational options for their student.

- Enable schools to develop a school profile and connect directly with families who express interest in the school.
- Allow parents to complete the school enrollment process.

Part-time Enrollment in Public Schools

Present Situation

At least 12 states expressly permit students to enroll in public school part-time.¹²¹ These states vary greatly in the scope of the authorization for part-time enrollment, specifically, six permit both home school students and private school students to enroll part-time in public schools while three permit only home school students and three permit only private school students to enroll part-time.¹²² Additionally the funding provided to school districts when a student enrolls part-time varies between these states with some providing funding based on instructional time while others provide only a flat rate for part-time students.¹²³

Florida law does not expressly authorize or prohibit part-time enrollment in public schools. However, for the purpose of funding Florida’s school districts, the FEFP does provide a definition of a “part-time student” and authorizes a district to receive funding for the student proportional to the amount of instructional hours provided by the school divided by the minimum term.¹²⁴

Effect of the Bill

The bill expressly authorizes any public school in the state, including charter schools, to enroll a student on a part-time basis, subject to space and availability. Students that attend public school part-time generate FTE student membership consistent with the definition of “part-time student” currently in law. However, a student that receives a scholarship and attends public school on a part-time basis through contracted services provided by the public school or school district may not be reported for funding. The bill clarifies that students enrolled in public school part-time are not considered to be in regular attendance at a public school.

Cost Per Student Station

Present Situation

The practice of using a student station to determine the cost of construction was first adopted by the Legislature in 1997.¹²⁵ Prior to 1997, costs were limited by square foot rather than by student station. Construction of new educational facilities was capped at a cost per square foot that could not exceed the most recent five-year statewide average square foot total cost, adjusted for inflation and the most recent Marshall and Swift Construction Cost Index of Florida.¹²⁶ Starting in 1997, the baseline student station costs were used to report school construction costs.

In 2005, DOE conducted a study on overall inflation of school construction costs, including the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and other factors. The study included a survey of four counties with increasing student enrollment in the state from 1997 through 2005 (Brevard, Hillsborough, Orange, and

¹²¹ ExcelinEd, *Part-time Enrollment Policy Analysis June 2021*, at 1, available at https://excelined.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ExcelinEd_PolicyAnalysis_PartTimeEnrollment_June2021.pdf.

¹²² *Id.* at 3.

¹²³ *Id.*

¹²⁴ Section 1011.61, F.S. The minimum term is 180 actual teaching days or the equivalent on an hourly basis as set forth in rules of the SBE. A school district may alter the minimum term only as authorized in SBE rule. Section 1011.60(2), F.S.

¹²⁵ Florida Department of Education, *Review and Adjustment for Florida’s Cost per Student Station* (January 1, 2020), available at <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7738/urlt/2020AnnCSSR.pdf> [hereinafter *Cost per Student Station*].

¹²⁶ Section 235.216, F.S., (1996). Marshall and Swift was an appraisal guide that provided replacement costs and insurable values, while also providing an index of future values.

Sarasota), all of which reported increased school construction costs ranging from 23 to 32 percent. Because the CPI increased by 13 percent over this same time period, this index alone did not capture the full increases in construction costs.¹²⁷ The cost per student station levels adopted in 2006 were based on the DOE’s 2005 study recommendations.¹²⁸

The statutory cost per student station is annually adjusted to reflect increases or decreases in the CPI.¹²⁹ The law does not specifically assign this adjustment function; however, the DOE and the Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR) work together to calculate and disseminate the new statutory caps.¹³⁰ The dollar amount is structured as a ceiling or maximum, and its usage is required for the new construction of educational plant space funded from specified funding sources.

Cost per student station includes contract costs, fees of architects and engineers, and the cost of furniture and equipment.¹³¹ Contract costs include costs for construction within five feet of the building, including materials and supplies, as well as any furniture or equipment permanently attached to the building.¹³²

The table below summarizes the July 2022 forecast by EDR for the July 2023 cost per student station caps:¹³³

Type of School	Cost Per Student Station
Elementary School	\$27,212
Middle School	\$29,385
High School	\$38,169

District school boards are prohibited from using funds from specified sources, including the nonvoted 1.5 mill levy of ad valorem property taxes, for any new construction of education plant space with a total cost per student station that exceeds the caps in the table above.¹³⁴ An exception is provided for a contract for architectural and design services or for construction management services executed before July 1, 2017.¹³⁵

Effect of the Bill

The bill provides that an unfinished construction project for new construction of educational plant space that was started on or before July 1, 2026, is exempt from the total cost per student station requirements.

