

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.)

BILL: SB 1906

SPONSOR: Senator Lee

SUBJECT: Student Grade Point Averages

DATE: March 16, 2000 REVISED: 03/20/00 _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>White</u>	<u>O'Farrell</u>	<u>ED</u>	<u>Fav/3 amendments</u>
2.	_____	_____	<u>FP</u>	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

This bill requires school districts to disclose on high school report cards any differences between the grade point average as calculated for purposes of the Bright Futures Scholarship Program and the grade point average as calculated for school district purposes. It raises the authorized grade weights used for calculating the Bright Futures Scholarship from half a point per course to one point per course, and it authorizes local school districts to identify courses that will be weighted for calculating eligibility for a Bright Futures Scholarship. It requires rather than authorizes the Department of Education to determine eligibility and inform students of their award status prior to graduation.

The bill amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 232.24521 and 240.40202.

II. Present Situation:

High school grades may be expressed on student report cards as letter grades, percentages, grade points, or a combination of those measures. Each student's "grade point average" either may be cumulative, using all grades in all courses during the student's high school career, or it may be calculated only using certain courses, such as the courses used for purposes of university admission or the Bright Futures Scholarship program. The required scale of percentages, letter grades, and grade points is established by s. 232.2463, F.S.:

Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F	I
Grade points	4	3	2	1	0	0
Percentages	94-100	85-93	77-84	70-76	0-64	Incomplete

In grade "weighting" systems, extra points are added to the grade points earned in certain courses. Grade weights are used to encourage students to take challenging courses or to assure a

high ranking for students who take them. Section 232.2463, F.S., authorizes school districts to use weighted grades to rank students.

The Bright Futures Scholarship Program (s. 240.40202, F.S.), requires the Department of Education to weight grades by assigning up to an additional half a point in certain courses. The courses are identified at the state level and include all courses in the following categories: Advanced Placement, pre-International Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate, academic dual enrollment, and others identified by the Articulation Coordinating Committee as containing rigorous academic curriculum and performance standards. This committee has identified all honors courses for grade weighting.¹

In some cases, parents are confused by the different grade weighting schemes and find that their children with *B* averages are not eligible for Bright Futures Scholarships. This possibility occurs because the school district's weights differ from those of the Bright Futures Program or because the school district's calculation is cumulative and Bright Futures eligibility is calculated by omitting certain courses.²

In a survey conducted for an Education Committee interim project on high school grading policies (Project #00-33), many superintendents said that grade weighting is controversial, that no weighting scheme will please everybody, and that they would prefer to avoid the pressures associated with determining which courses deserve higher weights than others.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The legislation under consideration amends s. 232.24521, F.S., to require school districts to calculate student grade point averages two ways on end-of-year student report cards -- one for purposes of the Bright Futures Scholarship Program and one for school district purposes. In practice, this requirement will mean three grade point averages on each report card because the Bright Futures Program requires two different methods of calculating the grade point average -- one for the Academic and Merit Scholarships and one for the Gold Seal Vocational Scholarship. The eligible courses also differ, and the Gold Seal Vocational Scholarship requires a higher grade point average on vocational courses than on others. (Note: Amendment #1 removes the requirement that the Gold Seal Vocational Scholarship GPA be included on student report cards.)

The bill will amend s. 240.40202, F.S., to:

- Allow school districts, rather than the Department of Education, to determine which courses are honors courses to be weighted for purposes of Bright Futures eligibility. (Note: Amendment #2 removes this authority.)
- Increase the authorized weight from half a point to 1 point.

¹That is, those courses classified as honors courses by the Florida Course Code Directory, not locally identified.

²For the Academic Scholarship and the Merit Scholarship, the grade point average is calculated using 15 college-preparatory academic courses and omitting any electives that are not academic or are not on the list of courses used for university admission. For the Gold Seal Vocational Scholarship, college preparatory courses are not required, but two grade point averages are -- a 3.0 (weighted GPA) on all courses except electives and a 3.5 on vocational courses.

- **Require** rather than **authorize** the Department of Education to determine eligibility and inform students of their award status prior to graduation. (Note: Amendment #3 removes this requirement.)

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:

With the additional weights and local determination of which courses are to receive weights, it is likely that more students will earn a 3.0 GPA and become eligible for a scholarship. (Note: Amendment #2 removes the local determination of which courses are to receive weights.)

C. Government Sector Impact:

School districts will incur the expense of reprogramming their computers or purchasing software capable of distinguishing the eligible courses for each scholarship program and adding the weights, which will differ among the districts. According to the Department of Education, the programming will be extensive because all systems will need to be reprogrammed. Each school district will need to estimate its cost.

Likely, the state will need to provide additional funding for scholarships because more students will earn the required grade point average. Both the higher weights and the likelihood that more courses will be weighted will tend to raise grade point averages.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

The effective date of July 1, 2000, will not allow students who graduate in June of 2000 to benefit from the additional weighted courses, while students who graduate after summer school will be eligible.

It will not be possible for the Department of Education to inform *all* students of their eligibility prior to their graduation, as required on page 3, lines 14 and 15, which change the word “may” to “shall.” Students may not earn their eligibility until graduation, if they enter the second semester of their senior year with grades on the brink of 3.0, or if they still have a required course to complete. Corrected in Amendment #3.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

#1 by Education:

Delays by 1 year the date by which student report cards must include the grade point average in courses and grade weights required for the Bright Futures Scholarship Program. Requires the grade point average only for the Academic and Merit components of the Bright Futures Program, omitting the two other grade point averages used for the Gold Seal Vocational Program.

#2 by Education:

Requires the honors courses for grade weighting to be identified at the state level rather than the local level. The state’s method for identifying honors courses is the state Course Code Directory.

#3 by Education:

Removes the requirement that the Department of Education must notify all students of their Bright Futures Scholarship eligibility before graduation.