



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
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FLORIDA:

THE MILITARY-FRIENDLY STATE

A Report from Commissioner of Education Richard Corcoran



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“ **Without education,** he lives within the narrow, dark and grimy walls of ignorance.

Education on the other hand, means emancipation. It means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man into the glorious light of truth, the light by which men can only be made free. To deny education to any people is one of the greatest crimes against human nature.

It is easy to deny them the means of freedom and the rightful pursuit of happiness and to defeat the very end of their being.”

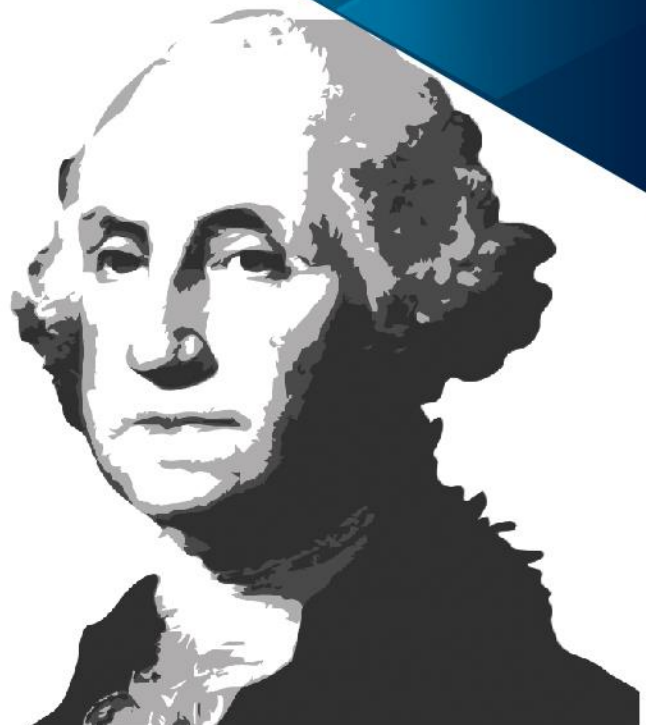
FREDERICK DOUGLASS

*A Great American
Historical Thinker*

“ **...Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness...**to the security of a free constitution it contributes in various ways: by convincing those, who are entrusted with the public administration, that every valuable end of government is best answered by the enlightened confidence of the people; and by teaching the people themselves to know and value their own rights; to discern and provide against invasions of them; to distinguish between oppression and the necessary exercise of lawful authority...to discriminate the spirit of liberty from that of licentiousness...”

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*Founding Father & First President
of the United States*





LETTER

FROM COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION RICHARD CORCORAN

The *White Paper on Support of Military Families Initiative* (White Paper) recently released by the United States Air Force (USAF) is intended to determine the local and state support of military families across all 50 states in terms of the education provided to families and the degree of each state’s licensure reciprocity. The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) understands how difficult of an endeavor it is to compare across all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Despite its laudable intentions, the White Paper fails to accurately reflect the situation on the ground in Florida while ignoring the vast array of educational opportunities and other supports and resources that Florida provides and offers to military members and their families. Florida is so unique and ahead of the curve when it comes to catering to the needs of families – including military members and their families. Due to this, it’s impossible to make accurate and meaningful “apples to apples” comparisons with other states. These comparisons are impossible because Florida accomplishes what other states dream of accomplishing. Other states cannot compete with the educational opportunities Florida provides for families because they simply do not offer high-quality educational choices for families, due to a lack of will, leadership and/or ability to step up to the plate and do what is right for families. The purpose of this document is to provide the USAF with a more accurate and specific document that describes all of the ways in which military families are prioritized by FDOE.

Florida has been at the epicenter of the education revolution launched by Governor Jeb Bush in 1998. Since then, our education system has rapidly increased student achievement and closed achievement gaps as we have improved our ability to educate an informed and competent workforce. More than twenty years later, Floridians have elected Governor Ron DeSantis – the first true education governor since Governor Bush – and he has taken bold steps to make Florida #1 across the board.

Over the past five legislative sessions, the Florida Legislature have passed the most massive educational reform packages Florida has ever seen – all to the benefit of teachers, parents and students alike. These far-reaching, evidence-based reforms help ensure that every student is provided an opportunity to receive a world-class education regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status or zip code.

Military families dream of providing a better life for their children while in the service of their nation. Governor DeSantis’ bold vision to improve Florida’s education system will help turn those dreams into a reality. The governor’s steadfast commitment to rigor, high expectations and strong accountability demand that Florida be recognized as the “EDUCATION STATE.”

Florida is routinely recognized as a national leader for accommodating military families. Our [State Council on Interstate Educational Opportunity for Military Children](#) provides advice and recommendations regarding the state’s participation in and compliance with the compact and the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children activities.

Enclosed, you will find the State of Florida’s [2021 Florida Military-Friendly Guide](#) as well as supplemental information that the USAF may consider in a similar manner in which they measure licensure portability components. You will see the numerous military-friendly initiatives, programs, resources, accommodations and services that are provided to our military families to help make transition to Florida as seamless and easy as possible.



Additionally, I would like to personally invite leadership within the United States Air Force to come to Florida to see the totality of our commitment to active duty members of the Armed Forces, veterans and their families. We are fully confident that a comprehensive review of the resources, services, accommodations and opportunities provided to military families in Florida far exceeds other states' wildest dreams. We would also be happy to coordinate a visit with any members of Florida's Congressional Delegation – including Senator Rubio and Senator Scott, who are some of the most influential and ardent supporters of military families in the nation.

Sincerely,

Richard M. Corcoran
Commissioner, Florida Department of Education





FLORIDA STAKEHOLDER PHONE CALL WITH UNITED STATES AIR FORCE SEPTEMBER 15, 2020:

Florida is grateful that USAF staff and researchers indicated a willingness to consider revisions to the methodology and measures used in the Educational Analytic Framework. The FDOE expressed concerns about the Stanford Educational Data Archive (SEDA) that may impact Florida’s performance on the learning rates metric. In addition, Commissioner Corcoran, Bay County Superintendent of Schools, Bill Husfelt, and FDOE staff identified a number of potential options for the USAF to consider data that are already available and could be used in addition to or in lieu of measures currently included.

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA):

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(ii), as amended by ESSA, requires that state report cards disaggregate student achievement information on academic assessments (mathematics, reading/language arts and science), including information about students with a parent who is a member of the Armed Forces on active duty. Florida’s annual report cards include this disaggregation for accountability measures such as achievement data at each level of achievement, proficiency, learning gains and graduation rates.

STANFORD EDUCATIONAL DATA ARCHIVE CONCERNS:

- Academic Performance:
 - Graduation rates (United States Department of Education [USED] – EDFacts); and
 - “average learning rate” (Stanford Educational Data Archive which uses National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP] data).
- School Climate (USED – Office for Civil Rights):
 - Chronic absenteeism rates; and
 - Suspension rates.
- Service Offerings (USED – Office for Civil Rights):
 - Free/Universal Pre-K availability;
 - Student to Counselor Ratio;
 - Student to Mental Health Support Ratio;
 - Student to Nurse Ratio; and
 - Student to Teacher Ratio.

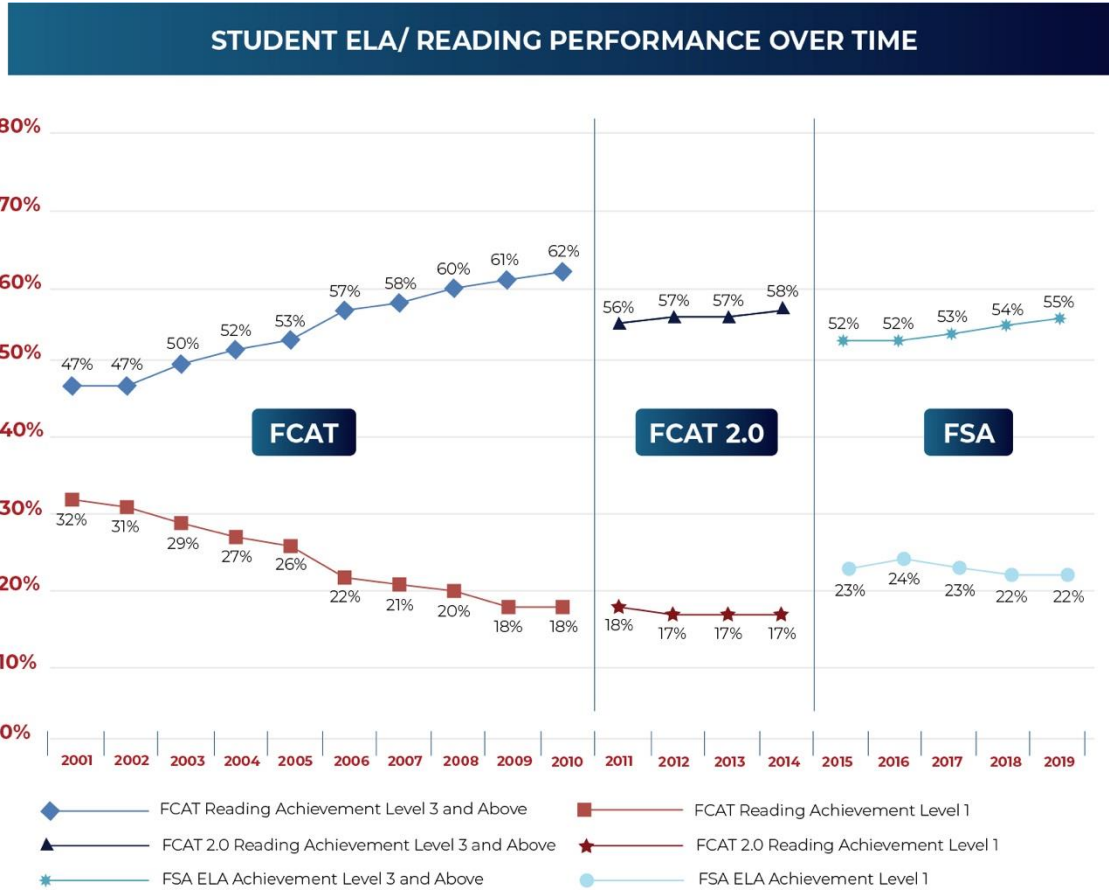
The “average learning rate” academic performance measure used in the study is based on Dr. Sean Reardon’s (Stanford) attempt to normalize different state assessment data across the country in order to compare districts. Thus, the scores used are derived scores based on his model, not actual test scores.

