

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 2364

SPONSOR: Senator Holzendorf

SUBJECT: Education Investment Act

DATE: April 17, 2000 REVISED: _____

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

I. Summary:

Senate Bill 2364 creates a number of initiatives designed to assist graduates of low-performing high schools to succeed in university education. To this end, the bill:

- ▶ Suggests program enhancements for low-performing high schools and their feeder-pattern middle and elementary schools.
- ▶ Requires improvements in guidance counseling programs for low-performing high schools.
- ▶ Requires accountability measures related to “gatekeeper” courses and college preparatory courses.
- ▶ Requires a study of Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test scores of students at low-performing high schools to identify students who could benefit from a test preparation course.
- ▶ Defines schools-within-schools as separate schools for purposes of ranking graduates for the “Talented Twenty Percent” who will be admitted to a university as freshmen.
- ▶ Requires student services at universities to assist freshmen from low-performing high schools.
- ▶ Provides fee waivers for graduate students who came from low-performing high schools.
- ▶ Provides for Law-School-Admissions-Test-preparation for those students.
- ▶ Awards a bonus of \$5,000 to teachers whose schools raise their grade from a *D* or an *F*.

This bill creates 10 undesignated sections of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Under the “Talented Twenty Percent” policy of university admissions proposed by Governor Bush and endorsed by the Board of Regents, the top ranked graduates of every public high school in Florida will be guaranteed admission as freshmen to one of the state’s 10 public universities.

Under the previous method, admissions officers considered test scores and the types of courses taken as well as high school grades.¹

Much anecdotal evidence and some data support the idea that all top-ranked high school graduates are not the same. Under the new school-grading system, which for the first time last year assigned grades from *A* to *F* to every school in Florida, this perception has taken on greater importance. Graduates of low-graded high schools are likely to experience difficulty in postsecondary education even if they were in the top twenty percent.

One of the concerns about the grading system and the admissions policy is that many high schools with students from disadvantaged neighborhoods contain “magnet schools” designed to attract students from other neighborhoods, generally to achieve racial integration. The presence of 50 International Baccalaureate students in a class of 300 can mask the school’s otherwise failing programs and take up all the top-twenty slots. The Department of Education has no record of how many magnet schools-within-schools exist, but asked each high school to rank the graduates of magnet schools separately from the regular graduates for purposes of the talented twenty.

As a result of the school grading system, school districts and the Department of Education have initiated many enhancement schemes and are looking closely at ways to give extra help to low-graded schools. According to the Department of Education, “Programs of extended or enhanced instruction are already included in many low-performing schools’ improvement plans and are being implemented now. Likewise, while there are no specific statutes concerning ‘feeder-pattern’ elementary and middle schools . . . , the Department often uses feeder patterns or regional configurations to assist schools in developing and implementing improvement plans.”

Among the initiatives designed to improve the preparation of students from low-performing high schools, the Governor has requested funds to pay for each tenth grade student to take the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test. Some but not all districts and schools provide test preparation courses for their students.

It is well known that success in college can be better predicted by the types and levels of courses students take than by grades. A study by Dr. Carolyn Stone at the University of North Florida suggests that there can be large differences among schools in the percentage of students of equal ability, as measured on standardized tests, who enroll in more challenging courses. Under the Governor’s plan, school districts are encouraged to start more Advanced Placement programs and emphasize honors and dual enrollment courses. However, specific accountability measures comparing course-taking behavior in high- and low-performing high schools have not been completed.

Currently in Florida, the 79 public schools with a grade designation of *F* employ 3,495 teachers. The 592 with a designation of *D* employ 27,085 teachers. Elementary schools represent the

¹The new admissions policy has not yet been implemented because high schools have not, as of this date, identified their top ranked graduates. To be in the talented twenty percent, a student must complete 19 academic credits. Some high schools are initiating a new ranking system in which only the students who have completed the 19 credits will be on the list.

overwhelming majority of schools with *D* and *F* grades. Only 5 high schools are graded *F* and 47 *D*.

In Florida public high schools, the average ratio of guidance counselors to students is 1:447. In many districts and high schools, the ratio is 1:600 or higher. In addition to providing academic advice, guidance counselors are often responsible for test administration, data collection and reporting, discipline, school safety, and mental health counseling. Most counselor training programs are not oriented toward academic counseling.

Most graduate financial aid is tied either to financial need or merit. There are no programs specifically for students from low-performing schools.

The Minority Participation in Legal Education program provides scholarships for minority law students, and the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission has recommended funding for Law-School-Admissions-Test preparation. Neither the scholarships nor the proposed LSAT-prep courses are designated for graduates of low-performing high schools.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The legislation under consideration creates a number of initiatives designed to assist graduates of low-performing high schools to succeed in university education.

For implementing the “Talented Twenty Percent” admissions policy, the bill requires magnet programs in low-performing high schools to be separate schools. This provision will codify the current informal practice and guard against possible court challenges.

It acknowledges that low-performing high schools enroll students from low-performing middle and elementary schools and provides academic enhancement at all levels. These enhancements include longer school years and after school programs, many of which will require school districts to reallocate funds.

It requires low-performing schools to identify students whose PSAT scores indicate that they could benefit from a test-preparation program and provides for the Department of Education to conduct such a program.

It requires an annual comparison between low-performing schools and high-performing schools on key academic indicators such as gatekeeper courses, honors courses, and Advanced Placement courses.

It prohibits a low-performing high school from having more students per counselor than a high-performing school. The bill details how the comparisons must be conducted.

It provides an incentive for teachers to raise the grade of a *D* or *F* school -- a \$5,000 bonus to any teacher who was assigned to a school in the year it raises its grade.

Finally, the bill includes a number of enhancements for students from low-performing high schools when they are at a university -- including student services, test preparation courses, and fee

waivers for graduate school. Test preparation courses will be provided free for students interested in law school, if they graduated from a low-performing high school.

Each of these provisions is contingent upon funding in an appropriations act.

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:

Students from low-performing high schools and their feeder-pattern elementary and middle schools would benefit from a number of opportunities, including free tuition to graduate school if they attend within 2 years of graduation from college.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The most expensive provision in the bill is the bonus of \$5,000 for teachers at *D* and *F* schools that raise their grade. Currently in Florida, the 79 public schools with a grade designation of *F* employ 3,495 teachers. The 592 with a designation of *D* employ 27,085 teachers.

The total fiscal impact cannot be predicted because we do not know how many of these schools will raise their grades. Other “indeterminables” include:

- ▶ The number of high school graduates from low-performing schools who will be eligible to enroll in a university and receive student services.
- ▶ The number who would be eligible for test preparation courses.
- ▶ The number who would enroll in graduate school and have tuition paid.
- ▶ The number of schools that would need to employ more guidance counselors.

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.
