

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 985 Workplace Skills of Students

SPONSOR(S): Nelson

TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 2460, SB 2818

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR
1) Schools & Learning Council		Hassell	Cobb
2) Policy & Budget Council			
3) _____			
4) _____			
5) _____			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

HB 985 requires students entering their first year of high school in the 2008-2009 school year to earn a Florida Ready to Work Credential (credential) as requirement for graduation, if the student selects the traditional 24-credit graduation option and chooses a career or technical major area of interest.

The bill revises the student eligibility requirements of the Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars (Gold Seal) award to include the requirement that a student earn a gold level Florida Ready to Work Credential. In order to achieve a gold level credential, a student must score a minimum of 5 each of the following assessments: Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information.

The bill also requires Workforce Florida, Inc. to work together with the Department of Education to ensure consistent use of the credential.

There is no direct cost to students, job seekers, employers, schools or other partners to participate in the Florida Ready to Work Certificate Program.

The bill may result in minor savings to Educational Enhancement Trust Fund appropriations if students who otherwise would have earned a Gold Seal do not because of the new requirement to earn the credential. Gold Seal awards account for less than 1% of all Bright Futures awards.

The 2007-2008 General Appropriations Act appropriates \$17,160,000 to the Florida Ready to Work Certificate Program. (See Fiscal Comments section of this analysis)

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. HOUSE PRINCIPLES ANALYSIS:

Safeguard individual liberties – The bill safeguards individual liberties by increasing a high school student's chances for successful employment after high school by merging academics and workplace skills as a graduation requirement for students enrolled in a career or technical major area of interest.

B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Background

High School Graduation Requirements

To graduate from high school, a student must complete credits for the required courses and earn the required grade point average. In addition, to earn a high school diploma, the student must earn passing scores on the grade 10 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) or attain concordant scores on standardized tests determined by the Commissioner of Education, currently the SAT or ACT tests.

There are three options a student may select to satisfy the credit requirements:

- Traditional 24-credit option that generally may be completed in 4 years.
- Accelerated 18-credit college preparatory option that generally may be completed in 3 years.
- Accelerated 18-credit career preparatory option that generally may be completed in 3 years.

A student who selects the traditional 24-credit graduation option must earn 24 credits in high school courses, complete the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, or complete an Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) curriculum.¹ Credits must be earned through applied, integrated, and combined courses approved by the Department of Education (DOE) and must consist of 16 core curriculum credits and 8 credits in majors, minors, or electives.

A major area of interest consists of 4 credits in sequential courses in an academic content area, career and technical area, or fine and performing arts. A student selects a major area of interest as part of his or her personalized academic career plan developed in 7th or 8th grade. A student may annually change his or her major area of interest at registration. To be selected, a major area of interest must be offered at the student's high school.²

Each major area of interest offered by a high school must be submitted to by the school district for approval by the Commissioner of Education. Once approved, a major area of interest may be offered by any school district.

Florida Ready to Work Certificate Program

¹ Section 1003.428, F.S., provides for the general requirements for high school graduation.

² Section 1003.428(2)(b), F.S.

The 2006 Florida Legislature created the Florida Ready to Work Certificate Program³ to enhance the workplace skills of Florida's students to better prepare them for successful employment in specific occupations. A student who earns a Ready to Work Credential (credential) will be considered equipped with the skills to enter the workforce.⁴ Any Florida student or resident is eligible to earn the credential.

The program is administered by the Florida Department of Education, Division of Workforce Education, in cooperation with Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN) and the nationally recognized ACT® WorkKeys program. WIN provides the online WIN for WorkKeys® pre-assessment and skills training courseware, career database and other program support. ACT WorkKeys® provides the proctored assessment and career readiness certification.⁵

A credential is awarded to a student who successfully passes 3 WorkKeys assessments in Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information. Each assessment can be completed in less than 1 hour. The assessments are offered online but must be proctored and taken at a certified Florida Ready to Work testing center.⁶

Each assessment is scored on a scale from 3 to 7. The higher the score, the greater the participant's ability to perform more complex skills. The three levels of the credential are:

- Bronze – minimum score of 3 or more on all assessments
- Silver – minimum score of 4 or more on all assessments
- Gold - minimum score of 5 or more on all assessments

The credential demonstrates to current and future employers that students have the skills to meet employment expectations. Knowing a job applicant possesses a credential, an employer can be more confident that he or she can begin the job with the skills necessary for successful job performance. In addition, the credential ensures that students have the skills necessary to enter college or the workforce based on objective, standardized skill assessments which are aligned to FCAT objectives.⁷

Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars Award

The Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars award (Gold Seal) is created within the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program to recognize and reward academic achievement and career preparation by high school students who wish to continue their education.⁸ In addition to meeting the general eligibility criteria for a Bright Futures award⁹, a student must meet the following criteria to be considered for a Gold Seal award:

- Complete the secondary school portion of a sequential program of studies that requires at least three secondary school credits taken over at least 2 academic years, and is continued in a planned, related postsecondary education program.