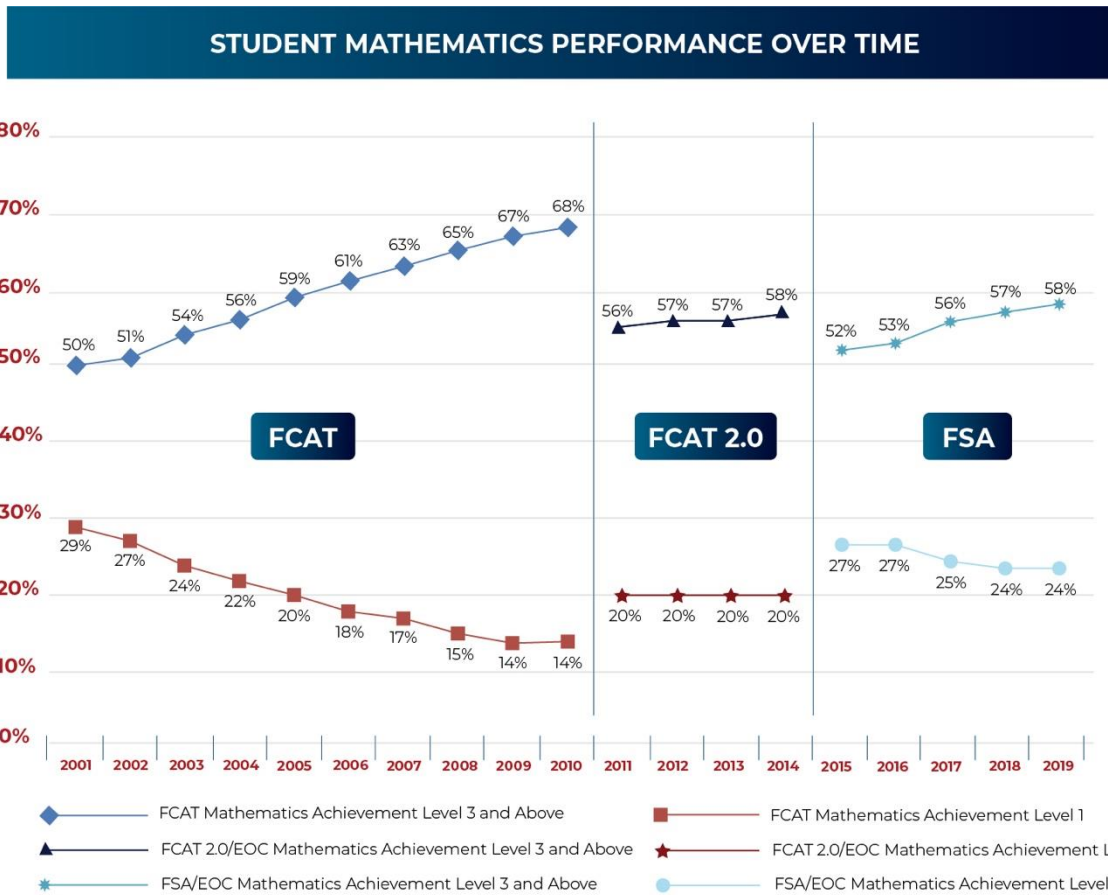
It’s a very sophisticated [analysis](#), designed to compare performance across the country at the district level when no such universal assessments exist. However, Florida is concerned that there are at least some factors that the study does not take into account that significantly adversely impact Florida’s performance on this measure, distorting the picture and making "apples to apples" comparisons with other states problematic.

For instance, the Stanford data is based on state assessment data from 2008-2009 to 2015-2016 in grades 3-8. During that time period, **Florida increased the rigor of its state standards, and its assessments, twice:**

- Transition from FCAT to FCAT 2.0 (2009-2010 to 2010-2011); and
- Transition from FCAT 2.0 to Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) (2013-2014 to 2014-2015).

These changes, and the standard setting processes that establish new cut scores for achievement levels, are accompanied by a temporary dip in performance as teachers and students adjust to the new standards and associated higher expectations.





These transitions, while good for students by increasing the rigor of the standards they are taught and the quality of the education they received, likely depress Florida’s performance on this measure.

OTHER NATIONAL DATA:

Florida ranks very highly on a number of high profile national indices. The low performance on the academic performance measures used in the educational analytic framework does not triangulate with this information.

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (NAEP):

Regarding the 2017 NAEP results, Florida was highlighted by [U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos](#) as the only state to make progress stating in the national press release, “One bright spot in today’s report is Florida, where Sunshine State students are bucking the national trend, showing significant improvement in 4th and 8th grade mathematics and in 8th grade reading. Both low and high performers in Florida demonstrated that improvement, again bucking the national trend and narrowing the achievement gap.

Florida leaders, administrators, and, most importantly, teachers are to be commended for their continued efforts on behalf of students. Florida has been at the forefront of bold, comprehensive education reform for



decades. From accountability, to literacy, to teacher certification and recognition, to providing parents more freedom to select the learning environment that best fits their students' needs, Florida is rethinking education.

Florida's results show what is possible when we focus on individual students."

**“FLORIDA IS
RETHINKING
EDUCATION.”**

BETSY DEVOS, U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

In 2017, Florida was the only state in the nation that year to significantly improve on three of the four NAEP assessments (4th grade Mathematics, 8th grade Reading, and 8th grade Mathematics). Florida's NAEP results in 2017 are provided in the following reports:

- NAEP Data Sources:
 - [2017 Grade 4 Reading](#)
 - [2017 Grade 4 Mathematics](#)
 - [2017 Grade 8 Reading](#)
 - [2017 Grade 8 Mathematics](#)

NAEP is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment that highlights what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. Results on 4th grade reading and mathematics show that Florida students are not only unquestionably succeeding, but thriving.

In terms of reading, our students ranked #5 nationally in 2017 (currently #6), but the performance of our subgroups has been phenomenal. When compared to their national counterparts, our 4th grade students perform exceptionally well.



GRADE 4 READING – FLORIDA’S RANK

SUBGROUP	2019		
	AVERAGE SCALE SCORE	AT OR ABOVE BASIC	AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT
All Students	6	7	11
White	9	8	13
Hispanic	1	1	1
Black	4	5	5
NSLP	1	1	1
SD	2	2	3
ELL	23	28	38

Florida’s Hispanic students, African American students, students with disabilities and students who qualify for free and reduced lunch – groups that have historically struggled in terms of student achievement and success – now rank #1 among the 50 states in NAEP Grade 4 Mathematics.

GRADE 4 MATHEMATICS – FLORIDA’S RANK

SUBGROUP	2019		
	AVERAGE SCALE SCORE	AT OR ABOVE BASIC	AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT
All Students	4	1	6
White	5	3	5
Hispanic	2	2	1
Black	2	1	4
NSLP	1	1	1
SD	1	1	1
ELL	9	8	13



Florida has also achieved an outstanding return on its educational investment in our students and classrooms. Simply put, we do not waste our precious tax dollars – we get more “bang for our buck.” We maximize the utilization of our tax dollars to the benefit of our students and families alike who would be otherwise saddled with having to pay higher taxes.

Due to our efforts, Florida ranked in the top 5 in the nation for return on investment when comparing the state’s 2017 NAEP results to funding. These results are truly a testament to the innovative education system we have developed over time that focuses on the individual needs of our students and our dedicated teachers in the classroom.

More recent NAEP data from 2019 show that Florida continues to be a national leader, ranking first and second in a number of areas, including subgroup achievement (Black, Hispanic, students with disabilities, and eligible for free/reduced lunch) and gap closures (students with/without disabilities).

FLORIDA CURRENTLY RANKS 7st AMONG 50 STATES IN THE FOLLOWING

- In reading, Florida’s grade 4 students eligible for free/reduced lunch have the highest average scale score.
- For the third consecutive NAEP administration, the achievement gap for Florida’s grade 8 students with and without disabilities is the narrowest in the nation in reading. Florida has ranked #1 for this measure since 2015.
- Florida has the highest percentage of grade 4 students scoring at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics.
- Florida’s grade 4 students with disabilities and students eligible for free/reduced lunch continue to have the highest average scale score in mathematics. Florida has ranked #1 for these measures since 2017.
- In reading, Florida’s grade 4 Hispanic students have the highest average scale score for the fourth consecutive NAEP administration. Florida has ranked #1 for this measure since 2013.
- For the fourth consecutive NAEP administration, the achievement gaps for Florida’s grade 4 and 8 students with and without disabilities are the narrowest in the nation in mathematics. Florida has ranked #1 for these measures since 2013.