Transportation of Students

Present Situation

District school boards, after considering recommendations of the district school superintendent, must provide transportation for each student in prekindergarten disability programs and in K-12 public schools when transportation is necessary to provide adequate educational facilities and opportunities

¹²⁷ *Cost per Student Station*, supra note 126.
¹²⁸ Section 1013.64(6)(b)1., F.S.
¹²⁹ *Id.*
¹³⁰ *Cost per Student Station*, supra note 126.
¹³¹ Section 1013.64(6)(d), F.S.
¹³² *Cost per Student Station*, supra note 126.
¹³³ Office of Economic and Demographic Research, *Student Station Cost Factors* (July 2022), available at <http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/conferences/peco/studentstation.pdf>.
¹³⁴ Section 1013.64(6)(b)1., F.S.
¹³⁵ Section 1013.64(6)(b)3., F.S.

which otherwise would not be available. School districts must also transport students whose homes are more than a reasonable walking distance from the nearest appropriate school.¹³⁶

Federal law, Florida law, rules of the State Board of Education (SBE), and rules of the district school board specify the responsibilities and requirements of district school superintendents and district school boards in regards to the transportation of students to and from school and school activities.¹³⁷

In 2020-2021, school districts transported 508,293 students, or 18 percent of the total enrollment in traditional public schools.¹³⁸

Safety and Health of Students Being Transported

School districts are responsible for the safety and health of students being transported that must be observed by district school boards in routing buses, appointing drivers, and providing operating equipment, in accordance with law and SBE rules.¹³⁹

There are four vehicle categories that indicate the type of vehicle used to transport a student. These include:

- School buses meeting Florida School Bus Specifications.
- Passenger car or allowable multipurpose passenger vehicle owned, operated, or contracted by the school board or charter school, transporting fewer than 10 students.
- Privately owned motor vehicle or boat (for certain students with disabilities or isolated students).
- General-purpose transportation (city buses, trains, etc.).¹⁴⁰

District school boards must use school buses for all regular transportation, including to and from school or school-related activities.¹⁴¹ All public school buses owned, operated, rented, leased and contracted for by any public school board or charter school, used to transport children to and from school or school-related events must meet certain requirements.¹⁴² In 2020-2021, 12,551 school buses were in daily service, traveling over 204 million total miles.¹⁴³

District school boards may use motor vehicles other than school buses only when the transportation is:

- For physically handicapped or isolated students and the district school board has elected to provide for the transportation of the student;
- A part of a comprehensive contract for a specialized educational program;
- Provided through a public transit system; or
- For trips to and from school sites or agricultural education sites but not the customary transportation between the student's residence and such sites.¹⁴⁴

Transportation provided in a vehicle other than a school bus owned, operated, or contracted by the school board or charter school must meet statutory and federal requirements related to the size of the vehicle, and must meet requirements regarding licensed adult drivers and board procedures for

¹³⁶ Section 1006.21(3), F.S.

¹³⁷ See ss. 1006.21, 1006.22, 1006.23, 1006.24, 1006.25, 1006.261, and 1006.27, F.S.

¹³⁸ Florida Department of Education, *Florida School District 202-21 Transportation Profiles*, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7585/urlt/schtrandist2021.pdf>.

¹³⁹ Section 1006.22, F.S.

¹⁴⁰ DOE Bureau of PK-20 Education Data Warehouse and Office of Funding and Financial Reporting, *Full-time Equivalent (FTE) General Instructions 2020-21*, at 72, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7507/urlt/2021FTEGeneralInstruct.pdf>.

¹⁴¹ Section 1006.22(1), F.S.

¹⁴² Florida Department of Education, *Florida School Bus Specifications* (January 2020), available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7585/urlt/2020FLSchoolBusSpec.pdf>.

¹⁴³ Florida Department of Education, *Florida School District 2020-21 Transportation Profiles*, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7585/urlt/schtrandist2021.pdf>.

