

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 2188

SPONSOR: Senator Holzendorf

SUBJECT: Education Investment Act

DATE: April 4, 2001 REVISED: _____

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

I. Summary:

Senate Bill 2188 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.

This bill creates nine undesignated sections of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

In February 2000, the Board of Regents adopted amendments to the rule on freshman admission to the State University System, incorporating Governor Jeb Bush’s One Florida Initiative known as the Equity in Education Plan. One component of that plan is the “Talented Twenty Percent” program, which, for the top ranked graduates of every public high school in Florida, guarantees

admission to one of the 10 public universities. Under the previous method, admissions officers considered test scores and the types of courses taken as well as high school grades.

After the first year of implementation, the new policies have not affected the diversity of the freshman class. Almost all of the Talented Twenty would have been eligible for admission without that designation.¹ Of the 22,519 Talented Twenty students who graduated from Florida public high schools in 2000, nearly 52 percent (11,650) enrolled in a state university during Summer and Fall terms of 2000. Of those, 13.56 percent (1,580 students) were African-American and 13.26 percent (1,545 students) were Hispanic students. By comparison, about 19,000 Florida residents who were not in the Talented Twenty were admitted to the freshman class in 2000. Of those, more than 16 percent (3,127 students) were African-American and nearly 16 percent (3,019 students) were Hispanic.²

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 last 2 years 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 of their graduating class.

For instance, all Talented Twenty students at Miami's Palmetto High School had a weighted GPA of at least 4.48, but at Miami's Edison High School, some Talented Twenty students had a GPA of only 2.6. In Pasco County, all Talented Twenty students at Ridgewood High School had a GPA of 3.65 or better, while some Talented Twenty students at Zephyrhills High School had a GPA of 2.77.³

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."

¹ According to a computer calculation of the test scores and GPA conducted by the *St. Petersburg Times*, of the 22,519 Talented Twenty students, only 145 or 0.6 percent had grades and scores below the previous freshman admissions requirements.

² Data provided by staff of the Florida Board of Regents

³ Barry Klein and Stephen Hegarty, *College Program Has Little Impact*, *St. Petersburg Times*, September 3, 2000.

It is well known that success in college can be better predicted by the student's selection of courses than by grades or test scores. 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.

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 student financial assistance 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.

The bill requires the Department of Education to identify low performing schools and to include schools at risk of falling beneath a grade of *C* in the definition. A feeder-pattern school is one whose students predominantly enroll in low-performing high schools. It suggests a number of improvements to low-performing high schools and their feeder-pattern middle and elementary schools, including:

- A longer school day
- A longer school year.
- Consultants or mentors to assist teachers or improve curriculum.
- Additional teachers.
- Electronic access through the web-based FACTS system.
- After-school programs.

The Department of Education will evaluate the program and assure accountability for any funds provided. As an example, a teacher in a core subject should have responsibility for no more than 150 students per day.

In addition, under the bill:

- Annually the department will report the number of programs implemented with funds provided, the types of assistance provided, and the results of the productivity and accountability measures established.
- Low-performing schools will identify students whose Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT) scores indicate that they could benefit from a test-preparation program, and the Department of Education will conduct the program. As of this date, April 4, 2001, Specific Appropriation 112 of the Senate's proposed budget allocates \$1.6 million to pay for 10th-grade students to take the PSAT.
- Annually the department will compare low-performing schools and high-performing schools on key academic indicators such as gatekeeper courses, honors courses, and Advanced Placement courses.
 - A low-performing high school may not have more students per counselor than a high-performing school.
 - The bill details how the comparisons will be conducted.
- A number of enhancements are provided for students from low-performing high schools when they are at a university – including:
 - Student services
 - Test preparation courses
 - Fee waivers if they attend 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. The 2001 Senate's proposed budget contains appropriations for many of them, except law-school-assessment-test preparation courses and fee waivers for graduate students who came from low-performing high schools. School grades have been known for only 2 years, so it will be another 3 years before the first graduates from low-performing high schools will be ready for graduate school.

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 total fiscal impact will depend on variables such as:

- < 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 will be eligible for test preparation courses.
- < The number who will enroll in graduate school and have tuition paid.
- < The number of schools that will need to employ more guidance counselors.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.