FLORIDA CURRENTLY RANKS **2nd AMONG 50 STATES IN THE FOLLOWING**

- ✓ In reading, Florida’s grade 4 and 8 students with disabilities have the second highest average scale score.
- ✓ The achievement gap for Florida’s grade 4 students with and without disabilities is the second narrowest in the nation in reading.
- ✓ In Grade 4 Mathematics, the average scale scores for Florida’s Black and Hispanic students rank #2 in the nation.

Florida has narrowed achievement gaps between subgroups, such as White and non-White students and students with and without disabilities, and performs higher than the national public on many key measures.

- **Florida Subgroup Performance and National Comparisons:**
 - The average scale scores of Florida’s Hispanic students and students with disabilities are ranked in the top 5 across all grades and subjects.
 - **2019 Grade 4 Reading:**
 - All of Florida’s subgroups significantly outperformed their national peers in Grade 4 Reading (average scale scores significantly higher than the National Public).
 - Most of Florida’s student subgroups earned average scale scores that rank in the top 10 in Grade 4 Reading (White, Black, Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander students; students eligible for free/reduced lunch; and students with disabilities).
 - Compared to 2003, Florida’s Grade 4 Reading achievement gaps have narrowed significantly for the following subgroups: the White-Black gap by 9 scale score points; the White-Hispanic gap by 6 scale score points; and the students with and without disabilities gap by 8 scale score points.
 - **2019 Grade 4 Mathematics:**
 - Most of Florida’s student subgroups outperformed their national peers in Grade 4 Mathematics (average scale scores significantly higher than the National Public for White, Black, and Hispanic students; students eligible for free/reduced lunch; students with disabilities; and English language learners).
 - For the second consecutive NAEP administration, all of Florida’s student subgroups earned average scale scores that rank in the top 10 in Grade 4 Mathematics.
 - Compared to 2003, Florida’s Grade 4 Mathematics achievement gaps have narrowed significantly for the following subgroups: the White-Black gap by 7 scale score points and students eligible and not eligible for free/reduced price lunch by 6 scale score points.



- **2019 Grade 8 Reading:**
 - In Grade 8 Reading, average scale scores for Florida’s Black students have ranked in the top 10 since 2013, and average scale scores for Florida’s Hispanic students have ranked in the top 10 since 2015.
 - In Grade 8 Reading, average scale scores Florida’s students with disabilities have ranked in the top 10 since 2013, which is a great improvement from their rank of #36 in 2003.
 - Florida’s Hispanic students, students eligible for free/reduced lunch, and students with disabilities significantly outperformed their national peers in Grade 8 Reading (average scale scores significantly higher than the National Public).
 - Compared to 2003, Florida’s Grade 8 Reading achievement gap has narrowed significantly (by 13 scale score points) for students with and without disabilities.

- **2019 Grade 8 Mathematics:**
 - In Grade 8 Mathematics, Florida’s Hispanic students are ranked #5 and significantly outperformed their national peers (average scale score significantly higher than the National Public).
 - Florida’s students with disabilities maintained a rank of #4 in Grade 8 Mathematics and significantly outperformed their national peers (average scale score significantly higher than the National Public).
 - Compared to 2003, the Grade 8 Mathematics achievement gaps have narrowed significantly for the following subgroups: the White-Hispanic gap by 8 scale score points and the students with and without disabilities gap by 15 scale score points.

- **NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA):**
 - Among the 27 large, urban school districts nationally that participated in 2019, the three participating districts from Florida continue to occupy top spots for performance in reading and mathematics. All three of Florida’s participating TUDA districts are home to military installations, and on these objective, and actual assessment data, each district is recognized as a national leader in reading and mathematics.
 - Miami-Dade County Public Schools ranked #1 in Grade 4 Reading for the second consecutive NAEP administration, #1 in Grade 4 Mathematics and #2 in Grade 8 Reading.
 - Duval County Public Schools ranked #2 in Grade 4 Mathematics and #5 in Grade 4 Reading.
 - Hillsborough County Public Schools ranked #3 in Grade 4 Reading, #4 in Grade 4 Mathematics and #4 in Grade 8 Reading.



QUALITY COUNTS:

Florida ranks 3rd in the nation for K-12 Achievement according to a new 2020 Quality Counts report by [Education Week](#). This is a move up from 4th in 2019 and the highest ranking ever in K-12 Achievement for the Sunshine State. Florida’s K-12 Achievement grade also improved to B-, which is higher than the nation’s grade of C. The K-12 Achievement index is comprised of six indicator areas: Achievement Levels, Achievement Gains, Poverty Gap, Achieving Excellence, High School Graduation and Advanced Placement. To develop the measure, Education Week used NAEP performance data, College Board data and graduation data from the U.S. Department of Education.

- **Quality Counts Data Sources:**
 - [2020](#)
 - [2019](#)
 - [2018](#)

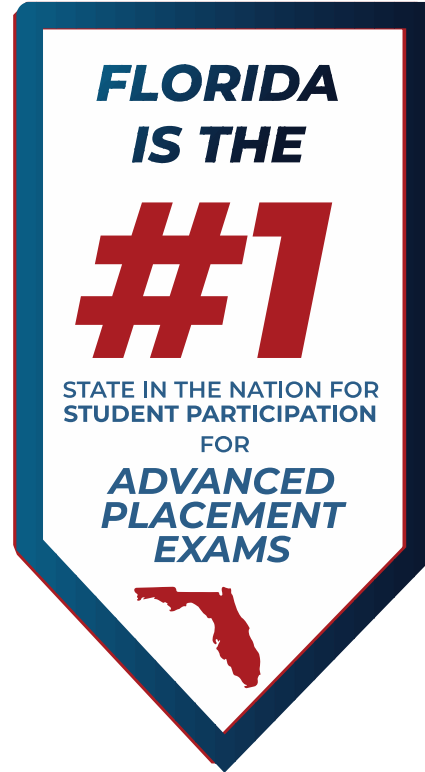
ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) EXAMS:

Florida has led the nation in Advanced Placement (AP) participation and been among the top five in performance and improvement for years:

- Florida has the highest percentage of graduates in the nation who took an AP exam during high school (56.0%).
- Florida’s 2019 graduates continue to have the 3rd highest AP success rate in the nation with 32.3 percent scoring a 3 or higher on an AP exam during high school.
- Florida is ranked 3rd in the nation for improvement over the past 10 years in the percentage of graduates scoring 3 or higher on the AP exam during high school, improving by 12.2 percentage points during the last decade.
- The percentage of Florida graduates who succeeded on AP exams is 8.4 percentage points higher than the national average (32.3% vs. 23.9%).
- The percentage of Florida graduates who took an AP exam during high school is 17.1 percent higher than the national average (56.0% vs. 38.9%).
- According to the College Board, in May 2019, Florida public and private high school students took a total of 215,120 AP Exams that resulted in scores of 3, 4 or 5. Based on students’ opportunity to earn at least three college credits for each AP exam score of 3 or higher, this represents an estimated 645,360 college credits. At an average rate of \$211.67 per credit hour, the total potential cost savings for Florida’s students and families was \$136,603,351.
- Over the last decade, Florida districts have been recognized on the AP Honor Roll, which recognizes districts increasing access to AP coursework while simultaneously maintaining or increasing their success.
 - 10th AP Honor Roll Districts, 2019: DeSoto and Pasco
 - 9th AP Honor Roll, 2018: Lee and Manatee
 - 8th AP Honor Roll, 2017: Osceola



- 6th AP Honor Roll, 2015: Indian River, Lee and Miami-Dade
- 5th AP Honor Roll, 2014: Lake, Miami-Dade, Orange and Pasco
- 4th AP Honor Roll, 2013: Miami-Dade and Manatee
- 3rd AP Honor Roll, 2012: Broward, Dixie, Escambia, Hillsborough, Lake, Levy, Miami-Dade, Orange, Pinellas, Polk and St. Johns
- 2nd AP Honor Roll, 2011: Polk and Seminole
- 1st AP Honor Roll, 2010: Charlotte, Flagler, Hillsborough, Marion, Orange, Santa Rosa and Seminole
 - Data Sources:
 - [2020](#)
 - [2019](#)
 - [2017](#)
 - [2016](#)



Florida is the #1 state in the nation for student participation in AP examinations. Over the past decade, 24,866 more Florida graduates took an AP exam in high school in 2020 (90,609) than in 2010 (65,743).

AP PARTICIPATION OVER THE LAST DECADE

NUMBER OF GRADUATES WHO TOOK AN AP EXAM DURING HIGH SCHOOL					PERCENTAGE OF GRADUATES WHO TOOK AN AP EXAM DURING HIGH SCHOOL				
2009	2014	2018	2019	2020	2009	2014	2018	2019	2020
58,255	82,204	91,974	92,984	90,609	38.0	50.9	55.9	56.0	56.1

Florida students are now ranked #2 nationally for student performance on AP exams. In 2020, a total of 21,635 more students scored a “3” or higher on an AP exam in high school than in 2010, and the percentage of students succeeding on these tests improved by 12.6 percentage points during the same time period.

AP SUCCESS OVER THE LAST DECADE

NUMBER OF GRADUATES WHO SCORED 3 OR HIGHER ON AN AP EXAM DURING HIGH SCHOOL					PERCENTAGE OF GRADUATES WHO SCORED 3 OR HIGHER ON AN AP EXAM DURING HIGH SCHOOL				
2009	2014	2018	2019	2020	2009	2014	2018	2019	2020
30,787	43,147	52,194	53,543	55,346	20.1	26.7	31.7	32.3	34.2

Over the past decade, Florida students have shown the 2nd most improvement in the nation on AP examinations among states – trailing only Rhode Island while being tied with New Jersey. When compared to



2019 graduates, Florida’s AP participation rate increased 0.1 percentage points and the success rate increased by 1.9 percentage points in 2020. These participation rates represent an estimated 691,293 college credits – potentially saving students and their families more than \$146 million, while helping to make higher education more affordable, accessible and attainable.

