

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FINAL BILL ANALYSIS**

BILL #:	CS/CS/CS/HB 15	FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION:		
SUBJECT/SHORT TITLE	Education Options	101	Y's 11	N's
SPONSOR(S):	Education Committee; PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee; PreK-12 Innovation Subcommittee; Sullivan and others	GOVERNOR'S ACTION:	Approved	
COMPANION BILLS:	CS/CS/SB 902 and CS/CS/SB 1314			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/CS/CS/HB 15 passed the house on April 19, 2017. The bill was amended in the Senate on May 5, 2017, and was returned to the House. The House concurred in the Senate amendment on May 5, 2017.

The bill expands access to the Gardiner Scholarship Program (GSP) and strengthens accountability by:

- expanding the pool of eligible applicants by including additional disabilities;
- expanding the authorized use of scholarship funds for equine, art or music therapy and services;
- providing that payments to a scholarship account stop if the account has been inactive for two consecutive fiscal years and providing for closure of an account that is inactive for three consecutive fiscal years; and
- providing that a private school that has consecutive years of material exceptions listed in their annual financial reports may be ineligible to participate.

The bill revises the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship Program by:

- increasing the base annual scholarship amounts;
- increasing the amount of a transportation scholarship for a student who chooses a public school outside their district from \$500 to \$750;
- allowing a dependent child of a parent who is a member of the U.S. Armed Forces to apply for a scholarship at any time;
- authorizing a Scholarship Funding Organization (SFO) to make scholarship payments on behalf of a parent only if the SFO receives prior approval from the parent;
- providing that a private school that has consecutive years of material exceptions listed in their annual financial reports may be ineligible to participate; and
- requiring the Department of Revenue to provide a copy of a denial letter to the SFO specified by the taxpayer seeking the tax credit.

There is no fiscal to state government.

The bill was approved by the Governor on June 26, 2017, ch. 2017-166, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2017.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

The Gardiner Scholarship

Present Situation

The Gardiner Scholarship Program (GSP) provides parents of eligible students with disabilities more flexibility to customize their child's education.¹ Funds are distributed to qualified² Scholarship Funding Organizations (SFOs) to establish accounts for eligible students.³ Parents can use funds from their account to choose from a variety of approved items for their student including, but not limited to: specialized services, curriculum, instructional materials, tuition and contracted services.⁴

A student participating in the GSP must meet the requirements for regular school attendance by enrolling in:

- a parochial, religious or denominational school;
- a private school supported in whole or in part by tuition charges or by endowments or gifts; or
- a home education program.⁵

The parent of a student, who is a resident of this state, may request and receive an account if the student:

- is 3- or 4-years-old or eligible to enroll in kindergarten through 12th grade in a public school in this state;
- has one of the following disabilities: autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, an intellectual disability, Phelan-McDermid syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, is identified as a high-risk child or Williams syndrome;⁶ and
- has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) written in accordance with rules of the State Board of Education (SBE) or has received a diagnosis of one of the above disabilities from a licensed physician or a licensed psychologist.⁷

The parent of a student with a disability who does not have an IEP or who seeks a reevaluation of an existing IEP may request an IEP meeting and evaluation from the school district in order to obtain or revise a matrix of services.⁸

Parents must apply to an eligible SFO to participate in the program by February 1, before the school year in which the student wishes to participate or an alternative date set by the SFO.⁹ The scholarship is provided on a first-come, first-served basis.¹⁰

¹ Section 1002.385(1), F.S.

² Section 1002.385(2)(e), F.S.

³ Section 1002.385, F.S.

⁴ Section 1002.385(5), F.S.

⁵ Section 1003.01(13)(b)-(d), F.S.

⁶ Section 1002.385(2)(d), F.S.

⁷ Section 1002.385(3)(a), F.S.

⁸ Section 1002.385(7)(a)1., F.S.

⁹ Section 1002.385(3)(b), F.S.

¹⁰ Section 1002.385(12)(b), F.S.