¹⁴⁴ Section 1006.22(1)(a), F.S.

liability.¹⁴⁵ Federal regulations do not prohibit the use of vans by schools, but require any van, with a capacity of more than 10, sold or leased for use as a school bus, to meet the safety standards applicable to school buses.¹⁴⁶

District school boards may authorize the transportation of students in privately owned motor vehicles on a case-by-case basis only in the case of illness or for isolated events as long as each student's parent is notified in writing and gives written consent before a student is transported in a privately owned motor vehicle.¹⁴⁷

The district school superintendent must notify the district school board of any school bus or other vehicle used to transport students that does not meet all the requirements of law and the rules of the SBE.¹⁴⁸ If the school bus is in an unsafe condition, the district school board must withdraw it from use until it meets specified requirements to be deemed safe for operation.¹⁴⁹ The DOE may inspect any school bus to determine whether the bus meets the requirement of law and rules of the SBE.¹⁵⁰

In an emergency situation, as defined by district school board policy, a school district may temporarily require transporting students in excess of the rated seat capacity adhering to certain conditions. Each district school board is responsible for prompt relief of the emergency condition by providing additional equipment, bus rerouting, bus rescheduling or other appropriate remedies as provided for in district school board policies.¹⁵¹

School Buses

The DOE must assist district school boards in securing school buses, contractual needs, equipment, and supplies at as reasonable prices as possible by providing a plan under which district school boards may voluntarily pool their bids for such purchases.¹⁵²

The SBE is authorized to adopt rules regarding school bus safety standards, standards for leased vehicles, and passenger protection systems.¹⁵³

Transportation Costs and Expenditures

In the 2020-2021 fiscal year, Florida provided \$449.9M to transport students, however total transportation expenditures reported by school districts exceeded \$964M. In addition, in that year school districts spent over \$108 million on school bus purchases.¹⁵⁴

Florida has allocated \$515M in funds to provide transportation to students in the 2022-2023 fiscal year.¹⁵⁵

School districts are also responsible for transportation costs for students participating in:

¹⁴⁵ Section 1006.22, F.S.

¹⁴⁶ 49 U.S.C. s. 30101 and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Use of Nonconforming Vehicles for School Transportation*, <https://one.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/buses/pub/noncom.hmp.html> (last visited Apr. 25, 2023).

¹⁴⁷ Section 1006.22(2), F.S.

¹⁴⁸ Section 1006.22(11), F.S.

¹⁴⁹ *Id.*

¹⁵⁰ *Id.*

¹⁵¹ Section 1006.22(12)(a), F.S.

¹⁵² Section 1006.27(1), F.S.

¹⁵³ Section 1006.25, F.S.

¹⁵⁴ Florida Department of Education, *Florida School District 2020-21 Transportation Profiles*, March 2022, at 4, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7585/urlt/schtrandist2021.pdf>.

¹⁵⁵ Florida Department of Education, *Florida Education Finance Program Third Calculation, 2022-2023*, January 2023, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7507/urlt/2223FEFPTthirdCalc.pdf>.

- The Opportunity Scholarship Program when parents choose to enroll their student in a higher-performing public school in the school district.¹⁵⁶
- The FES-UA program when parents choose another public school in the school district.¹⁵⁷

In an effort to improve access to reliable and safe transportation for students participating in public education school choices and to support innovative solutions that increase the efficiency of public school transportation, the Driving Choice Grant Program was passed during the 2022 legislative session. The DOE must publish on its website, by December 31, 2023, an interim report and by December 31, 2024, a final report that includes best practices used by grant recipients to increase transportation options for students and the number of students served by grant recipients.¹⁵⁸

Effect of the Bill

The bill provides additional flexibility to district school boards in the transportation of students by removing the blanket requirement that all regular transportation occur on school buses and authorizing the use of other vehicles.

The bill removes the specified circumstances by which students may be transported in privately owned vehicles, allowing broader authority to district school boards to use such transportation. However, the district school board must still authorize such transport on a case-by-case basis and with the authorization of each student's parent.

The bill requires district school superintendents to notify the district school board of any other vehicle used to transport students that does not meet all statutory requirements and requires the SBE to assist districts in securing other vehicles used for transporting students through pooling bids.