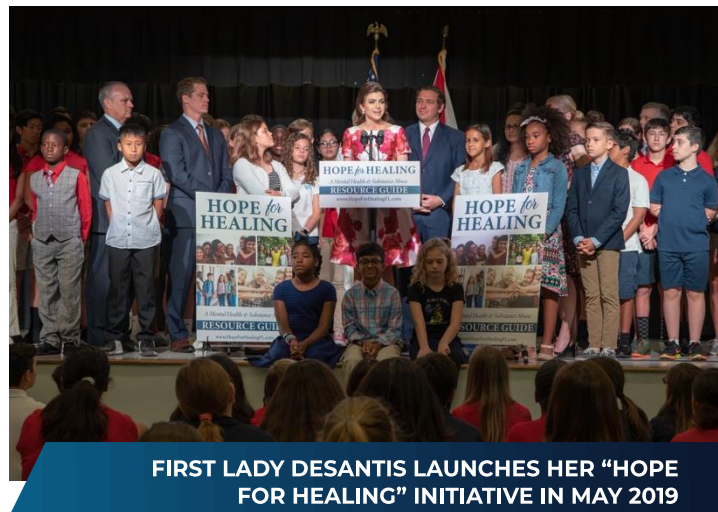
AP EXAMINATION IMPROVEMENT, 2010-2020

STATE	2010	2020	10-YEAR CHANGE	RANK
Rhode Island	10.8	25.2	14.4	1
Florida	21.6	34.2	12.6	2
New Jersey	18.7	31.3	12.6	2
Illinois	16.5	29.0	12.5	4
Massachusetts	21.8	34.0	12.2	5
California	21.1	32.4	11.3	6
New York	21.2	31.6	10.4	7
United States	16.2	24.4	8.2	N/A

Florida students outpaced the national average for success by 9.8 percentage points (34.2 percent vs. 24.4 percent), and Florida’s 10-year change percentage (12.6 percentage points) is approximately 35 percent higher than the national average improvement (8.2 percentage points).

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES:

Mental health is a serious issue our schools and students continually face daily. The Governor and First Lady have both shown tremendous leadership to identify and prioritize an issue that seldom attracts headlines – mental health. Due to their commitment, efforts have been made to improve the access to mental health services students badly need, but also providing training and educational opportunities to mitigate the stigma surrounding mental health services.



FIRST LADY DESANTIS LAUNCHES HER “HOPE FOR HEALING” INITIATIVE IN MAY 2019

Students need to understand it is ok to seek help and that they shouldn’t feel ashamed or embarrassed. Each school district is required to provide a mental health plan to the FDOE to delineate exactly how they are addressing mental health within their schools pursuant to the Mental Health Assistance Allocation within [section \(s.\) 1011.62\(16\), Florida Statutes \(F.S.\)](#). In 2019, the legislature committed \$75 million to the Mental Health Assistance Allocation for districts and schools to establish care for students and help school personnel identify and understand the signs of mental health and substance abuse problems. In 2020, the FDOE was successful in seeking an additional \$25 million commitment from the Legislature and the 2021-2022 state General Appropriations Act has increased total funding of the Mental Health Assistance allocation to \$120 million.



Prevention is key, and early warning signs can allow our teachers to quickly and effectively identify students who may be in need of mental health services. To this end, another important aspect of ensuring safe schools is by helping to mitigate the stigma of mental health by providing students with youth mental health awareness and assistance instruction. In August of 2019, the State Board of Education adopted [Rule 6A-1.094121, Florida Administrative Code](#). The new rule includes the prevention of suicide and prevention of the abuse of and addiction to alcohol, nicotine and drugs to the five hours of required instruction to students in grades 6-12 related to youth mental health awareness and assistance. Additionally, the FDOE was also successful in securing a \$5.5 million appropriation for the state to be used to provide [Youth Mental Health Awareness Training](#) for K-12 school personnel during the 2021 legislative session (and since 2018).

SCHOOL CHOICE OPTIONS:

We know students thrive in a variety of environments and parents should be provided with opportunities to make educational decisions in the best interest of their family. Military families are no exception. Thankfully, Florida is *the* national-leader in [school choice](#) for all families – including military families – to take advantage of for students in grades kindergarten through grade 12. In fact, many states pat themselves on the back for creating programs similar to what Florida has instituted for decades – and at a fraction of the size. These resources and services are available to families to decide what educational environment their child(ren) attend – traditional public school choice, charter school choice, scholarships to attend private schools, scholarships to ensure students with disabilities are provided with the services and resources required, homeschooling options, and a plethora of virtual options.

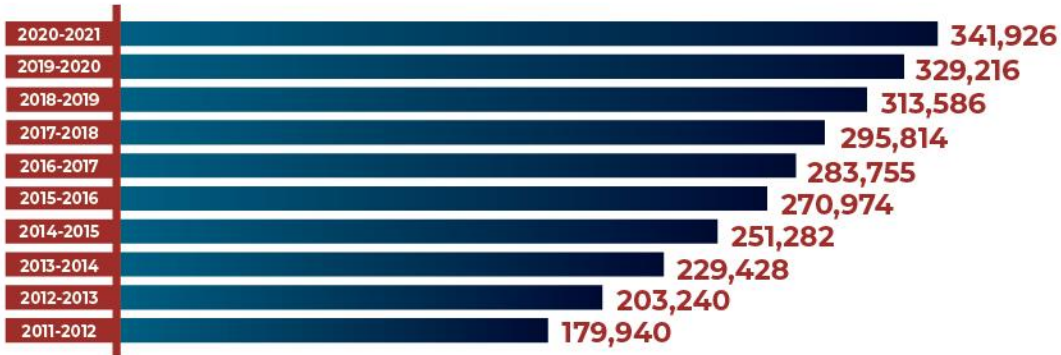
Florida is unquestionably the national leader of school choice and educational freedom. Our state is fortunate to boast a number of very innovative and highly successful public and private school choice options for families to take advantage of. The Center for Education Reform ranks [Florida #2 in its latest “Parent Power! Index”](#) based on the criteria of School Choice, Charter Schools, Teacher Quality, Transparency and Personalized Learning.

Furthermore, more than 1 million (37 percent) of Florida’s PreK-12 students attended a school of their choice during the 2020 – 2021 school year.

Since the first charter school was established in Florida in 1996, the number of public charter schools in Florida has grown to over 687 in 2020 – 2021. Public charter school student enrollment currently exceeds 341,900 students, and students in public charter schools have been shown to outperform their peers attending traditional public schools in terms of achievement, learning gains and narrowing the achievement gap. This represents a 90 percent increase in the number of students reported attending charter schools since 2011.



PK-12 ENROLLMENT ON CHARTER SCHOOLS



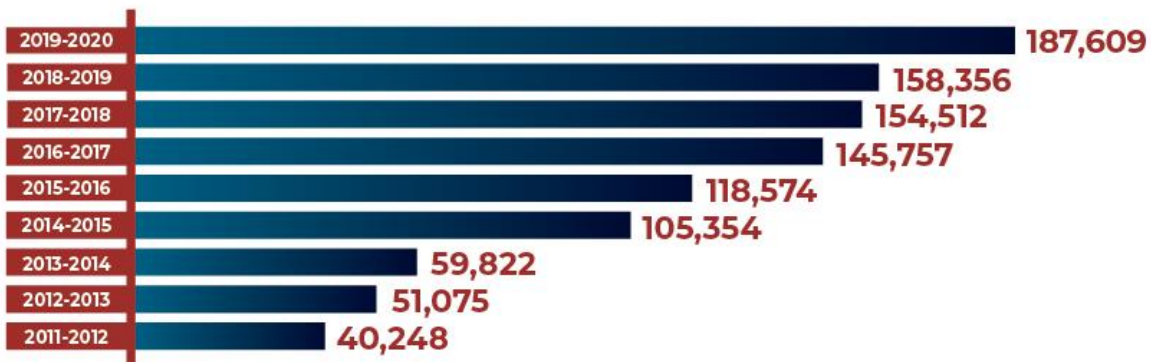
Additionally, more than 249,000 students and their families have taken advantage of open enrollment opportunities where families send their children to a school they are not zoned to attend.

In 2019, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) ranked Florida as the #2 state in their [Report Card on American Education](#). Similarly, the CATO Institute ranked Florida #1 overall (since 2014) – including #1 in terms of Education Freedom according to their [Freedom in the 50 States](#) rankings. In 2019, EdChoice (formerly the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice) ranked Florida as the #2 state in the nation in terms of [“Educational Choice Share.”](#) EdChoice also recognizes Florida as the #1 state ranked by spending on school choice programs.

Florida’s robust school choice program encourages traditional public schools to perform better in meeting their primary goal of providing students with a world-class education. Florida parents who are not satisfied with their zoned traditional school know they have a variety of educational options for their child(ren).

As these programs become more and more popular, Florida families – including military families – can continue to take advantage of all of their benefits. The number of students participating in a scholarship program has also significantly increased since 2011 – increasing a total of 366 percent.

