

# SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

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

BILL: SB 636  
 SPONSOR: Senator Pruitt  
 SUBJECT: High School Grades  
 DATE: March 7, 2001                      REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	White	O'Farrell	ED	Favorable
2.	_____	_____	AED	_____
3.	_____	_____	AP	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

**I. Summary:**

This bill changes the required ranges of percentage grades that equate to letter grades and grade points. Under the bill, the required range will be 90-100=A; 80-89=B; 70-79=C; 60-69=D; below 60=F.

This bill substantially amends the following section of the Florida Statutes: 232.2463.

**II. Present Situation:**

Section 232.2463, F.S., requires all school districts to use the same range of percentage grades that equate to letter grades and grade points. Only one other state has such a law.<sup>1</sup> The 1997 Legislature slightly altered the range for grades C and D. The grade scale history is displayed below:

	A	B	C	D	F	I
1987-1997	94-100	85-93	75-84	65-74	0-64	Incomplete
1997- present	94-100	85-93	77-84	70-76	0-69	Incomplete
SB 636	90-100	80-89	70-79	60-69	0-59	Incomplete

<sup>1</sup> According to research conducted in 1999 by the Education Commission of the States, Arkansas had a law requiring all districts to adopt the same range: 90-100=A, etc. Some other states use a standard conversion scale to assign letter grades when student transcripts include only percentages.

The Senate Education Committee conducted an interim project in 1999 (Project #00-33) and found that the 1997 change in percentages had no effect on grade distributions. Despite the law that requires an unusually high percentage to earn a good grade, most grades (53 percent) are A or B.

A literature review and survey of teachers and administrators found that:

- Many teachers do not use percentages to calculate grades. They grade tests not by counting the number of correct answers but by judging the quality of the responses. Examples include essay tests, short answer tests, or math and science tests in which a value is assigned to each step in solving a problem.
- Many teachers say that grades are subjective even with specified percentages. They arrive at the grades they believe students deserve by giving easier or harder tests. On an easy test, 80 percent might not mean good work, while on a hard test it might mean excellent work.
- When scores on standardized tests are compared with grades assigned by teachers, wide disparities are almost always found.

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

The legislation under consideration will change the grading scale of percentages to letter grades and grade points so that 90-100=A; 80-89=B; 70-79=C; 60-69=D; and 59 and below is failing.

In the past, changing the grade equivalents had no effect on statewide grade distribution or grade inflation. However, if individual teachers perceive that they are meant to give better grades, they might do so. The bill widens the range more for grade D than for other grades, so borderline students would be more likely to benefit from this perception.

### **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:**

School districts will incur the cost of informing teachers of the change in the law.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

The debate over grades has traditionally been about fairness and perception, not about academic standards. Most parties to the debate recognize that a teacher who wants to inflate grades can do so despite state requirements.

The sponsor of the 1987 bill that created the grading scale, then state-Senator Karen Thurman, was concerned about the fact that districts adopted different grading scales. Residents of Palm Beach County, which had a narrow range, believed that it was harder for their students to make good grades than for students in Broward County, which had the more traditional range of 90-100=A, etc. Fans of high school athletics complained that Broward County had an unfair advantage because it was easier for their athletes to make the required GPA to play sports.

Now, Florida residents are concerned that our public school students have more trouble getting into prestigious out-of-state colleges because our grading scale is comparatively high. They also point out that private schools do not require such high percentages for good grades.

In 2000, Governor Bush vetoed SB 990, which eliminated the state-required percentage ranges and suggested, but did not require, the ranges established in SB 636. The Governor's concern was twofold: (1) that suggesting a lower range would be perceived as lowering academic standards and (2) that districts would adopt different ranges and cause a further perception of inequity. Senate Bill 636 will not allow districts to adopt different ranges.

**VIII. Amendments:**

None.