The bill maintains SBE authority to adopt rules relating to the transportation of students which are necessary to protect student health and safety.

Deregulation of Public Schools

Present Situation

Florida has provided opportunities for public schools to have similar flexibility and accountability requirements as charter schools in the past by establishing various pilot programs and school initiatives with the purpose of improving student achievement and relieving school districts of burdensome regulations.¹⁵⁹ However, the last time the early learning through 20 education code was revised was in 2001.¹⁶⁰

Effect of the Bill

In an effort to provide more flexibility, efficiency, and reduce unnecessary regulation for public schools, the bill requires the SBE, no later than November 1, 2023, to develop and recommend to the Governor and Legislature for adoption during the 2024 legislative session repeals and revisions to the Florida Early Learning-20 Education Code, chapters 1000-1013, Florida Statutes.

As part of this review the DOE must review the entirety of the Florida Early Learning-20 Education Code for potential repeals and revisions. The state board must make recommendations addressing

¹⁵⁶ Section 1002.38, F.S.

¹⁵⁷ Section 1002.394(7)(c)3., F.S.

¹⁵⁸ Section 1006.27(3), F.S.

¹⁵⁹ See, e.g., ss. 228.058, 228.0565 (2001), and 1002.451, F.S.

¹⁶⁰ Section 4, ch. 2001-170, L.O.F.; see also, *Florida School Laws 2001 Edition*, LexisNexis (2001) and *Florida School Laws 2022 Edition*, LexisNexis (2022). Education code chapters increased from 636 pages in 2001 to 944 pages in 2022.

repeals and revisions to the statutes governing the transportation of students. The SBE must consider input from teachers, superintendents, administrators, school boards, public and private postsecondary institutions, home educators, and other entities identified by the SBE in undertaking this effort.

District School Tax

Present Situation

In order to receive funds under the FEP for the operation of schools, a district school board must levy the millage¹⁶¹ set for its required local effort from property taxes.¹⁶² A school district's millage rate may not exceed the amount certified by the commissioner as the minimum millage rate necessary to provide the district required local effort for the current year.¹⁶³

In addition to the required local effort, each school district may levy a discretionary nonvoted current operating millage.¹⁶⁴ The Legislature prescribes annually in the General Appropriations Act the maximum amount of millage a district may levy. For the 2022-2023 Fiscal Year, the Legislature set a maximum levy of 0.748 mills.¹⁶⁵

In addition to the maximum discretionary levy of nonvoted current operating millage, a school board may also levy no more than 1.5 mills for charter schools and for district schools to fund:¹⁶⁶

- New construction, remodeling projects, sites and site improvement or expansion to new sites, existing sites, auxiliary facilities, athletic facilities, or ancillary facilities.
- Maintenance, renovation, and repair of existing school plants or of leased facilities to correct deficiencies.
- The purchase, lease-purchase, or lease of school buses.
- The purchase, lease-purchase, or lease of new and replacement equipment, including computer and device hardware and enterprise resource software.
- Lease and lease-purchase agreements for educational facilities.
- Costs related to compliance with state and federal environmental requirements.
- Costs of opening day collection for the library media center of a new school.
- Costs of school buses when a school district contracts with a private entity to provide transportation services.
- Specified loans.

Effect of the Bill

The bill adds payment of salaries and benefits for employees whose job duties support activities funded by the discretionary 1.5 mills levy as an authorized use for district capital improvement funds.

Educator Certification

Present Situation

¹⁶¹ Section 200.001(3)(a)-(e), F.S. School millage is composed of five categories: nonvoted required school operating millage, nonvoted discretionary school operating millage, voted district school operating millage, nonvoted district school capital improvement millage, and voted district school debt service millage.

¹⁶² Section 1011.71(1), F.S.

¹⁶³ *Id.* The state average millage was set at 3.262; for the 67 school districts, the certified required millage varied from 3.355 mills (Miami Dade County) to 1.249 mills (Monroe County). See Florida Department of Education, *2022-23 Funding for Florida School Districts*, at 7, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7507/urlt/Fefpdist.pdf>.

¹⁶⁴ Section 1011.71(1), F.S.

