



Equitable Education Initiatives Provide Relief for Florida's Hard-Working Families *2021 Legislative Session Proposals*

Introduction: When COVID-19 roiled classrooms in the spring of 2020, nonpublic schools efficiently transitioned to distance learning. By early fall of that same year, leaders from faith-based and independent schools likewise worked diligently to answer Florida Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran's call for "reopening brick and mortar schools with the full panoply of services for the benefit of Florida students and families."

Meanwhile, ripple effects have left traditional nonpublic as well as public schools weathering a dip in enrollment as some parents select home education, virtual learning or other options.

Against this backdrop, the Florida Association of Academic Nonpublic Schools (FAANS) — a nonprofit organization representing more than 80 percent of the nonpublic schoolchildren in the Sunshine State — respectfully asks for consideration of the three following initiatives:

- Restoring dual enrollment access for students in grades 6-12 by supporting SB 52 (by Sen. Ray Rodrigues) and HB 281 (by Representatives Wyman Duggan and Ardian Zika);
- Streamlining add-on endorsements for Florida certified teachers; and,
- Removing the prior-public-attendance mandate from Family Empowerment scholarships.

Restoring Dual Enrollment Access: For nearly 20 years, Florida law recognized the value of dual enrollment courses by allowing free access by all students whether educated in public or nonpublic schools or home education programs. This changed during the 2012 session when the Legislature allowed public colleges and universities to directly charge nonpublic middle and high schools for courses taken by their students.

Yet according to multiple studies, dual enrollment courses provide key benefits to students and society. First-generation students who attend college first gain confidence in navigating the postsecondary realm. These students are thus more likely to attend and complete college.

Streamlining Add-On Endorsements: Existing Florida law creates an unlevelled playing field for nonpublic school teachers as opposed to public school counterparts. Public teachers may take professional development courses approved by districts to demonstrate subject matter expertise in academic areas such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), gifted and reading.

A change in law could align state certification and professional development policies. Private school organizations already allowed to participate in Professional Educator Competency (PEC) protocols would also be allowed to approve add-on endorsement courses.

Removing Prior-Public Attendance Mandate: Yet another example of inconsistent policy exists in Florida law for eligibility under Family Empowerment Scholarships (FES) versus Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarships. Though both programs serve schoolchildren from low-income families, only the FTC allows eligibility in grades 1-12 regardless of whether students previously attended public schools. This FES eligibility mandate hampers school choice by forcing some parents to switch between nonpublic and public schools to gain access to life-changing scholarships.

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