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS 10-YEAR STUDENT PARTICIPATION





FAMILY EMPOWERMENT SCHOLARSHIP

It is no secret that no one loves or cares about students more than their parents. Parents will always put the best interest of their children above of all else. [The Family Empowerment Scholarship \(FES\) Program](#) is one of Florida's greatest victories for low-income and working-class families, and it is the first of its kind to extend support to middle-income families, such as military families. The FES currently provides scholarship opportunities for more than 34,000 low- and middle-income families to allow their children to attend a private school. It provides an educational lifeline to students waiting for an opportunity to find the school that will best work for them and puts more parents in the driver's seat to determine the best educational environments for their children.

The Legislature confirmed its commitment and support for school choice when it passed [HB 7045](#) during the 2021 Legislative Session, which is the single [largest expansion of school choice in the history of the state](#) and was signed into law by Governor DeSantis on May 11, 2021, with an effective date of July 1, 2021.

HB 7045 drastically expands the eligibility requirements of FES recipients and modifies other scholarship programs, the benefits of which are of tremendous value to military families. As written, the bill repeals the [Gardiner Scholarship](#) immediately and the [McKay Scholarship](#) in July 2022; programs that currently serve students with disabilities. However, the Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES) was expanded to allow students under both Gardiner and McKay to continue to be eligible to receive scholarships through the FES. Additionally, the bill specifically improves the ability of military families to participate in the FES program by:

- Expanding program eligibility to include students who are dependents of a member of the United States Armed Forces and students who have a sibling of a student with a disability receiving a FES scholarship; and
- Excluding students from being counted towards the capped number of students participating in the program if they are a dependent child of a member of the Armed Forces.

HOPE SCHOLARSHIP

Bullying and other forms of physical, sexual and mental violence is nothing new in our schools. No student should ever have to fear for their safety or well-being when attending school. When schools are unable to provide a learning environment conducive to education, the student will undoubtedly struggle. The first-of-its-kind [Hope Scholarship](#) is available to any family with a student subjected to an incident of battery; harassment; hazing; bullying; kidnapping; physical attack; robbery; sexual offenses, harassment, assault or battery; threat or intimidation; or fighting at school. Each family that has experienced any of these incidents has an opportunity to transfer to another public school with capacity within the district, an out-of-district school with a transportation scholarship (\$750) to help offset costs or receive a scholarship award to enroll in an approved private school.

FLORIDA TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP

[The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship \(FTC\)](#) was established to help students attend a school that best fits their individual educational needs and is a tool that empowers parents to have a greater say in the education provided to their child. Today, more than 111,000 students take advantage of this very successful scholarship



– approximately 73 percent of these students are low-income and minority students. The benefits of the FTC are undeniable – a [2017 Urban Institute report](#) recently found that students participating in the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program at any point in their academic career are 40 percent more likely to enroll in a Florida college and graduate than students who have not participated. In fact, the FTC is so successful and popular that there are more students and families interested in participating than there are funds available.

READING SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNTS

Students typically “learn to read” during their early formative educational years. Generally after grade 3, students begin to “read to learn.” However, many students struggle to read during their entire K-12 matriculation. Therefore, it is necessary to provide our young students with additional resources so that they are set up for future success. [Reading Scholarship Accounts](#) are available for students in grades 3 through 5 who are enrolled in a Florida public school and scored below a Level 3 on the grade 3 or grade 4 statewide, standardized English Language Arts assessment in the prior school year.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

[Charter schools](#) are public schools that operate under a performance contract, or a “charter,” which frees them from many regulations created for traditional public schools while holding them accountable for academic and financial results. The charter contract between the charter school governing board and its sponsor – which in Florida is the local school district – details the school’s mission, program, goals, students served, methods of assessment and ways to measure success.

All students seeking to enroll in a charter school have an equal chance of being admitted through a random-selection process, or a lottery (many Florida charter schools have wait lists). However, Florida statute allows that certain student populations can bypass those lotteries. Students who are the children of an active duty member of any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces are among those student populations.

FLORIDA VIRTUAL SCHOOL

Online learning is a major component of school choice options in Florida’s education system and an important strategy for achieving state education goals. Florida students have more access to online learning courses than any other state. Florida has the largest and most successful state virtual school in the United States, the [Florida Virtual School \(FLVS\)](#). All school districts in Florida offer full-time and part-time virtual instruction programs for students in kindergarten through grade 12. Many districts also operate franchises of FLVS, and some school districts offer individual online courses to students in and outside of traditional school settings.

FLVS was created in 1997 and currently offers more than 140 online courses, including general education courses, as well as AP and Honors Program options for middle and high school students. The school’s funding is performance-based, and only students who successfully complete courses are eligible for funding. FLVS offers a limited part-time elementary school program and also operates two full-time schools for Florida’s students in kindergarten through grade 12.



Florida launched its Florida Online Course Catalog in July 2014. The catalog includes information about available online courses offered by school districts, FLVS and approved private providers. The catalog provides an opportunity for school districts, FLVS and approved private providers to showcase the online courses they offer, and for parents and students to browse the catalog to see what online course choices are available. The catalog currently includes over 19,000 online courses.

HOME EDUCATION PROGRAMS

[Homeschooling](#) is an important component of Florida’s robust system of school choice. In fact, more than 97,000 Florida K-12 students were educated at home in 2018-19. By all reasonable accounts, Florida home-educated students are being prepared to become well-educated, productive and useful citizens. Furthermore, they should be commended for their exceptional public service of educating a relatively small, but significant, percentage of the rising generation, and for saving Florida taxpayers a considerable amount of money – to the benefit of our public schools.

OTHER PUBLIC SCHOOL BENEFITS & ACCOMODATIONS FOR MILITARY FAMILIES:

[High School Athletics:](#)

Sports are incredibly important for students to participate in as they teach extremely valuable lessons that directly translate to the military, e.g., teamwork, dedication, responsibility, a sense of duty, etc. Many military families have children who actively participate in interscholastic sport programs. In some instances, there are issues where a student is unable to participate in a sport because they had previously participated in the same sport in another state or location. However, Florida law protects military families by not punishing them from participating in athletic sports when a family is relocated to another state. In fact, Florida law clearly provides a statutory exemption for “Dependent children of active duty military personnel whose move resulted from military orders.”

FLORIDA LAW *PROTECTS* MILITARY FAMILIES BY NOT PUNISHING THEM FROM PARTICIPATING IN *ATHLETIC SPORTS* WHEN A FAMILY IS RELOCATED

[Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery:](#)

Introduction of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) into Florida’s school grades calculation through the passage of Senate Bill 662 during the 2020 legislative session will increase the number of students taking the test, and may also act as an incentive for districts to increase the availability of JROTC programs. This in turn could increase the likelihood of students enlisting in the U.S. Armed Forces and ensuring multigenerational military service within families who are stationed in Florida.



Troops to Teachers (FL-TTT) program:

This program was established to provide a college and career transition one-stop service for program participants who wish to become Florida classroom teachers, and to develop recruitment/employment



initiatives with schools and school districts. By partnering with Tallahassee Community College (TCC), FL-TTT will assist in the career transition of military personnel into the civilian employment by providing a detailed individualized academic map and career transition plan for each participant. The goal of this program is to reduce veteran unemployment by establishing recruitment/employment initiatives with schools and school districts, and will increase the number of male role models in Florida schools, especially those from underrepresented

demographic groups as the military has a higher percentage of males and a high percentage of personnel from the military in underrepresented demographic groups.

In addition, FL-TTT provides participants with an understanding of the Florida teacher certification requirements to include: the pathways to achieve a degree and certification in Florida, certification examination preparation, application processes, as well as teacher demand and how to improve their chances of employment in their new profession. Through its partnership, TCC will present a comprehensive approach to the management of educational goals and employment opportunities for our service members, while measuring the effectiveness of participants in the classroom.

Although the federal government has chosen to sunset this program, the FDOE is currently working to continue recruiting its recruitment/employment initiatives with schools and school districts by strengthening and improving its communication with key military personnel at military bases throughout Florida.

Educator Recruitment:

The FDOE is also proud to provide opportunities for members of the United States Armed Forces, veterans and their spouses to become part of our team working hand in hand to improve Florida’s education system for students of all backgrounds and abilities.

Florida leads the nation in high-quality teacher policies in areas like making sure new teachers enter the classroom well-prepared, identifying teachers who are helping students achieve more and retaining effective teachers who improve achievement for all students. The FDOE commits to recruitment of military personnel, veterans and their spouses to continue their service by teaching and leading in Florida’s schools.

THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION *COMMITTS* TO THE RECRUITMENT OF MILITARY PERSONNEL, VETERANS & THEIR SPOUSES TO CONTINUE THEIR SERVICE BY *TEACHING AND LEADING* IN FLORIDA’S SCHOOLS

This includes educator certification fee waivers for eligible military and spouses (initial application and examination); certification extensions, providing pathways for veteran military officers to transition into school administrator roles (special temporary certificate in educational leadership), and according to s. 1003.4286, F.S., the Commissioner of Education may award a standard high school diploma to an honorably discharged veteran who has not completed high school graduation requirements.



POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION:

[The Florida College System \(FCS\)](#) is humbled by the service and sacrifice of our military servicemembers and offers a broad array of options for current and past serving members to continue their educational attainment. In fact, all of the 28 FCS institutions have dedicated staff and veteran service centers dedicated to assisting current and former members of the military to ensure they are accessing all the available benefits to them.

When military families successfully complete their secondary education, there is also a need to continue on a path to learn and grow. Florida provides a litany of high-quality postsecondary educational options for students and adults to take advantage of to begin or advance their civilian careers.