¹⁶⁵ Specific Appropriation 86, s. 2, ch. 2022-156, L.O.F.

¹⁶⁶ Section 1011.71(2)(a)-(i), F.S.

Educational personnel in public schools must possess appropriate skills in reading, writing, and mathematics; adequate pedagogical knowledge; and relevant subject matter competence so as to demonstrate an acceptable level of professional performance.¹⁶⁷

The SBE designates the certification subject areas, establishes competencies, and adopts rules in accordance with which education certificates are issued by the DOE to qualified applicants.¹⁶⁸

General Eligibility

In order to seek educator certification, a person must attest to uphold the principles of the United States and meet other general eligibility requirements, which include receipt of a bachelor's or higher degree from an approved postsecondary institution and minimum age, background screening, moral character, and competence requirements.¹⁶⁹

Professional Educator Certificate

A professional teaching certificate is valid for 5 years and is renewable. A professional certificate is awarded to an applicant who meets the basic eligibility requirements for certification and demonstrates mastery of:

- General knowledge, only if serving as a classroom teacher;
- Subject area knowledge; and
- Professional preparation and education competence.¹⁷⁰

Acceptable means of demonstrating mastery of general knowledge are specified in law and include passing one of several different examinations identified by the SBE, having a valid teaching certificate from another state, having a valid certificate from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), teaching a minimum of two semesters in either full-time or part-time status at a state college or university or at the private college level, or having a master's or higher degree from an accredited postsecondary education institution.¹⁷¹

The acceptable means of demonstrating mastery of subject area knowledge are specified in law and include passing a subject area or other alternative examination as approved by the SBE, having a valid teaching certificate from another state, having a valid certificate from the NBPTS, or a passing score or program completion of a specified defense language proficiency test or program.¹⁷² A school district that employs an individual who does not achieve a passing score on any subtest of the general knowledge exam must provide information regarding the availability of state-level and district-level supports to assist him or her in achieving a passing score.¹⁷³

A candidate for a professional certificate may demonstrate professional preparation and education competence through the completion of a teacher preparation program and a passing score on the corresponding professional education competency exam required by the SBE.¹⁷⁴ Other means include:

- Documentation of a valid professional standard teaching certificate issued by another state, the NBPTS, or a national educator credentialing board approved by the SBE.
- Passing the professional education competency examination and documentation of two semesters of successful, full-time or part-time teaching in a state college or university or a private college or university approved by the DOE.

¹⁶⁷ Section 1012.54, F.S.

¹⁶⁸ Section 1012.55(1), F.S.

¹⁶⁹ Section 1012.56(2), F.S.

¹⁷⁰ Section 1012.56(7)(a), F.S.

¹⁷¹ Section 1012.56(3), F.S.

¹⁷² Section 1012.56, F.S.

¹⁷³ Section 1012.56(3), F.S. (flush-left provision at the end of the subsection).

¹⁷⁴ Florida Department of Education, *Competencies and Skills Required for Teacher Certification in Florida* (Oct. 1, 2020), incorporated by reference in rule 6A-4.0021, F.A.C., available at <http://www.flrules.org/Gateway/reference.asp?No=Ref-10344>.

- Successful completion of professional preparation courses, successful completion of a professional preparation and education competence program, and achievement of a passing score on the professional education competency examination;
- Successful completion of a professional development certification and education competency program.
- Successful completion of a competency-based certification program and achievement of a passing score on the professional education competency examination.

Temporary Educator Certificate

A temporary teaching certificate is valid for 3 years and is nonrenewable. The DOE is required by law to issue a temporary certificate to any applicant who:

- Completes applicable subject area content requirements or demonstrates mastery of subject area knowledge by, for example, successful completion of an approved exam; and
- Holds an accredited degree or a degree approved by the DOE at the level required for the subject area specialization in state board rule.¹⁷⁵

A classroom teacher under a temporary certificate has the validity period of the certificate to complete the remaining requirements of general knowledge and professional preparation and education competence in preparation for application for a professional certificate.¹⁷⁶

Effect of the Bill

The bill provides a waiver of the mastery of general knowledge requirement for an individual who has been provided 3 years of supports and instruction by the school district and who has been rated effective or highly effective for each of the last 3 years.

