

2020 Legislative Summary

The 2020 Legislative Session began with a number of bills that would have affected private schools, but in the final days only a few education bills actually passed. The ones that did pass have not reached the Governor's desk as of April 15, and when they do reach his desk, he will have to sign the bills to make them official. With the Covid-19 Crisis we will have to wait to see what the Governor does with his pen.

I. The Gardiner Scholarship

The budget includes an increase of \$42 million to fund the waiting list for the Gardiner Scholarship.

II. Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK)

VPK funding was increased in the budget by \$49 per student for the regular school year and a \$42 per student increase for summer program. Thus, the per student funding will increase to \$2,486 for the 2020-2021 school year program and \$2,122 for the summer program.

III. Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship Program and Family Empowerment Scholarships (FES)

(Taken from The House of Representatives 2020 Session Summary)

HB 7067 expands access to the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program (FES), and revises the priority of awards under the FES and Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program (FTC). Specifically, the bill:

- increases the FES enrollment cap from 0.25 percent to 1 percent of the state's total public school enrollment,
- increases the FES income eligibility by 25 percent of the maximum federal poverty level after a year in which more than 5 percent of the annual increase in available scholarships are not awarded,
- allows a student who can no longer receive a FTC scholarship award due to lack of available scholarships to transfer to the FES and receive priority of award after FES renewal scholarships,
- requires scholarship-funding organizations (SFOs), *such as Step Up for Students and AAA*, to give priority to FTC renewal students and to exhaust all funds for renewal of scholarships before awarding initial scholarships,

- requires SFOs to refer FTC eligible students to another SFO if funds are not available to award a scholarship to the student, and
- requires the exhaustion of FTC funds before Hope Scholarship Program funds in excess of the 5 percent carry forward may be used to award initial FTC scholarships.

IV. Protection for Florida Student Athletes from Heat Strokes

(Taken from The House of Representatives 2020 Session Summary)

HB 7011 requires the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) to revise its safety policies for preventing and responding to heat stroke in student athletes and specifies that these requirements apply year round. The changes include:

- Requiring schools to monitor heat stress and modify athletic activities based on heat stress guidelines
- Identifying heat stress levels at which a cooling zone must be made available for athletic activities
- Establishing requirements for implementing cooling zones, including the presence of individuals with training on rapid cooling at athletic activities
- Requiring student athletes to pass the annual medical evaluation each year before engaging in any athletic activities year round.

Beginning June 1, 2021, the bill requires an employee or volunteer with current cardiopulmonary resuscitation and automated external defibrillator (AED) training to be present at any athletic activity. All employees or volunteers who are reasonably expected to use an AED must complete the training and be notified annually of the location of each AED on school grounds, which must be available in a clearly marked and publicized location for each athletic activity.

The bill is entitled the “**Zachary Martin Act**” after Zachary Martin, a Lee County high school football player who suffered fatal heat stroke after an outdoor practice the morning of June 29, 2017.

V. Dual Enrollment

Unfortunately, **SB 1246** by Senator Stargel and **HB 187** by Rep. Zika, which were filed this Session to address the dual enrollment issue for private school students, died in Committee or on the Calendar. The bills were heard in several Committees of reference, but, like many bills this Session, they failed to make it over the finish line.

VI. Bright Futures Scholarships

SB 72 made some changes in higher education. The change made to the Bright Futures Medallion Scholar Award provides students who enter a Florida State College in the fall semester of 2021 a full 100% scholarship for tuition and fees to earn an associate degree. Previously, the award was for 75% of tuition and fees regardless of where the student attended. This change encourages students to attend a state college for the first two years.