FLORIDA PROVIDES A LITANY OF HIGH-QUALITY POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS AND ADULTS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF *TO BEGIN* AND *ADVANCE* THEIR CAREERS

Florida has a total of 12 state universities and 28 state colleges that are generally the first point of access to higher education in Florida – approximately 65 percent of Florida high-school graduates begin the pursuit of a postsecondary education by starting at a Florida college. Additionally, the FCS is a higher education access point for minority students.

Over the past 20 years, the number of awarded degrees or certificates has increased. In 1998-99, FCS institution awarded over 45,000 degrees or certificates. By 2017-18, that number had increased nearly 150 percent to more than 112,000 degrees or certificates. Of note, 96 percent of recent graduates are either employed or continuing their education, and 93 percent of FCS graduates ultimately remain in Florida and help contribute to the state’s economic growth.

According to the Southern Regional Education Board, Florida colleges have the best three-year graduation rates in the entire Southeast. Florida college students earned the 2nd most Associate's Degrees and the 4th most Bachelor’s Degrees in the nation in 2016-2017.



#1 Ranked Higher Education System:

The nationally-renown and respected [U.S. News & World Report](#) has ranked Florida's higher education system #1 in the country for three straight years. U.S. News & World Report compared Florida to other states in terms of: the share of Floridians holding a college degree, the time it typically takes students to complete

both two- and four-year college programs, the cost of in-state tuition and fees, and the burden of debt that college graduates carry.



Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence :

[The Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence](#) is the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance among America's community colleges. It is awarded every two years to one or more institution(s) that have been assessed for student outcomes in four areas: student learning, certificate and degree completion (including of a bachelor's

degree after transfer), employment and earnings, and high levels of access and success for minority and low-income students. Since its inception in 2011, at least one Florida college has been honored as a finalist or winner of this prestigious award.

YEAR	INSTITUTION(S) AND FINAL RANKING
2011	Valencia College (Winner)
2013	Broward College (Finalist), Santa Fe College (Finalist)
2015	Santa Fe College (Winner), Indian River State College (Finalist)
2017	Broward College (Finalist), Indian River State College (Finalist)
2019	Indian River State College (Finalist), Miami Dade College (Winner), Broward College (Finalist)
2021	Tallahassee Community College (Finalist), Broward College (Finalist)



Postsecondary Financial Assistance and Scholarship Programs:

Florida is ranked 6th in the nation for student tuition cost and [affordability](#), according to the [U.S. Department of Education's 2019 report](#) on cost and affordability.

In addition to having some of the lowest tuition rates in the nation, Florida offers a variety of educational [financial aid grant programs and scholarships](#) dedicated for the use and advantage of military families. For example, Florida provides [in-state tuition rates](#) at postsecondary institutions for members of the Armed Forces. This helps reduce the financial stress and burden of families having to either take out massive loans or figure out how to pay for a student to go to a college or university in Florida.

FLORIDA PROVIDES *IN-STATE TUITION RATES* AT POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES

With an abundance of pride, Florida offers unique programs to its residents and military servicemembers' families that have had significant participation from Florida's students and families taking tremendous advantage of the savings provided.

The [Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program](#) provides awards that cover up to 100% of full tuition and textbooks for students based on high school GPA, qualifying scores on the ACT or SAT examinations, and accumulated volunteer service hours.

Florida offers a tax- and risk-free investment plan for families to save for college via the [Florida Prepaid Plan](#).

Florida provides the following active duty members of the Armed Forces and their families in-state tuition rates at postsecondary institutions:

- Active duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces residing or stationed in Florida and their spouses and dependent children, and active drilling members of the Florida National Guard ([s. 1009.21\(10\)\(a\), F.S.](#)); or
- Active duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their spouses and dependents attending a public college or state university within 50 miles of the military establishment where they are stationed, if the military establishment is within a county contiguous to Florida. ([s. 1009.21\(10\)\(b\), F.S.](#))

The [Congressman C.W. "Bill" Young Veteran Tuition Waiver Program](#) authorizes an out-of-state waiver for Honorably discharged veterans of the United States Armed and Reserve Forces (Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines and Navy) and the National Guard (Army and Air) or any other student who is entitled to and uses educational assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs who physically resides in Florida while enrolled as a degree or certificate seeking student. Veterans under this program are also given enrollment priority pursuant to [s. 1009.26\(12\)\(d\), F.S.](#)

Postsecondary institutions waive out-of-state fees for a person who is an active duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces residing or stationed outside of this state ([s. 1009.26\(14\), F.S.](#)).



FCS institutions waive any portions of the student activity and service fee, the financial aid fee, the technology fee, the capital improvement fee, and any other fees authorized for a person who is an active duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces using military tuition assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Defense ([s. 1009.26\(15\), F.S.](#)).

FCS institutions, school district career centers, and charter technical currently offer tuition waivers to spouses and dependents of deceased law enforcement, correctional and correctional probation officers identified in [s. 112.19\(3\), F.S.](#), and firefighters identified in [s. 112.191\(3\), F.S.](#) In 2019, Senate Bill 7098 ([Chapter No. 2019-24, Laws of Florida](#)) amended those statutes and expanded those benefits to include spouses or dependents of deceased first responders and members of the Florida National Guard and the U.S. Armed Forces (see [s. 250.34, F.S.](#), and [s. 295.01, F.S.](#)).

Florida provides the [Scholarships for Children and Spouses of Deceased or Disabled Veterans](#) (CSDDV) which provides an award to dependent children or non-remarried spouses of qualified Florida veterans. ([s. 295.01, F.S.](#), and [s. 295.015, F.S.](#))

The 2014 Florida Legislature created funding for the [Honorably Discharged Graduate Assistance Program](#) (HDGAP) as a supplemental need-based veteran educational benefit. Funds are to be used to assist in the payment of living expenses during holiday and semester breaks for active duty and honorably discharged members of the U.S. Armed Forces who served on or after September 11, 2001.

Dual Enrollment:

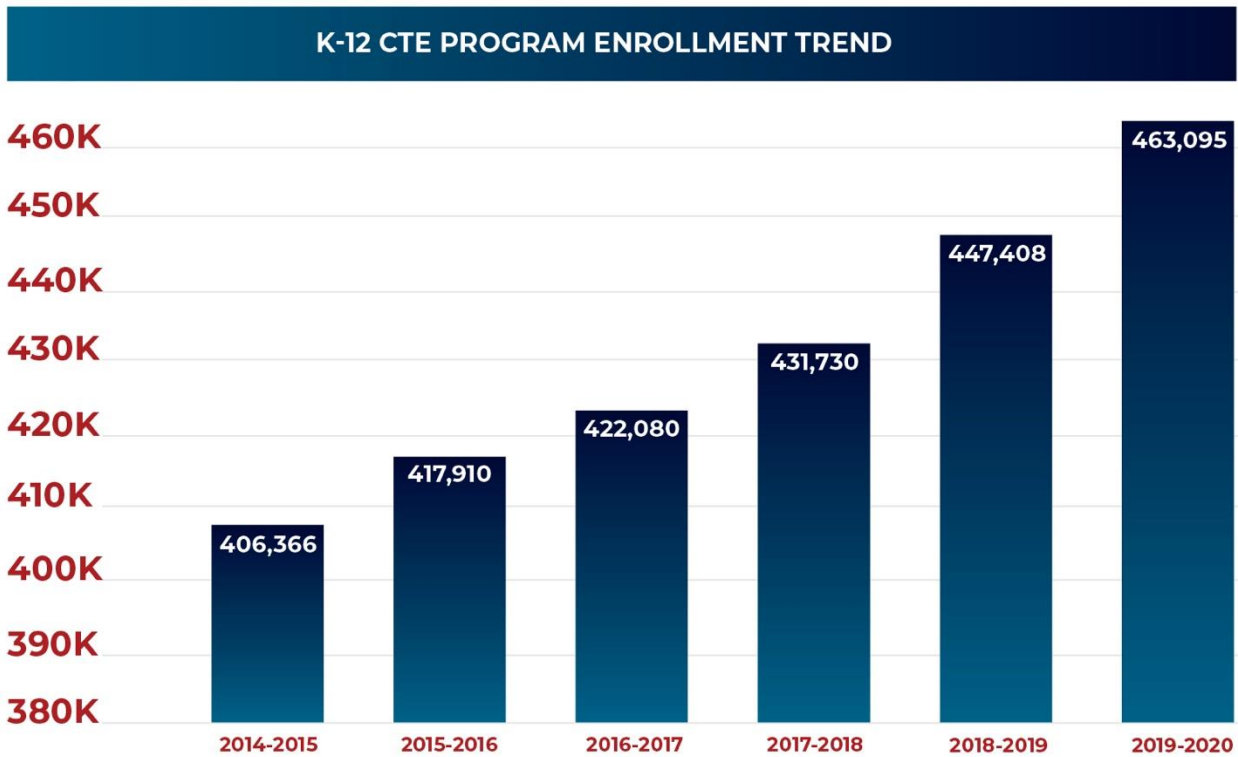
In addition to in-state tuition, financial aid and the scholarship programs that make a postsecondary education less expensive, Florida has greatly invested in [dual enrollment](#) programs that allow high school students an opportunity to enroll in postsecondary courses and receive both high school and postsecondary credit. Now, many Florida students are exiting high school with all or part of an Associate’s degree or a high-quality certification of value that allows them to immediately join the workforce in a high-demand field.