A student is not eligible for the program:

- while enrolled in a public school;
- while enrolled in a Department of Juvenile Justice school commitment program;
- while receiving a scholarship from the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship Program or the McKay Scholarship Program; or
- while receiving any other educational scholarship pursuant to chapter 1002.¹¹

Program funds must be used to meet the individual educational needs of the student. Program funds may be spent for the following purposes:

- Instructional materials and curriculum
- Specialized services by approved providers, including but not limited to, applied behavior analysis, speech language pathologist, occupational therapy, physical therapy and services provided by listening and spoken language specialists
- Enrollment in, or tuition and fees for enrollment in a home education program, an eligible private school or postsecondary education institution or a program offered by the institution, a private tutoring program or virtual education programs or courses
- 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
- Contracted services provided by a public school or school district, including classes, tuition, and fees for part-time tutoring services provided by an individual who has a valid Florida educator's certificate, an adjunct teaching certificate or has demonstrated mastery of subject area knowledge
- Fees for specialized summer or after-school education programs
- Fees for transition services provided by job coaches
- Fees for an annual evaluation utilized by home education students
- Tuition and fees associated with programs offered by Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten education and school readiness providers¹²

Entities eligible to provide specialized services or educational programs include:

- a provider approved by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, a health care practitioner or a provider approved by the Department of Education (DOE) to offer specialized instructional services for children with disabilities;¹³
- a postsecondary educational institution including a Florida College System institution; a state university; a school district technical center; a school district adult general education center; an independent college or university eligible to participate in the William L. Boyd, IV Florida Resident Access Grant Program or an accredited, independent postsecondary educational institution which is licensed to operate in this state;¹⁴
- a private school that is located in this state, offers education to students in any grade from kindergarten to grade 12, meets all the requirements of a private school operating in Florida; and meets all the requirements of a private school participating in the McKay Scholarship Program or the FTC Program.¹⁵

¹¹ Section 1002.385(4), F.S.

¹² Section 1002.385(5)(m), F.S.

¹³ Section 1002.385(2)(a), F.S. See list of eligible providers at <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/gardiner/>.

¹⁴ Section 1002.385(2)(f), F.S.

¹⁵ Section 1002.385(2)(g), F.S.

Eligible providers may not share, refund or rebate any money from a student's GSP account with the parent or participating student.¹⁶

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill expands access to the GSP by:

- including rare diseases (diseases which affect patient populations of fewer than 200,000 individuals in the United States as defined by the National Organization for Rare Disorders) anaphylaxis, deaf, visually impaired, dual sensory impaired, traumatic brain injured or students medically diagnosed as hospital or homebound for more than six months;
- extending eligibility to students who have a qualifying disability and whose IEP was written in another state; and
- extending eligibility to a student who is diagnosed with a qualifying disability by a physician who holds an active license in another state, the District of Columbia or Puerto Rico.

The bill prohibits a student enrolled in the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind from being eligible for the GSP.

The bill includes hospitals in Florida as approved providers and expands eligible uses of funds to include fees for services provided by:

- members of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International; and
- a therapist certified by the Certification Board of Music Therapists or credentialed by the Art Therapy Credentials Boards.

The bill increases accountability by:

- prohibiting parents, students or a provider of services from billing an insurance company, Medicaid or any other agency for the same services that are paid using GSP funds;
- providing that a private school may not be eligible to participate in the program if its financial reports have consecutive years of material exceptions;
- defining "inactive" to mean that no eligible expenditures have been made from the scholarship account and requiring that payments from the state into the account stop if the account has been inactive for two consecutive fiscal years. When an SFO verifies eligible expenditures have been made from the account, payments may resume based on available funds; and
- closing a scholarship account and reverting funds to the state (becoming available for other eligible students) if the account has been inactive for three consecutive years.

The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program

Present Situation

The FTC Scholarship Program¹⁷ was established to encourage taxpayers to make private, voluntary contributions to SFOs, expand educational opportunities for families that have limited financial resources and enable Florida's children to achieve a greater level of excellence in their education.¹⁸ The FTC Scholarship Program is funded with contributions to private nonprofit 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;

¹⁶ Section 1002.385(5), F.S.

¹⁷ Section 1002.395, F.S.

