

Florida Legislative Updates: Impact on High School Learners (2025)

Advanced Placement (AP) Courses: Funding Secured

AP Course Funding: Advocacy Leads to Continued Support

During the recent legislative session, there were proposals to significantly alter the funding model for Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Cambridge AICE courses, which initially raised concerns about potential cuts to these valuable programs. These changes sparked considerable advocacy from students, parents, educators, and community members who highlighted the importance of these courses for college readiness and cost savings for families.

Thanks to this widespread advocacy, the Legislature ultimately agreed to maintain full funding for AP, IB, and AICE programs in the state budget. **While the funding mechanism has shifted from a per-student "add-on weight" to a new "Academic Acceleration Options Supplement" categorical grant**, the crucial aspect is that the total dollars sent to school districts for these programs remain at previous levels. This ensures that high schools can continue to offer a wide array of advanced courses, support qualified teachers, and cover associated costs, allowing students to pursue rigorous academic pathways and earn college credits while in high school for the upcoming school year.

1. HB 447 - Disability History and Awareness Instruction ("Evin B. Hartsell Act")

New Law: Disability History and Awareness Instruction

Florida has enacted HB 447, the "Evin B. Hartsell Act," which mandates instruction on disability history and awareness for all students, from elementary through high school. This curriculum will be taught annually during the first two weeks of October, aiming to promote understanding and empathy regarding individuals with diverse abilities.

2. HB 1607 - Cardiac Emergencies

Enhanced Cardiac Emergency Preparedness in Schools

With the signing of HB 1607, Florida secondary schools are now required to offer basic first-aid training, including CPR and AED (Automated External Defibrillator) use. Additionally, public schools must have AEDs on school grounds and implement plans for responding to sudden cardiac arrest. These provisions aim to improve student safety and preparedness for medical emergencies.

3. SB 248 - Student Participation in Interscholastic Sports

Expanded Opportunities for Student Participation in Sports

SB 248, now law, broadens access to interscholastic sports for Florida students. Homeschooled students can now participate in athletic teams at public schools in their district, and private school students can join public or private school teams if their sport is unavailable at their own school. This aims to increase athletic opportunities for a wider range of students.

4. SB 296 - Middle School and High School Start Times

Flexibility in School Start Times Restored

With the signing of SB 296, earlier mandates regarding middle and high school start times have been repealed. Local school districts and boards will now have the autonomy to establish their own school start times, allowing for schedules that can be tailored to local needs and student well-being.

5. HB 443 - Charter Schools (Focus on Student Conduct)

Charter School Updates: Student Conduct and Operational Flexibility

HB 443, now law, allows charter schools to adopt their own codes of student conduct and provides them with increased flexibility in administrative operations. These provisions are intended to support the efficient management of charter schools while maintaining focus on student well-being and parental rights.

6. HB 969 - Student Mental Health

Evaluation of Student Mental Health Services

HB 969, now law, mandates that the state evaluate the mental health services school districts provide to students. This step is designed to assess and enhance the support systems available for student mental well-being across Florida schools, with an initial report due by the end of the year.

7. SB 958 - Diabetes Detection

Increased Education on Type 1 Diabetes

SB 958, now signed into law, directs the Florida Department of Health to work with school districts and charter schools to provide educational resources to families regarding Type 1 diabetes. This measure seeks to enhance awareness and support for students managing diabetes in school environments.

8. SB 1514 - Anaphylaxis Preparedness

Strengthened Anaphylaxis Preparedness in Schools

SB 1514, now law, introduces new requirements for schools regarding severe allergic reactions. Schools must now provide training to teachers and staff on responding to anaphylaxis and implement specific action plans. This aims to improve the safety protocols for students with allergies.

9. SB 166 - Lowered Graduation Standards & Academic Efficiency

Updates to High School Graduation Requirements

With the enactment of SB 166, Florida's high school graduation requirements have been adjusted. The bill removes the requirement for students to pass specific Algebra I and 10th-grade English Language Arts assessments for a standard diploma. It also reinforces intensive reading and math interventions and places a continued focus on career and technical education pathways to support diverse student achievements.

10. HB 1105: Significant Changes Across Florida's High School System

House Bill 1105, recently signed into law, stands out as a highly comprehensive piece of legislation that introduces a multitude of changes impacting high school students and the broader educational environment in Florida. Often referred to as an "omnibus" bill due to the breadth of its provisions, it addresses everything from academic pathways to student well-being. Key components of this extensive bill include:

*** Academic Flexibility and Pathways:**

* Marching Band Credit: Students completing two years of marching band can now satisfy the one-credit physical education or performing arts requirement for a standard high school diploma.

* New Course Development: The Department of Education is tasked with developing new applied, equivalent, and integrated courses, and incorporating work-based internships into graduation planning, offering diverse routes to a diploma.

* Florida Seal of Fine Arts: Eligibility for this recognition is expanded to include Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) arts courses.

*** Bright Futures Scholarship Expansion:**

* AP Capstone Diploma for FAS: For students graduating in the 2025-2026 school year and beyond, earning an AP Capstone designation from the College Board will now count toward eligibility for the Florida Academic Scholars (FAS) award within the Bright Futures Scholarship Program.

* Out-of-State Graduates: Eligibility for Bright Futures is also expanded to include students who earn a high school diploma from a non-Florida school if their parent or guardian recently retired from military or public service within 12 months prior to the student's graduation.

*** Student Device Policies:**

* High School Instructional Time: Prohibits cell phone use for high school students during instructional time, unless authorized by a teacher, with designated storage areas and board-adopted usage zones.

* Pilot Program: Creates a pilot program in six counties to study the impact of full-day cell phone restrictions in high schools.

*** Support for Students with Disabilities:**

* Workforce Credential Program: Establishes a Department of Education-led credentialing program for students with autism or cognitive disabilities by January 1, 2026, aimed at helping them demonstrate job readiness through employer-recognized credentials.

*** Career and Dual Enrollment Access:**

* Dual Enrollment Logistics: Requires dual enrollment agreements to specify transportation options and address scheduling changes, aiming to increase access to career dual enrollment opportunities.