



THE FLORIDA SENATE
SENATOR JOE NEGRON
President

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Senators
FROM: Joe Negron, President
SUBJECT: Higher Education Excellence
DATE: January 11, 2017

As you may be aware, my goal over the next two years is to enact an aggressive and comprehensive higher education agenda that boosts the strength and competitiveness of our state universities as our primary economic engine to drive vibrant, sustainable economic development and growth in high-paying jobs.

In April, I visited each of Florida's 12 state universities to meet and discuss with students, faculty and administrators their ideas for how we can further enhance the reputation of our state universities. Many Senators joined me for those visits and over the last few months, I have enjoyed discussing your takeaways, working with our professional staff in Tallahassee, and following up with our universities to determine how to translate our ideas into policy solutions. In December, our Committee on Education began the formal process of developing legislation by holding a workshop during which Senators discussed many of these ideas and heard additional public testimony.

The next step took place today when Senator Galvano filed the first two important pieces of our higher education agenda. Senator Galvano has been a leader in education issues throughout his service in the Florida Legislature. He shares my commitment to developing a package of policy enhancements and funding investments that will elevate the prominence of our state universities and increase their ability to compete as national destination institutions, while preserving access and increasing affordability for Floridians.

A brief summary of Senator Galvano's legislation is below. I look forward to discussing these important issues with you in more detail in the weeks to come.

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SENATE BILL 2 – THE FLORIDA EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION ACT

My goal is for all students in Florida who qualify and earn the right to attend one of our state universities to have the opportunity to obtain a higher education, regardless of their economic circumstances. That does not mean higher education should be free. Students and their families should contribute toward the expenses of a college degree.

Students, families and the taxpayers of Florida who support our higher education system deserve a good return on their investment. Taxpayers do not see a return when young people languish in school for six or eight years, while working 50 hours a week at low paying jobs so they can afford to take six or nine credits a semester. Additionally, taxpayers do not see a return when students graduate with mountains of debt that delays, for many years, their ability to purchase a new car, or a home, or dozens of other significant purchases that contribute to our economy. Rather, Florida taxpayers see a return worthy of their investment in our entire PreK-20 system when our top Florida students attend our own universities, complete degree programs on time, and then graduate with job opportunities in high-demand fields needed in our growing communities.

Senate Bill 2, the “Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act,” promotes on-time graduation by expanding student financial assistance and support, establishing tuition and fee incentives, streamlining 2+2 articulation, and strengthening mechanisms that keep colleges and universities accountable to Florida taxpayers. By improving Florida’s 4-year graduation rate, over time, we will increase the national reputation of our universities, further improving Florida’s ability to attract top student scholars, faculty, and business partners.

Expands Student Financial Assistance and Support

- **Reinstates highest Bright Futures Scholarship Program Award** (Florida Academic Scholar) to cover 100 percent of tuition and certain tuition-indexed fees, including the summer term, plus \$300 for textbooks and college-related expenses during the fall and spring terms.
- **Expands the Benacquisto Scholar Program** to provide awards for qualified out-of-state students, as funded in the General Appropriations Act (GAA), equal to the highest cost of resident student attendance at a state university. The student must physically reside in the community of the university he or she is attending.
- **Revises the 1st Generation Matching Grant Program** to provide two to one (state to local match versus one to one), as funded in the GAA.

Establishes Tuition and Fee Incentives

The Legislature has authorized state universities to implement flexible tuition policies to assist students in accessing higher education in our state. To date, no state university has implemented a block tuition policy.

- **Requires universities to implement a block tuition policy** which must specify an in-state block tuition rate and an out-of-state block tuition rate for full-time undergraduate students. The block tuition policy must be publicly-approved by the university board of trustees and the Board of Governors in time for implementation by no later than the Fall 2018 semester.

Streamlines 2+2 Articulation

- **Establishes the 2+2 targeted pathway program** to strengthen Florida's 2+2 system of articulation and improve student retention and on-time graduation in four years with a baccalaureate degree.
- **Requires each community college to execute at least one 2+2 targeted pathway articulation agreement by the 2018-19 academic year.** The articulation agreement must provide students who meet specified requirements guaranteed access to the state university and baccalaureate degree program in accordance with the terms of the agreement.
- **Requires district school boards to notify students and parents with accurate and timely information** about how college credits generated in high school will apply towards a college degree.

Strengthens Mechanisms That Keep Colleges and Universities Accountable To Florida Taxpayers

Incentivizes full-time student graduation in four years by focusing institutional efforts on initiatives that reduce student time to, and costs of, on-time degree completion.

- **Upgrades State University System (SUS) Performance Metrics in Preeminence and Performance Funding programs:**
 - Tightens graduation rate expectations to four-year (from six-year) for a baccalaureate degree.
 - Repeals preeminent university authority for a six-credit set of "unique courses," that consume time and money for non-transferable credit.

- **Upgrades Florida College System (FCS) Performance Metrics in Distinguished College and Performance Funding programs:**
 - Tightens degree (associate and bachelor) graduation rate metrics to 100 percent (versus 150 percent) of normal-time completion.
 - Adds a college affordability metric, which must be adopted by the State Board of Education.
 - Specifies that the job placement metric must be based on wage thresholds that reflect the added value of the applicable certificate or degree.

SENATE BILL 4 – RECRUIT AND RETAIN ELITE FACULTY

Recruiting and retaining elite faculty, improving our university facilities, and enhancing our professional schools will dramatically enhance the national reputation of Florida’s universities. Elite faculty scholars and nationally-ranked professional schools often bring significant grant funding and research capabilities, which further increases the return on investment for Florida taxpayers as universities earn patents, receive royalties, and increase their ability to attract top undergraduate, graduate, and professional students.

This legislation expands and enhances policy and funding tools state universities can leverage to recruit and retain the very best faculty, enrich professional and graduate school strength and viability, and bring aging infrastructure and research laboratories into the 21st century.

- **Establishes a World Class Faculty Scholar Program** to fund university efforts to recruit, recognize, and retain star faculty and teams, as funded in the GAA.
- **Establishes a University Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program** to promote quality and excellence in university professional school and graduate study outcomes in high-impact fields of medicine, law, and business, as funded in the GAA.
- **Links education to job opportunities** by expanding university responsibility to identify internship opportunities for students to benefit from industry experts and mentors, earn industry certifications, and become employed in high-demand fields of unmet need.