¹⁸ Section 1002.395(1)(b), F.S.

or alcoholic beverage taxes on beer, wine and spirits.¹⁹ The tax credit is equal to 100 percent of the eligible contributions made.²⁰

SFOs use contributions to award scholarships to eligible low-income students for private school tuition and fees or transportation expenses to a Florida public school located outside of the school district in which the student resides.²¹ During the 2016-2017 school year, 98,457 students were awarded FTC Program scholarships. Of that number, 50,408 students were female and 48,049 students were male.²²

Contingent upon available funds, a student is eligible for a FTC Program scholarship if he or she meets one or more of the following criteria:

- The student is on the direct certification list or the student's household income level does not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level.
- 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 is greater than 185 percent of the federal poverty level but does not exceed 260 percent of the federal poverty level.²³

A student who receives a scholarship based upon placement in foster care or out-of-home care remains eligible until he or she graduates from high school or turns 21, whichever occurs first, regardless of his or her household income level. A sibling of a participating student is eligible for a scholarship if he or she resides in the same household as the sibling.²⁴

Priority is given to students who received a scholarship in the previous year, to new applicants whose household income levels do not exceed 185 percent of poverty, and to students who are in foster care or out-of-home care.²⁵

The law caps the amount of tax credits that may be made for scholarships and places limits on the per-student scholarship amount.²⁶

Tax Credit Cap

The tax credit cap amount is the amount in the prior state fiscal year unless the actual tax credit amount for the prior state fiscal year is equal to or greater than 90 percent of the tax credit cap amount applicable to that state fiscal year, in which case the tax credit cap amount increases by 25 percent.²⁷ The tax credit cap for Fiscal Year 2016-2017 is \$559,000,000 and the estimated scholarship amount is \$5,886.²⁸

¹⁹ Section 1002.395(1) and (5), F.S.

²⁰ Sections 220.1875 and 1002.395(5), F.S.

²¹ Section 1002.3953 (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.

²² Florida Department of Education, *Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program: February 2017 Quarterly Report*, at 1-3, available at <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7558/urlt/FTC-Feb-2017-Q-Report.pdf>.

²³ Section 1002.395(3)(c)1-3., F.S.

²⁴ Section 1002.395(3), F.S. (flush left provision at end of subsection).

²⁵ Section 1002.395(6)(e), F.S.

²⁶ Section 1002.395(5), F.S.

²⁷ Section 1002.395(5)(a)2., F.S.

²⁸ Step Up For Students, *2015-16 Fact Sheet*, available at <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/newsroom/basic-program-facts/> (last visited March 1, 2017); Florida Department of Education, *Fact Sheet, Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program*, available at http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/15230/urlt/FTC_Sep_2016.pdf (last visited February 13, 2017).

Scholarship Amount

The amount of a scholarship awarded to a student enrolled in an eligible private school is equal to 82 percent of the unweighted full-time equivalent (FTE) funding amount for that state fiscal year and thereafter.²⁹ The scholarship amount is adjusted based on family income, unless the student is receiving a scholarship based upon placement in foster care or out-of-home care.³⁰ Eligible income levels for the 2016-2017 school year are as follows:

FTC Scholarship Income Guidelines ³¹					
2016-2017 School Year					
Household size	Monthly Maximum Income for a 100% Scholarship	Monthly Maximum Income for an 88% Scholarship	Monthly Maximum Income for a 74% Scholarship	Monthly Maximum Income for a 60% Scholarship	Monthly Maximum Income for a 50% Scholarship
1	\$1,980	\$2,129	\$2,277	\$2,426	\$2,574
2	\$2,670	\$2,871	\$3,071	\$3,271	\$3,471
3	\$3,360	\$3,612	\$3,864	\$4,116	\$4,368
4	\$4,050	\$4,354	\$4,658	\$4,962	\$5,265
5	\$4,740	\$5,096	\$5,451	\$5,807	\$6,162
6	\$5,430	\$5,838	\$6,245	\$6,652	\$7,059
7	\$6,122	\$6,581	\$7,040	\$7,500	\$7,959
8	\$6,815	\$7,327	\$7,838	\$8,349	\$8,860
9	\$7,509	\$8,072	\$8,635	\$9,198	\$9,761
10	\$8,202	\$8,817	\$9,432	\$10,048	\$10,663
11	\$8,895	\$9,563	\$10,230	\$10,897	\$11,564
12	\$9,589	\$10,308	\$11,027	\$11,746	\$12,465
13	\$10,282	\$11,053	\$11,824	\$12,596	\$13,367
	Each additional member, add +693	Each additional member, add +745	Each additional member, add +797	Each additional member, add +849	Each additional member, add +901

For a scholarship awarded to a student for transportation to a Florida public school that is located outside the district in which the student resides, the limit is \$500.³²

To participate in the FTC Scholarship Program, a private school must:

- comply with all of the requirements for private schools participating in state school choice scholarship programs;
- provide the SFO, upon request, all documentation required for student participation, including its fee schedule;
- annually provide the parent with a written explanation of the student's progress;
- annually administer or make provisions for students in grades three through 10 to participate in one of the nationally norm-referenced tests identified by the DOE or the statewide assessments³³ and report the student's scores to the parent and to the Learning System Institute at Florida State University;

²⁹ Section 1002.395(12)(a)1.a., F.S.

