

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: CS/SB 1906

SPONSOR: Fiscal Policy Committee and Senator Lee

SUBJECT: Student Grade Point Averages

DATE: April 7, 2000 REVISED: _____

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

I. Summary:

This bill requires school districts that use a weighted grade point average (GPA) to include on high school report cards or permanent records a statement indicating that the GPA is different from the GPA used for the Bright Futures Scholarship Program. Beginning with the 2001-02 school year, students must be informed, on an annual basis, of their progress toward meeting the requirements for a Florida Bright Futures Scholarship. The bill 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 specifies that honors courses weighted for Bright Futures are to be those designated as honors courses in the Florida Course Code Directory.

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 that use a weighted grade point average (GPA) to include on high school report cards or permanent records a statement indicating that the GPA is different from the GPA used for the Bright Futures Scholarship Program. Beginning with the 2001-02 school year, the districts are required, in cooperation with the Department of Education, to annually inform all students of their progress toward meeting the requirements for a Bright Futures Scholarship. The bill appropriates \$75,000 of recurring General Revenue to the Department of Education to implement this provision.

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

- Specify that honors courses to be weighted for purposes of Bright Futures eligibility are those honors courses in the Florida Course Code Directory
- 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.

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, more students will earn a 3.0 GPA and become eligible for a Bright Futures scholarship.

C. Government Sector Impact:

DOE will need to reprogram its evaluation system to reflect the weights changing from .5 to 1.0, but this reprogramming can be done within existing resources. The department would need to inform students of the change in weights. This also can be done within existing resources.

The state will need to provide additional funding for scholarships because more students will earn the required grade point average due to the higher weights. The additional amount needed for in-coming freshmen for **FY 2001-02** is estimated to be \$1.7 million to \$2.7 million. Additional funds will be needed in subsequent years as each class of students renews its scholarships. By FY 2004-05, the total additional funds needed are estimated to be \$5 million to \$8 million.

The bill appropriates \$75,000 in recurring General Revenue to the Department of Education. These funds will be used for analyzing transcripts of all students to determine their progress towards earning the requirements for a Bright Futures Scholarship.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

SB 990, which passed the Senate on March 22, requires Bright Futures GPAs on report cards.

VIII. Amendments:

None.

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