The bill allows for an individual to demonstrate mastery of subject area knowledge, for subjects only requiring a baccalaureate degree for which a Florida subject area examination has been developed, through documentation of receipt of a master's or higher degree from an accredited postsecondary educational institution that the DOE has identified as having a quality program resulting in a baccalaureate degree or higher in the certificate subject area as identified by the SBE. The bill clarifies that demonstrating mastery of subject area knowledge for a subject requiring a master's or higher degree is achieved by passing a subject area exam or a standardized exam that is directly related to the subject.

The bill permits an individual to demonstrate mastery of professional preparation and education competence by documentation of 3 years of being rated effective or highly effective and successful completion of professional preparations courses or a professional preparation and education competence program.

The bill extends the duration of a nonrenewable temporary educator certificate from 3 to 5 years.

Requirements for a Standard High School Diploma

Present Situation

Florida law requires the adoption of standards for core curricula content taught in public schools and specifies the requirements that students must meet to earn a standard high school diploma.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Section 1012.56(7)(b), F.S.

¹⁷⁶ Section 1012.56(7), F.S. (flush-left provision at the end of the subsection).

¹⁷⁷ Sections 1003.41 and 1003.4282(3), F.S.

In order to receive a standard high school diploma, a student must successfully complete 24 credits in core-curricula and extracurricular courses with a 2.0 or higher cumulative grade point average¹⁷⁸ with limited exceptions.¹⁷⁹

The 24 required credits must be completed in the following subject areas:

- Four credits in English Language Arts I, II, III, and IV.
- Four credits in mathematics, including one in Algebra I and one in Geometry.
- Three credits in science, two of which must have a laboratory component and one of which must include Biology I.
- Three credits in social studies including one credit in United States History, one credit in World History, one-half credit in economics, and one-half credit in United States Government.
- One credit in fine or performing arts, speech and debate, or practical arts.
- One credit in physical education which includes the integration of health.
- One-half credit in personal financial literacy for students entering grade 9 in the 2022-2023 school year.
- Eight credits in electives for students entering grade 9 prior to the 2022-2023 and 7.5 credits in electives for students entering grade 9 in the 2022-2023 school year.

In addition, within the 24 credits, at least one course must be completed through online learning.¹⁸⁰

Florida's online course requirement was established as part of the Digital Learning Now Act¹⁸¹ passed by the legislature in 2011; however, additional options have been added to satisfy the requirement.

Currently, a student may:

- Complete an online or blended learning course in grades 6-12 that is within the 24 credits required for graduation.
- Complete a course in which the student earns a nationally recognized industry certification in information technology identified on the Career and Professional Education Industry Certification Funding List.
- Pass an industry certification exam in information technology without enrolling or completing the corresponding course.¹⁸²

In addition, a student who has an individualized education plan which indicates that an online or blended learning course would be inappropriate is exempt from the requirement as well as an out-of-state transfer student enrolled in a Florida high school and has one academic year or less remaining in high school.

A school district must report to the DOE when a student takes an online course and indicate if the student took the course under conditions that meet the online course graduation requirement.¹⁸³

Effect of the Bill

The bill removes the requirement for at least one course within the 24 credits required for a standard high school diploma to be completed through online learning.

Maintenance and Transfer of School Records

Present Situation

¹⁷⁸ Section 1003.4282, F.S.

¹⁷⁹ Section 1002.3105, F.S. A student may graduate with a minimum of 18 credit hours through the Academically Challenging Curriculum to Enhance Learning option if the student meets core course credit, assessment, and GPA requirements and completes three electives.

¹⁸⁰ Section 1003.4282, F.S.

¹⁸¹ Section 1, ch. 2011-137 L.O.F.

¹⁸² Section 1003.4282(4), F.S.

¹⁸³ Florida Department of Education, *DOE Information Database Requirements Volume I, 2022-23*, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/20077/urlt/2223-197235.pdf>.