³⁰ Section 1002.395(12)(a)3., F.S.

³¹ Step Up For Students, *FTC Scholarship Income Guidelines*, available at, <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/for-parents/income-based/how-the-scholarship-works/>.

³² Section 1002.395(12)(a)1.b., F.S.

³³ The statewide assessment program for public schools includes statewide, standardized comprehensive assessments and end-of-course (EOC) assessments and the Florida Alternate Assessment for students with disabilities. The statewide, standardized comprehensive assessment tests reading (grades 3-10), mathematics (grades 3-8), science (once in elementary and middle school), and writing (once at the elementary, middle and high school level). EOC assessments for high school students include Algebra I, Biology

- cooperate with a student whose parent chooses to have the student participate in statewide assessments; and
- require each student receiving a scholarship to have regular and direct contact with his or her teachers at the school's physical location.³⁴

Participating private schools that receive more than \$250,000 in funds from the FTC Scholarship Program in any state fiscal year must annually contract with an independent certified public accountant to perform agreed-upon procedures³⁵ and produce a report of the results. The procedures must determine whether the private school has been verified as eligible by the DOE; has an adequate accounting system, system of financial controls, and process for deposit and classification of scholarship funds and has properly expended scholarship funds for education-related expenses. The private school must submit the report annually on September 15, to the SFO that awarded the majority of the private school's scholarships and the SFO must monitor a private school's compliance. The SFO must notify the commissioner of a private school's failure to submit its annual report or of any material exceptions set forth in the report.³⁶

The DOE may remove a private school's eligibility to participate in the FTC Scholarship Program if the school fails to meet any of these requirements.³⁷

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill removes obsolete language regarding student eligibility and funding and increases the base annual scholarship limits for students enrolled in eligible private schools from 82 percent of the unweighted FTE to:

- eighty-eight percent of unweighted FTE for grades K-5;
- ninety-two percent of unweighted FTE for grades 6-8;
- ninety-six percent of unweighted FTE for grades 9-12.

The amount of a transportation scholarship for a student, who chooses a public school outside his or her district, also increases from \$500 to \$750.

The bill authorizes a SFO to make scholarship payments to eligible private schools by funds transfer (including debit cards, electronic payment cards, or any other means the DOE deems commercially viable). Payments must be approved by the parent before the funds are deposited and a parent may not designate an entity or individual associated with the participating private school as their attorney to approve a fund transfer.

The bill permits a dependent child of a parent who is a member of the U.S. Armed Forces to apply for a scholarship at any time.

I, Geometry, and U.S. History. Middle school students must take an EOC assessment if they are enrolled in any of the above listed high school courses and in Civics. Section 1008.22(3), F.S.

³⁴ Section 1002.395(8)(a)-(d), F.S.

³⁵ An agreed-upon procedure analysis is not a full financial statement audit. Instead, the certified public accountant is engaged by the client to examine specific financial or operational aspects of its company or organization. The client and the practitioner agree upon the procedures to be performed by the practitioner and the subject matter that they will cover. *See* American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, Audit and Attest Standards, Statements on Standards for Attestation Agreements, *Agreed-Upon Procedures Engagements*, at AT s. 201.02 (June 1, 2009), available at <http://www.aicpa.org/Research/Standards/AuditAttest/DownloadableDocuments/AT-00201.pdf>.

³⁶ Section 1002.395(6)(o) and (8)(e), F.S.

³⁷ Section 1002.395(8), F.S. (flush-left provision at end of the subsection).

The bill requires Department of Revenue to provide a copy of the denial or approval letter to the SFO within 10 days after approving or denying any of the following transactions:

- An application for a carryforward tax credit
- The conveyance, transfer, or assignment of a tax credit
- The rescindment of a tax credit
- Acknowledgement of tax credits

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

The bill has no fiscal impact to state government.