

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 990

SPONSOR: Education Committee

SUBJECT: High School Grading Policy

DATE: November 3, 1999

REVISED: 2/8/00 _____

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

I. Summary:

This bill requires school districts to publish a report of academic achievement measures of high school students, including grade distributions. It requires high school report cards to separate grades for academic achievement from grades for other factors. It repeals a requirement that school districts must weigh grades the same for dual enrollment courses and Advanced Placement courses. School districts may use their own judgment in weighing grades for class ranking purposes, but they must calculate and report separately the grade point average that will determine eligibility for the Bright Futures Scholarship Program. The bill authorizes high school teachers to vary the interpretation of percentage grades according to the difficulty of material tested and authorizes school districts to abandon the required grading scale of percentage equivalents to letter grades.

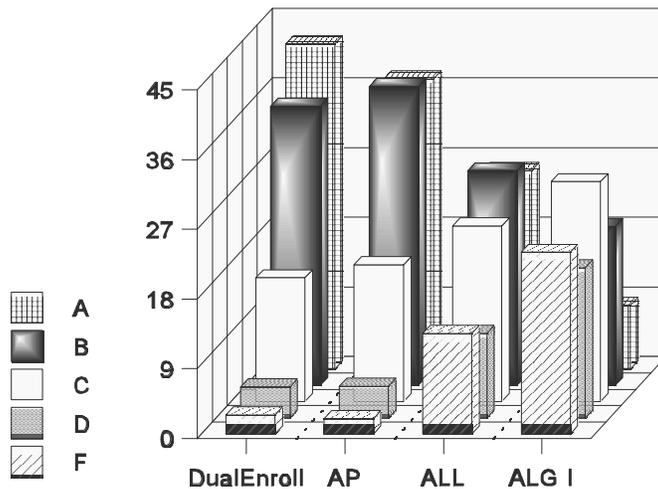
This bill amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 230.23, 232.24521, and 232.2463. It repeals subsection (4) of section 240.1163, F.S.

II. Present Situation:

A 1999 Senate Education Committee interim project on high school grading policy, Project # 00-33, found evidence for both grade inflation and deflation. Students in advanced classes such as dual enrollment, honors, or Advanced Placement (AP), mostly earn *As* and *Bs*, while students in lower level courses, such as algebra I, mostly earn *Ds* and *Fs*.

Statewide, 53 percent of all grades are *A* and *B*, and 24 percent are *D* and *F*. But in dual enrollment courses, over 40 percent of the grades are *As*, while in algebra I, only 8 percent of grades are *As*. The following graph displays the contrast for unweighted grades earned in 1997-1998:

Course/Grade Distribution



A literature review conducted for the project found that:

- Many teachers say they adjust academic grades to reflect other factors, especially improvement, conduct, effort, attendance, and tardiness.
- A comparison of class grades with standardized tests indicated that some students with grades of *A* earn low scores on the tests, and some students with grades of *F* earn high scores. Students in affluent schools who have *C* grades in class earn about the same score on standardized tests as students in high-poverty schools who have school grades of *A*.
- Many teachers say that percentage grades are arbitrary because they can make the grades come out as they wish by adjusting the difficulty of the material tested. Eighty percent correct answers on a test of difficult material is better than 80 percent on a test of easy material.

Section 232.24521, F. S., requires report cards to separate grades on academic performance from conduct and behavior, attendance and tardiness. It prohibits exemptions from academic performance requirements “based on practices or policies designed to encourage attendance.” Despite this prohibition, some high schools continue to exempt students from required tests if they have perfect attendance and a certain grade. The reasoning supplied is that, if attendance is not the only requirement for the exemption, the policy is not designed to encourage attendance.

In 1987, the Legislature established a statewide grading scale for all public high schools (s. 232.2463, F.S.). The 1997 Legislature amended the scale slightly. On a survey questionnaire, school superintendents said that the change required training of teachers and reprogramming of computers, although the statewide grade distribution did not markedly change. The scale of percentage grades to letter grades is:

	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	0-64	Incomplete
Other states	90-100	80-89	70-79	60-69	0-59	Incomplete

Section 232.2463, F.S., authorizes school districts to exercise a weighted grading system for purposes of class ranking. The Bright Futures Scholarship Program also requires grades in more difficult courses to be assigned a weight for determining eligibility. 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. College admissions officers are free to consider some high school courses as more significant than others and to assign a different weighting scheme.

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. Although over 75 percent of students earned grades of *A* or *B* in AP courses, only 53 percent passed the AP test with a score of 3 or higher (1997-1998). Unweighted grades in dual enrollment courses generally are higher than in AP courses: In 1997-1998, 41.7 percent of dual enrollment grades were *As*, compared to 37.5 percent of AP course grades of *A*.

School districts may add additional weights to student grades. 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 because the school district’s weights differ from those of the Bright Futures Program.

In a survey conducted for the committee’s interim project, many superintendents said that some academic dual enrollment courses are easier than most AP courses, but they did not ask that the law be changed. They said that grade weighting is controversial, that no weighting scheme will please everybody, and that they would prefer that the Legislature make the decision for them.

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:

Reporting Requirements

School Profiles

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 Bright Futures Scholarship Program and must disclose to students and their parents how the calculations differ.

Exemptions from Academic Performance Requirements

In an amendment to s. 232.24521, F.S., the prohibition against using exemptions from academic performance to encourage attendance is clarified. Exemptions will not be allowed based “in whole or in part” on policies designed to encourage attendance.

Percentage Grade Equivalents

The bill would amend s. 232.2463, F.S., to authorize high school teachers to vary the interpretation of percentage grades according to the difficulty of material tested, as in “curving the grades.” This authorization reflects the common knowledge that the same percent of correct answers is not the same on an easy test as on a hard test. The bill also authorizes school districts to abandon the required grading scale of percentage equivalents to letter grades. Instead, districts are expected to use letter grades or grade points instead of percentages. Percentage equivalents will be used only when student transcripts do not supply letter grades; in that case, the recommended scale is that used by other states.

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 weigh grades the same for dual enrollment courses and Advanced Placement 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:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

School districts may incur the expense of changing their report card formats to include two separate calculations of student grade point averages. This expense may be offset if the separate calculation makes it easier for the Office of Student Financial Assistance to determine eligibility for the Bright Futures Scholarship Program.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:**#1 by Education:**

Requires student report cards to include the grade point average in courses included for eligibility for a Bright Futures Scholarship, as well as to use the grade weighting system required for that program.

#2 by Education:

Delays until July 1, 2001, the requirement that school districts must report a separate grade point average that indicates eligibility for a Bright Futures Scholarship.