

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

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

Date: March 25, 1998 Revised: _____

Subject: High School Graduation Requirements

| | <u>Analyst</u> | <u>Staff Director</u> | <u>Reference</u> | <u>Action</u> |
|----|----------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. | <u>White</u> | <u>O'Farrell</u> | <u>ED</u> | <u>Favorable/CS</u> |
| 2. | <u>Hickam</u> | <u>Smith</u> | <u>WM</u> | <u>Favorable</u> |
| 3. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 4. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 5. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

I. Summary:

This committee substitute would:

- Require school districts to allow a student to graduate from high school as soon as the student earned the 24 credits required by the state,
- Provide the school district with a financial incentive for assisting students to graduate early, and
- Require a student to pass a test and complete two seasons in an interscholastic sport to exempt the requirement to earn half a credit in physical education.

This bill amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 232.246 and 236.081.

II. Present Situation:

Section 232.246, F.S., establishes the general requirements for high school graduation but encourages school districts to make them more rigorous. To earn a regular high school diploma a student must:

- Pass both sections of the High School Competency Test
- Earn a grade point average of 2.0 on all courses taken after July 1, 1997
- Successfully complete the credits shown on the following table:

| Required Subject | Number of Credits |
|---|-------------------|
| English | 4 |
| Math (includes algebra for those entering in 97-98) | 3 |
| Science | 3 |

| Required Subject | Number of Credits |
|--|----------------------------|
| Social Studies | |
| American History | 1 |
| World History | 1 |
| Economics | 0.5 |
| American Government | 0.5 |
| Phys. Ed. or one season sports participation | 0.5 |
| Practical Arts Vocational or Exploratory Performing Fine Arts | 0.5 in each or 1 in either |
| Life Management Skills | 0.5 |
| Total Required Credits | 15 |
| Total Elective Credits | 9 |
| TOTAL CREDITS | 24 |

Currently four school districts and two of the four research schools require more than 24 credits to graduate, and 10 more have announced an increase beginning in 1999-2000. Currently the following districts require 25 or 26 credits: Bay, Broward, Marion, Martin, P.K. Yonge, and the Florida State University School. In 1999, the following districts are scheduled to require 28 credits: DeSoto, Escambia, Gilchrist, Gulf, Lafayette, Liberty, St. Lucie, Santa Rosa, and Taylor. Flagler is scheduled to require 26 credits beginning in 1999. Many of these school districts also require students to take algebra, although state law requires algebra only for students currently in the 9th grade.

No state law or rule prohibits a school district from issuing a diploma to any student as soon as that student earns the credits required by the school district and the state. A student has several options for accumulating more than 24 credits or for accumulating them in less than 4 years. Some school districts offer seven class periods per day, so that a student who does not fail any courses will accumulate 28 credits by graduation. Students may attend adult high school courses at night, offered either by the school district or community college.

If students accumulated hours faster and graduated early, however, the school district would receive less in state funding per student. State funding is not provided for a student in any semester in which the student is not in attendance, nor is more funding provided for students who spend more than full time in school. Florida provides funding to school districts under the Florida Education Finance Program (s. 236.081, F.S.) based on the calculation of full-time-equivalent (FTE) students actually in attendance. The funding formula provides more or less funding depending on the type of educational program provided to each student -- a base allocation per student multiplied by a factor called a "program weight" -- but not more than the full-time-equivalent amount for the program.

The Florida Education Finance Program has two provisions that provide bonuses to school districts whose students excel academically in high school -- for each student who passes an Advanced Placement or an International Baccalaureate examination, the school district earns an amount worth 0.25 of a full-time-equivalent student member. No financial incentive is provided to school districts whose students graduate early from high school.

The 1997 Legislature added a provision to the graduation requirements that allows a student to substitute participation in an interscholastic sport for the required 0.5 credit in physical education. One season's participation in any year is sufficient.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The legislation under consideration would require a school district to issue a high school diploma to a student who wished to graduate early and who earned the 24 credits required by s. 232.246, F.S. The only way for school districts to make graduation requirements more rigorous would be to require a higher grade point average. School districts that currently require additional credits or courses would abandon those requirements on the effective date of the bill. Affected school districts would include those that require students currently in the 10th through 12th grades to take algebra or geometry.

To graduate early, a student would be required to notify the school district prior to the semester in which the student expected to complete the requirements for graduation. The student would also have the option of remaining in school through the senior year and accumulating additional credits.

If a student graduated early, the school district would receive a fiscal bonus from the Florida Education Finance Program. The bonus would be worth 0.25 times the value of a full-time-equivalent student membership for a student who graduated one semester early and 0.50 times the value for a student who graduated a full year early. The bonuses would be added in the funding cycle after the student's graduation. In 1998-1999, the value of 0.25 FTE is \$758.74. The value of 0.50 FTE is \$1,517.48.

The bill would also add to the requirements for a student who wished to substitute participation in sports for the required half-credit in physical education. The student would have to complete two rather than one season of participation, and any participation in the freshman year could not be used for the substitution. In addition, the student would have to take and earn a grade of at least "C" on a competency test on personal fitness. The bill would prohibit school districts from requiring students to take PE in their freshman year.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

For each student who graduated 1 year early, the state would pay the school district a bonus worth half of a full-time-equivalent student member, and for each student who graduated one semester early, the state would pay a bonus worth a quarter of a full-time-equivalent student. In the 1997-1998 school year, that amount would be \$1517.48 and \$758.74, respectively.

This amount represents a savings for the state, however, because the alternative would be to pay for a full-time-equivalent student member, and the bill provides only half of that amount.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
