

# 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 680  
 SPONSOR: Senator Cowin  
 SUBJECT: High School Grade Reports  
 DATE: March 7, 2001      REVISED: 03/13/2001      \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>White</u>	<u>O'Farrell</u>	<u>ED</u>	<u>Fav/1 amendment</u>
2.	_____	_____	<u>AED</u>	_____
3.	_____	_____	<u>AP</u>	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

## I. Summary:

This bill changes the way grades are reported for high school students. Under the bill's provisions:

- School districts will publish a report of academic achievement measures of high school students, including grade distributions.
- High school report cards will separate grades for academic achievement from grades for other factors, such as academic improvement.
- Several calculations of grade-point averages will be reported on the report cards issued after the first grading period of the junior year: a Bright Futures GPA, an unweighted GPA calculated only on academic courses, and the calculation using the school district's weighting system.
- School districts will not be required to weight grades the same for dual enrollment courses and Advanced Placement courses. (Deleted by Amendment #1)

This bill amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 230.23, and 232.24521. It repeals subsection (4) of section 240.1163, F.S., relating to weighting of grades in dual-enrollment and Advanced Placement courses.

## II. Present Situation:

### Grade Reports

Section 232.24521, F. S., requires report cards to separate grades on academic performance from conduct and behavior, attendance and tardiness. It does not require academic performance to be separated from academic improvement.

**Grade Weighting Issues**

Section 232.2463, F.S., authorizes school districts to exercise a weighted grading system for purposes of class ranking. In weighting schemes, an extra portion of a grade point is added to the grade point average, so that the scale is higher than 0 - 4.0. For instance, if a student earned three As and two Cs, the student's unweighted grade-point average would be 3.2. Suppose the As were all in nonacademic courses and unweighted, but the Cs were Advanced Placement courses and worth an extra full point. Then the student's weighted grade-point average would be 3.8.

The Bright Futures Scholarship Program also requires grades in more difficult courses to be assigned a weight for determining eligibility, but the weights are generally less than those assigned for class ranking.

Occasionally, a student will graduate with a B average (3.0 GPA), but not be eligible for a Bright Futures Scholarship because of the difference between the cumulative GPA calculated according to the school district's weighting system and the selective GPA calculated according to the requirements for Bright Futures eligibility. In the example above, the As in nonacademic courses would not count in the grade point average at all, because Bright Futures allows only college-preparatory courses to be counted. The Cs would receive only half an extra point as weight, because that is the maximum level established by the Department of Education. So the student's grade-point average would be only 2.5 for Bright Futures eligibility.

College admissions officers are free to ignore high school weighting systems or to emphasize some high school courses more than others.

All of these variables mean that a student could have as many as five different grade-point averages:

1. The school district weighted grade-point average.
2. The weighted grade-point average required by the Department of Education for eligibility for the Academic and Merit Scholarship components of Bright Futures. These components limit the GPA to courses designated college-preparatory.
3. The grade-point average used for the Gold Seal Vocational component of Bright Futures. This component excludes electives but may contain courses that are not designated as college-preparatory.
4. The grade-point average on vocational courses required for the Gold Seal Vocational component of Bright Futures.
5. The academic, unweighted grade-point average used by some college admissions officers.

**Grades in Dual Enrollment and Advanced Placement Courses**

In an amendment to s. 240.1163, F.S., the 1998 Legislature required school districts to assign the same weights to grades in academic dual enrollment courses and Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Dual enrollment courses generate college credit through the community college, but they do not require a standardized test. Advanced Placement courses are part of a national program and

require a student to pass a content area standardized test with a score of 3 or above to generate college credit.

In a survey conducted for a 1999 Education Committee interim project (Report #00-33), superintendents said that some academic dual enrollment courses are easier than most AP courses. They said that grade weighting is so controversial that no weighting scheme will please everybody.

Community colleges have an interest in dual enrollment because high achieving students may increase their funding under performance based budgeting. School districts have an interest in AP because they generate additional funds for each student who scores 3 or above on an AP examination.

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

#### **School Reports**

The legislation under consideration would amend s. 230.23, F.S., to require school districts to publish a report of academic achievement measures of high school students, including grade distributions. The reports must be a profile of each school and must report achievement measured by all statewide assessments, national assessments, and grades in high school courses. The grades must specify the number and percentage of students who received each letter grade in all courses and in each type of course organized by level and category.

#### **Student Report Cards**

The bill amends s. 232.24521, F.S., to require report cards to separate grades for academic achievement from grades for other factors, such as academic improvement, conduct, attitude, attendance, or tardiness. The words "academic achievement" are substituted for "academic performance." Timely completion of academic requirements and class participation may be among the measures used to assign academic grades.

If report cards use weighted grades to calculate the grade point average, they must also report the grade point average used by the Academic and Merit components of the Bright Futures Scholarship Program. This calculation is required only on the report cards issued after the first grading period of the junior year.

A separate calculation is required to report an academic grade-point average, which is the unweighted grade-point average calculated only on academic courses. The bill does not specify whether this calculation is required on every report card or only on the one after the first grading period of the junior year.

#### **Grade Weighting for Dual Enrollment and Advanced Placement**

Finally, the bill would repeal the requirement in s. 240.1163, F.S., that school districts must weight grades the same for dual enrollment courses, honors courses, and Advanced Placement courses. (Note: Amendment #1, by Education, deletes this provision. The law remains in force.)

**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 expense of calculating at least three grade point averages to report on student report cards after the first grading period of the junior year.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

In 2000, the Governor vetoed a bill (SB 990) that contained several of the provisions in this bill. However, this bill does not contain the provision primarily addressed in the veto message. Senate Bill 680 does not eliminate a requirement that all districts must use the same range of percentage grades to assign letter grades and grade points (s. 232.2463, F.S.).

**VIII. Amendments:**

#1 by Education

Deletes the repeal of subsection (4) of s. 240.1163. School districts must continue to weight grades the same for dual enrollment, advanced placement, and honors courses. (WITH TITLE AMENDMENT)