Between 2011-12 and 2017-18, the annual number of dual enrollment students in the FCS increased by more than 20,000, an increase of more than 40 percent. By 2017-18, more than 70,000 students enrolled in a dual enrollment course, a 26 percent increase over the previous two years. More middle and high school students are taking college-level dual enrollment courses than ever before, and they are thriving with a 91 percent passing rate in dual enrollment courses, which translates into approximate tuition and fee savings of \$17.5 million. Dual enrollment has been proven to reduce the opportunity costs students have to invest in prior entering the workforce.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION:

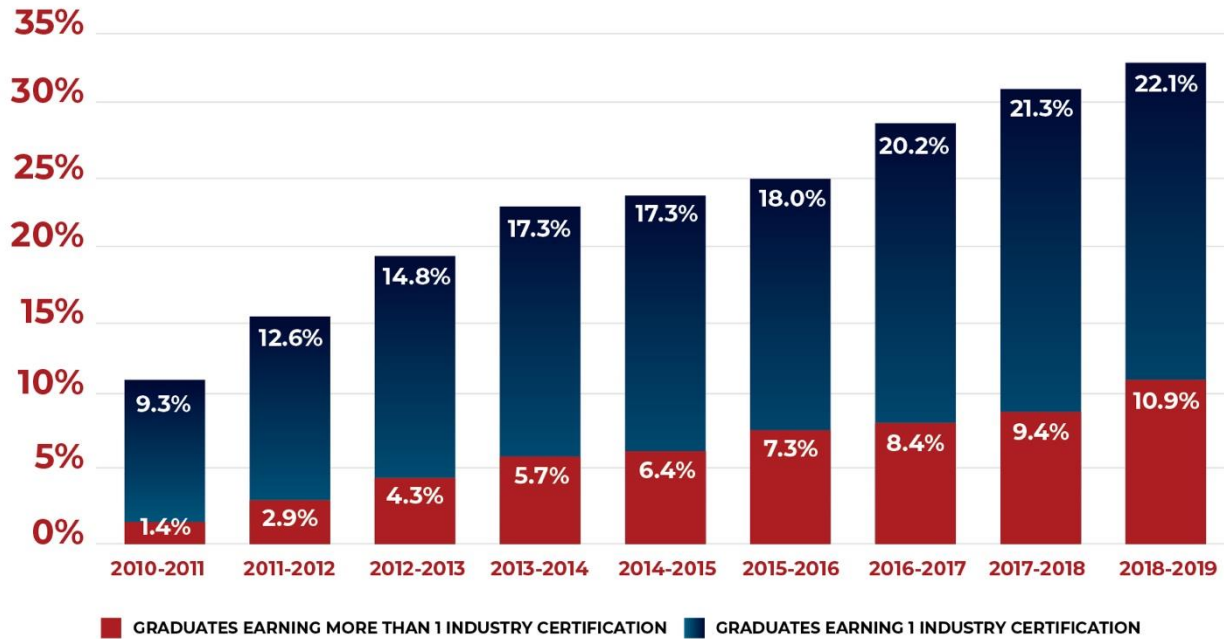
Attending a traditional college or university may not be for every student. For many students, careers in technical trades can be a very prosperous and fulfilling career decision. Focusing on [career and technical education](#) (CTE) allows students to avoid incurring massive amounts of student debt and enter the workforce as a certified or licensed employee earning an excellent wage upon graduation or program completion.

It is vital that we create streamlined pathways for our students to seamlessly complete high school and be fully prepared to enter the workforce in their chosen career path. There are numerous professional pathways for students to earn industry certifications in areas such as welding where they can emerge from high school or college and have a job that pays very well waiting for them in high-demand job areas. Entering the workforce at an earlier age allows our students to first gain real-world experience within their chosen career. Furthermore, it opens up possibilities for these students to continue to learn and gain valuable certifications and competencies that will allow them to further and improve their careers. As a result, there has been a dramatic increase in student participation in CTE programs since 2014-2015. During this time, enrollment has increased by 56,729 students, which is a 14% increase.





FLORIDA'S PERCENT OF GRADUATES EXITING HIGH SCHOOL WITH INDUSTRY CERTIFICATIONS



Students earning an industry certification through a CTE pathway typically outperform their peers in several ways. They tend to earn a higher GPA, have fewer absences, are less likely to drop out of school, are more likely to take Advanced Placement or dual enrollment courses than other students, are much more likely to earn a standard diploma, and are nearly twice as likely to earn a Bright Futures scholarship. Also, with greater proportions of minority students taking advantage of these career pathways, it will help bolster the minority participation and inclusion rates in the middle class – while helping to curb generational poverty.

Apprenticeship Programs:

Students working in an [apprenticeship program](#) are hired employees while they are apprentices in the program – an “earn while you learn” model. Students completing either a career certificate or apprenticeship program can immediately enter the workplace and find a job that pays well. Florida is emphasizing apprenticeship programs that allow all students to continue furthering their education, certification or licensure credentials within their respective fields so they can grow their career in high-demand areas of workforce need. Upon completion, many apprentices are offered full-time employment by the sponsoring employer. Florida’s Office of Apprenticeship works closely with the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) State Approving Agency to ensure registered apprenticeship programs are recognized and approved which in turn allows the U.S. Veterans Administration (VA) to pay educational assistance to veterans and other eligible individuals while they pursue approved apprenticeships or other on-the-job training programs provided by employers (public or private). The State Approving Agency has the function of ensuring that institutions and establishments meet and maintain acceptable approval standards so that eligible persons who attend may receive educational assistance from the VA.



As Florida’s economy has strengthened over the past several years, the number of apprentices and programs have dramatically increased. The FDOE streamlined the approval process for programs, reducing barriers and eliminating unnecessary bureaucratic processes to make it easier and more accessible to register a program. 2019-2020 was a record year for the number of new programs, with 29 new programs registered from July 1, 2019, through June 2020. In the past, the FDOE averaged 7 to 9 new programs a year.

As of June 30, 2020, the FDOE has 251 registered programs and 20,018 active apprentices. From July 1, 2019, through June 2020, 1,603 apprentices have graduated from their respective programs. Currently, there are over 4,500 participating employers covering 156 apprenticeable occupations. Part of this massive growth of registered apprenticeships include the diversification and expansion into non-traditional industry sectors, such as healthcare and information technology.

Every apprenticeship program that the FDOE helps to establish is registered with the U.S. Department of Labor. This provides our apprentices with the credibility and marketability of having graduated from a nationally recognized program with nationally-recognized, industry-issued credentials. This also gives our apprentices the opportunity for mobility. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Florida is ranked 9th out of 50 states for the number of new apprentices, 11th for the number of registered apprentices and 12th for the number of graduates.

Many apprenticeship programs partner with school districts and FCS institutions to provide the related technical instruction (RTI) for their programs, or the “learn” component of the “earn while you learn” model. Roughly 80% of our registered programs outsource the RTI component to a local educational agency (LEA). Of those, Florida’s district technical colleges provide approximately 80% of that RTI and FCS institutions provide roughly 20%.

Total Number of Apprenticeship Students in District and College Programs

YEAR	DISTRICT ENROLLMENT	COLLEGE ENROLLMENT	TOTAL
2012-2013	6,201	2,278	8,479
2013-2014	6,884	2,262	9,146
2014-2015	7,424	2,471	9,895
2015-2016	9,232	2,681	11,913
2016-2017	9,715	2,630	12,345
2017-2018	9,877	2,785	12,662
2018-2019	10,681	2,753	13,434
2019-2020	10,769	2,970	13,739



Although white students make up the largest proportion of apprenticeship students, (54%), Hispanic and African American students comprise a sizeable portion of total students participating in this type of workforce education programs (43%).

In total, students participating in an apprenticeship program can attain a career in a profession that pays well throughout the learning process and even better upon completion. In many instances, these students can enter a career and begin making an average salary of more than \$50,000.

Within the universe of career and adult education, institutions have all been informed and briefed regarding the relevant state requirements for career certificate basic skills exit requirements and exemptions for qualifying members of the military. The Division of Career and Adult Education has also informed institutions about the expansion of Veterans Employment and Training Services program that were modified within [s. 295.22, F.S.](#)

In 2013, the Legislature passed legislation that states the Commissioner of Education may award a standard high school diploma to an honorably discharged veteran who has not completed high school graduation requirements. [Section 1003.4286, F.S.](#), provides for the award of a standard high school diploma to eligible veterans who meet the following criteria:

- Left a public or non-public school located in any state prior to graduation and entered the armed forces of the United States.
- Is a current resident of the state of Florida, or was previously enrolled in any high school in this state, or was a resident of the state of Florida at the time of death.
- Is honorably discharged from the armed forces of the United States as verified by the FDVA.

The FDOE may send a standard Florida high school diploma upon receiving a completed application along with a DD Form 214 or other honorable discharge documentation. Also, family members who would like to apply for a diploma posthumously may do so. The FDOE and FDVA work together to assist veterans with the application process for their diplomas.

Get There, Florida!:

Capitalizing on the Rapid Credentialing grants and the great work already happening in FCS institutions, the FDOE’s workforce education initiative, [Get There](#), was recently unveiled at the State Board of Education meeting on September 23, 2020.

Over the past several months, education leaders have identified an opportunity to raise awareness and rebrand CTE as a modern approach to higher education and training. Get There will do just that by highlighting the 17 career pathways offered at Florida’s 28 FCS institutions and 48 technical colleges – and positioning these programs as an exciting





alternative to the traditional college path that gets them to work faster and affordably.

The timing could not be more critical as many Floridians have found themselves reconsidering their career opportunities, and it is important they understand that with CTE, there's something and somewhere for everyone – including military families.

STATE FISCAL RANKINGS:

There is a reason people and [companies are relocating](#) to Florida from other states in droves. Florida does not take from its taxpayers more than is absolutely necessary. Simply put, taxes matter to businesses and families. The structure and burden of a state's tax system impacts the decisions that businesses and families make on a day to day business significantly – and military families are no exception.