Each principal is responsible for maintaining a permanent cumulative record for each student enrolled in a public K-12 school. The required form and content of the cumulative records is established in SBE rule. The cumulative record is confidential and exempt from Florida’s public records laws and is open to inspection only as provided in law.¹⁸⁴

The procedure for transferring and maintaining records of students who transfer from school to school are established by rules of the SBE. The transfer of records must occur within 3 school days and the records must include:

- Verified reports of serious or recurrent behavior patterns, including threat assessment evaluations and intervention services.
- Psychological evaluations, including therapeutic treatment plans and therapy or progress notes created or maintained by school district or charter school staff, as appropriate.¹⁸⁵

Effect of the Bill

To lessen the administrative burden on school districts while also ensuring records are transferred in a timely manner, the bill requires that the transfer of records must occur within 5 school days.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

Two components of the bill have a fiscal impact: (1) expanding the eligibility of the FES-EO scholarship program to include any student who is a resident of Florida and is eligible to enroll in kindergarten through 12th grade, and (2) allowing the maximum number of students participating in the FES-UA scholarship program to annually increase by 3 percent of the total eligible exceptional student membership instead of 1 percent. The total fiscal impact of these two components is shown in the below table:

Estimated Fiscal Impact of the CS/CS/CSCS/HB 1	
Expanding FES-EO Eligibility	\$112.1 million
Increasing FES-UA Annual Percent Increase	\$97.5 million
Total Amount	\$209.6 million

A more detailed summary of the fiscal impact for each component is provided below:

Expanding the Eligibility of the FES-EO Scholarship Program

The fiscal impact of this component would be the estimated number of students currently enrolled at a private school participating in either the FES or FTC scholarship programs (*or both*) but who are not currently receiving a scholarship. **NOTE:** Any current public school student who may elect to “choice” a scholarship due to the expanded eligibility is already funded in the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP); therefore, there would be no fiscal impact.

¹⁸⁴ Section 1003.25(1), F.S.; *see* r. 6A-1.0955, F.A.C.

¹⁸⁵ Section 1003.25(2) F.S.; *see* r. 6A-1.0955, F.A.C.

For private schools currently participating in either the FES or FTC scholarship programs, their total Fiscal Year student enrollment was 302,491.¹⁸⁶ Applying the three-year average growth in private school enrollments, the estimated number of students enrolled in these participating private schools for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 is 327,653.¹⁸⁷ Based on historical renewal rates, this number is reduced by 211,023 which represents the estimated number of FES and FTC scholarship students who will renew their existing scholarships for Fiscal Year 2023-2024. Based on this reduction, the total estimated number of private school students enrolled in participating private schools who would be eligible for a new FES-EO scholarship in Fiscal Year 2023-2024 is 116,603.

Based on a 50 percent student participation rate, it is estimated that 58,315 private school students would be awarded a new FES-EO scholarship in Fiscal Year 2023-2024. Since the eligibility requirements for the FTC and FES-EO scholarships are the same, the bill requires that a scholarship-funding organization fund FTC scholarships prior to funding the FES-EO scholarship. As such, the fiscal for this component is detailed in the below table:

Fiscal Year 2023-2024				
Estimated Eligible Private School Students without Scholarship	50% Student Participation Rate	Number Funded as FTC Scholarships	Balance Funded as FES-EO Scholarships	Fiscal Impact
116,630	58,315	43,408	14,907	\$112.1 million

Increasing the Annual Increase for FES-UA from 1 Percent to 3 Percent

The calculation of the annual increase is based upon the total eligible exceptional student education full-time equivalent students funded in the FEFP; which at the current 1 percent is 4,814 students. The fiscal impact of the increase to 3 percent is provided in the below table:

Fiscal Year 2023-2024				
Current 1 percent Increase	3 Percent Annual Increase	Difference	Fiscal Impact	
4,814	14,442	9,628	\$97.5 million	

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

¹⁸⁶ Data provided by the DOE.

¹⁸⁷ The DOE collects private school enrollment data at the end of a school year; therefore, the most recent available private school enrollment data is for Fiscal Year 2021-2022.

The fiscal impact is based upon the changes made by the bill. On February 6, 2023, the Education Estimating Conference adopted a new full-time equivalent (FTE) student forecast for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 which includes a total of 3,034,172.60 FTE students. Included in this total number is 180,081.92 FES-EO scholarship FTE which will be included in the funding of the FEFP.

Section 12 of the bill, which requires the DOE to establish an online school choice portal, has an indeterminate fiscal impact.