³ Section 35, Chapter 2006-74, Laws of Florida

⁴ Section 1004.99, F.S.

⁵ <http://www.fldoe.org/readytowork/>

⁶ Id.

⁷ Id.

⁸ Section 1009.536, F.S.

⁹ Section 1009.531, F.S., provides that a student must meet the following general criteria to be considered for an award under the Bright Futures Scholarship Program: be a Florida resident; earn a Florida high school diploma, or the equivalent; enroll in an eligible Florida postsecondary education institution for at least 6 credit hours per semester; not have been found guilty of, or entered a plea of nolo contendere to, a felony charge; apply for the scholarship by high school graduation, and commence using the award within 3 years of graduation.

- Demonstrate readiness for postsecondary education by earning a passing score on the Florida College Entry Level Placement Test or its equivalent as identified by the DOE.
- Achieve a 3.0 weighted GPA on all subjects required for graduation, excluding elective courses.
- Achieve a 3.5 unweighted GPA in a minimum of three sequential secondary school career technical education credits in one vocational program.

Effects of Proposed Changes

The bill requires a student to earn a Ready to Work Credential (credential) as requirement for graduation, if the student selects the traditional 24-credit graduation option and chooses a career or technical major area of interest. The bill provides that this requirement would begin with students entering their first year of high school in the 2008-2009 school year. Therefore, students that are currently in a career or technical major area of interest would not be required to earn a credential as a requirement for high school graduation.

The bill revises the student eligibility requirements of the Gold Seal award to include the requirement that a student earn a gold level credential. In order to achieve a gold level credential, a student must score a minimum of 5 each of the following assessments: Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information.

The bill also requires Workforce Florida, Inc. to work together with the Department of Education to ensure consistent use of the credential.

C. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Amends s. 1003.428, F.S., requiring a Florida Ready to Work Credential for high school graduation with a career or technical major area of interest.

Section 2. Amends s. 1009.536, F.S., requiring a student to earn the credential for receipt of a Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars award.

Section 3. Amends 445.004, F.S., requiring Workforce Florida, Inc., and the DOE to ensure consistent use of the credential.

Section 4. Provides an effective date.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

The bill does not appear to have a fiscal impact on state government revenues.

2. Expenditures:

The bill does not appear to have a fiscal impact on state government expenditures.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

The bill does not appear to have a fiscal impact on local government revenues.

2. Expenditures:

The bill does not appear to have a fiscal impact on local government expenditures.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

There does not appear to be a direct economic impact on the private sector.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

The Ready to Work Certificate Program is funded by the Legislature. There is no direct cost to students, job seekers, employers, schools or other partners to participate in the program. The 2007-2008 General Appropriations Act appropriates \$17,160,000 to the Florida Ready to Work Certificate Program.¹⁰

The bill may result in minor savings to Educational Enhancement Trust Fund appropriations if students who otherwise would have earned a Gold Seal do not b/c of the new requirement to earn the Ready to Work credential. Gold Seal awards account for less than 1% of all Bright Futures awards.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

The bill does not appear to require a city or county to expend funds or take any action requiring the expenditure of funds. The bill does not appear to reduce the authority that municipalities or counties have to raise revenues in the aggregate. The bill does not appear to reduce the percentage of state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

¹⁰ 2007-2008 General Appropriations Act, Specific Appropriation 127 and Section 17. Conference Report for House Bill 7009, Specific Appropriation 65, passed March 12, 2008.

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

- 1) The bill references a “gold-level Ready to Work Credential as created under s. 1004.99.” However, the term “gold level” is not referenced in s. 1004.99, F.S. or in DOE rule.
- 2) As currently drafted, the change to Gold Seal eligibility requirements takes effect July 1, 2008, and would impact current high school students. The bill could be amended to require the Ready to Work Credential of students entering high school for the first time in 2008-09 or later, as is done on lines 35-36 re: high school graduation requirements.

The sponsor of the bill is expected to file an amendment to address these drafting issues.

D. STATEMENT OF THE SPONSOR

HB 985 incorporates important workplace skills components into the traditional 24-credit high school graduation option, in which a student chooses a career or technical major area of interest, through the use of the Ready to Work assessment. Additionally, the bill would establish a minimum credential of the Ready to Work program as a condition to receive the Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars award. This legislation is intended to increase high school students’ chances for successful employment after high school.

IV. AMENDMENTS/COUNCIL SUBSTITUTE CHANGES