Florida does not take from its taxpayers more than is absolutely necessary. Simply put, taxes matter to businesses and families – the structure and burden of a state's tax system impacts the decisions that businesses and families make on a day to day business significantly.

Florida is an extremely fiscally responsible state that lives below its means while continuing to pass a balanced budget – leaving it in a better fiscal position during times of economic downturn than other states. This fiscal maturity allows Florida to continue to receive a [AAA credit rating](#) (rated by Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's), ensuring Florida taxpayers are protected by securing favorable interest rates when borrowing. This helps allow Florida to continue to be a low-tax state.

Florida is routinely ranked as one of the most tax- and business-friendly states in the entire nation. The CATO Institute's [Freedom in the 50 States](#) ranks Florida the #1 state in terms of fiscal policy in terms of taxes, government employment, spending, debt and fiscal decentralization. Florida is also the #1 state in terms of economic freedom that includes fiscal and regulatory policy.

FLORIDA IS ROUTINELY RANKED AS *ONE OF THE MOST TAX- AND BUSINESS-FRIENDLY STATES* IN THE ENTIRE NATION

[The Mercatus Center at George Mason University](#) routinely comparatively ranks each state's fiscal soundness. Florida is always ranked high in these rankings as it is an aggressively fiscally conservative, low-tax state. In fact, Florida was ranked [#4 in the nation](#) in the Mercatus Center's 2018 state fiscal rankings.

Similarly, the [Tax Foundation](#) has ranked Florida #4 in the nation in its [2020 State Business Tax Climate Index](#), which considers “....how well states structure their tax systems....” The only states ranked higher than Florida are Wyoming (1), South Dakota (2) and Alaska (3). It is important to note that each of these states have a fraction of the population and economic output as Florida, which is the 3rd largest state in terms of population and the [17th largest economy in the world](#) with a Gross Domestic Product output greater than \$1 trillion. Unsurprisingly, other states with military installations ranked higher than Florida – Connecticut (47), California (48), New York (49) and New Jersey (50) – are the states with the worst state tax system structures.



A FAMILY-FRIENDLY STATE:

As the most family-friendly state in the nation, Florida has been a destination for tourists to escape the cold dreary northern and mid-western climates and enjoy the sun. More than 100 million tourists visit Florida each year. In a non-COVID-19 year, [127 million visitors](#) visited our state from around the world in 2018. Florida continued at a faster pace in 2019, with more than 69 million visitors during the first six months of the year.



To entertain all of those families, Florida is home to numerous resorts, [world-renowned beaches](#), theme parks (Orlando is the theme park capital of the world with [Universal Studios](#) and [Walt Disney World](#)), [nearly 200 state and national parks](#) – especially our world-famous [Everglades National Park](#), the [Kennedy Space Center](#) – including [Space X](#), and other family-friendly places to experience.

FLORIDA
THE MOST
FAMILY-FRIENDLY
STATE IN THE NATION

EMERALD COAST FLORIDA

THEME PARKS & ATTRACTIONS
WALT DISNEY WORLD
UNIVERSAL ORLANDO RESORT
BUSCH GARDENS
DAYTONA SPEEDWAY
LEGOLAND FLORIDA
KENNEDY SPACE CENTER
SEAWORLD ORLANDO
ST. AUGUSTINE HISTORIC DISTRICT
THE BINGLING MUSEUM
SALVADOR DALI MUSEUM
AND MANY MORE

WORLD-RENOWNED BEACHES
CLEARWATER BEACH
SIESTA KEY
VERNO BEACH
PANAMA CITY BEACH
AMELIA ISLAND
NAPLES BEACH
DAYTONA BEACH
SOUTH BEACH
NEW SMYRNA BEACH
AND MANY MORE

NATIONAL & STATE PARKS
DRY TOROUGAS-KEY WEST
BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK
EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK
BIG LAGOON STATE PARK
THE FLORIDA REEF
BILL BACOS CARE FLORIDA STATE PARK
CALADESI ISLAND STATE PARK
CURRY HAMMOCK STATE PARK
JONATHAN DICKINSON STATE PARK
RAINBOW SPRINGS STATE PARK
BLUE SPRING STATE PARK
BIG VITALBOT ISLAND STATE PARK
FLORIDA CAVERNS STATE PARK
AND MANY MORE



Additionally, Florida is home to a number of professional sports teams from the four most popular leagues for families to enjoy: NBA ([Orlando Magic](#)), MLB ([Miami Marlins](#) and [Tampa Bay Rays](#)), NFL ([Miami Dolphins](#), [Jacksonville Jaguars](#) and [Tampa Bay Buccaneers](#)) and NHL ([Florida Panthers](#)) sports teams. We're also home to the iconic and famous [Daytona 500](#). Additionally, Florida is home to numerous college athletic teams (University of Florida, Florida State University, University of Miami, University of Central Florida).

FLORIDA SPORTS TEAMS

<p>FOOTBALL</p> <p>TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS MIAMI DOLPHINS JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS FLORIDA GATORS FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES MIAMI HURRICANES CENTRAL FLORIDA KNIGHTS USF BULLS AND MORE</p> <p>BASKETBALL</p> <p>MIAMI HEAT ORLANDO MAGIC AND MORE</p>	<p>HOCKEY</p> <p>FLORIDA PANTHERS TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING AND MORE</p> <p>SOCCER</p> <p>ORLANDO CITY AND MORE</p> <p>BASEBALL</p> <p>MIAMI MARLINS TAMPA BAY RAYS AND MORE</p>	<p>★ SPRING TRAINING</p> <p>ATLANTA BRAVES BALTIMORE ORIOLES BOSTON RED SOX DETROIT TIGERS HOUSTON ASTROS MINNESOTA TWINS NEW YORK METS NEW YORK YANKEES PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES PITTSBURG PIRATES ST. LOUIS CARDINALS TORONTO BLUE JAYS WASHINGTON NATIONALS</p>
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FLORIDA HAS DEVELOPED A SYSTEM OF STATE GOVERNMENT THAT IS **UNRIVALED** IN TERMS OF **MILITARY SUPPORT.**

A TRUE PARTNER IN STATE GOVERNMENT:

Perhaps most importantly, Florida has developed a system of state government that is unrivaled in terms of military support. In fact, a large number of members of the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate – including Governor DeSantis – have all honorably served in the United States military. State and legislative leaders are more than willing to consider to solutions to problems that military families are facing – and would love to hear concerns and suggestions from the military to make Florida even more military-friendly.

Recent legislation passed in Florida is proof that the Legislature listens to military families and proactively seeks to make the transition to, and living in, Florida a much better experience than in other states. In



In addition to the historic HB 7045 (2021), the Florida Legislature passed additional military-friendly pieces of legislation that will greatly benefit military families.

HB 171 (2020):

During the 2020 legislative session and it was signed into law by Governor DeSantis on June 23, 2020, where it became immediately effective. This military-friendly bill enables service members and veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces to earn uniform postsecondary credit or career education clock hours across all Florida public postsecondary educational institutions for college-level training and education acquired in the military. Currently, the FDOE is active in the implementation process with a workgroup developing a process for determining equivalencies that will be considered by December 2020. Once equivalencies are adopted, Florida postsecondary institutions must award credit/clock hours in accordance with equivalencies adopted by the appropriate boards, if the credit or clock hours are applicable toward the student's degree or certificate.

HB 429 (2021):

Students belonging to military families often experience significant academic challenges as they relocate to new schools when their parent(s) serving in the military are transferred to a military installation within Florida. The FDOE will establish a "Purple Star Campus Program" to identify schools that support military-connected children. An eligible school will be recognized if they meet the following requirements:

- Designate a staff member as a military liaison;
- Maintain a webpage on the school's website which includes resources for military students and families;
- Maintain a student-led transition program to assist military students in their transition into a school;
- Offer professional development training opportunities for staff members on issues relating to military students; and
- Reserve at least five percent of open enrollment seats for military-connected students.

Ensuring that military families are offered ample opportunities to take advantage of various forms of school choice is a very important issue that has repeatedly been brought up in FDOE conversations with military liaisons and at military compact meetings. Between HB 429, HB 7045 and Florida's myriad school choice options, we are confident that no other state can compete with Florida in terms of the availability of school choice options for military families to take advantage of.

HB 435 (2021):

The Department of Defense (DoD) SkillBridge program provides eligible servicemembers who are beginning their transition back to civilian employment the ability to train and learn with the industry partner(s) that best align to their military training and work experience within the servicemember's final 180 days in the military. The goal of this program is to enhance the career prospects of the military member by making them more marketable as a civilian. The bill is expected to better-align Veterans Florida's Veterans Employment and Training Services Program with the SkillBridge program to help improve employment and career outcomes of servicemembers who transition back to civilian employment.



CONCLUSION:

Florida has proven itself to not only be known as the “Education State,” but also be known as the “Military Friendly State” – and it’s not even a close competition. Our status is cemented and unparalleled in terms of the access our residents – including military families – have to a variety of world-class, affordable and high-quality education opportunities. We are undoubtedly a national leader recognized for excellence in our continual search for innovative ways of providing our students with an amazing education. By rethinking how we deliver education to our students holistically, we have focused our attention at the granular level – on the individual educational needs of our students. Although we have comprehensively improved our educational system of delivery over the past 20 years, we can always do more.

Florida knows all too well that we must never become complacent, we must never stop looking for ways and areas to improve, and we must never give up on our mission to produce the greatest education system in the world – and our military families are a big part of that mission.

Our students and their families deserve nothing less.