

**Subject: Protecting the Promise of School Choice: Senate Passes Legislation to Enhance Transparency, Efficiency for School Choice Scholarships**

**For Immediate Release**

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**Protecting the Promise of School Choice: Senate Passes Legislation to Enhance Transparency, Efficiency for School Choice Scholarships**

*SB 318 addresses implementation issues identified in Auditor General School Funding Report  
Legislation safeguards parental choice in education, ensures money follows the student*

**Tallahassee**—The Florida Senate today passed Senate Bill (SB) 318, Educational Scholarship Programs, by Senator Don Gaetz (R-Crestview). Implementing several recommendations identified in a 2025 operational audit ordered by the Legislature and conducted by Florida’s Auditor General, the legislation makes various updates to education choice and school funding statutes to increase transparency and improve efficiency for schools and families.

“Florida was the first state to pass universal school choice, because we stand firmly on the principle that parents know best and have the right and the responsibility to determine where and how their children are educated. We set out on this journey with the best of intentions, but in the words of the Auditor General, ‘whatever could go wrong has gone wrong,’” said Senator Gaetz. “I filed this legislation in response to the hundreds of messages I’ve received from parents, private schools and public schools urging that we preserve the promise of school choice – public, private, or home school, by fixing the structural problems within this iconic program. If this issue is left to fester, it will imperil school choice in our state. We who believe in school choice and parent empowerment want to safeguard it. That’s what our bill does.”

Senator Gaetz is the former Superintendent of Schools for Okaloosa County and served as Senate President from 2012-2014. The legislation is co-sponsored by Senator Corey Simon (R-Tallahassee), Chair of the Senate Committee on K-12 Education and sponsor of HB 1 (2023), which created Florida’s universal school choice program; Senator Danny Burgess (R-Zephyrhills), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee on Pre-K-12 Education; Senator Rosalind Osgood (D-Tamarac), Senator Darryl Rouson (D-St. Petersburg) and Senator Jason Pizzo (NPA-Hollywood).

**Senate Bill 318: Educational Scholarship Programs**

**Conforms with the Auditor General’s Report to ensure dedicated funding for public schools and school choice programs**

- Establishes a categorical fund for implementing the Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES) program. The FES categorical fund would move funding of the FES scholarships out of the school district’s FEFP calculation and fund the FES scholarships separately within the FEFP.

**Reduces the scholarship administrative fee to fund more scholarships through the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program.**

**Creates reasonable, consistent timeframes and streamlines registration so parents and schools can plan for the school year**

- Creates Fall and Spring application windows.
- Requires the use of a single application for all scholarship programs.
- Requires additional documentation to be submitted at the time of application: more than one form to document residency and the child's birth certificate.

**Improves transparency to ensure money follows the student**

- To ensure funds follow the student to the provider designated by the parents, the bill requires families to attest that a student is not enrolled in a public school and is enrolled in a private school, registered with a district for a home-education program, or registered with the Scholarship Funding Organization (SFO) as a Personalized Education Program student. A private school can provide that attestation to the SFO for its enrolled students on behalf of the parents.
  - The Department of Education (DOE) must cross-check scholarship applicants against the latest district enrollment files to verify that the applicant is not enrolled in a public school.
- To ensure the appropriate scholarship funds reach students, the bill requires the DOE to assign a Florida student ID for all scholarship recipients to act as the official ID when processing scholarship information.
- The DOE must create a standard withdrawal form to be used by scholarship applicants when leaving the public school system.

**Streamlines payment schedules to ensure consistency and reliability of scholarship funds**

- Student eligibility must be confirmed prior to each payment.
- Changes the scholarship payment installments from quarterly to monthly.
- Allows the DOE to provide funds to the SFOs for the first quarter of the fiscal year based on the forecasted scholarship numbers.
- Clarifies payment deadlines for initial and renewal students.
- Clarifies protocols for ineligible or inactive accounts.

**Updates reimbursement protocols to ensure timely invoicing and payment**

- Requires the DOE to develop a uniform reimbursement and invoicing process.
- Standardizes the authorized use of funds among the scholarships.
- Expands the eligibility criteria for individuals who may provide tutoring services.
- Expands the authorized use of funds to include membership and activity fees for Career and Technical Student Organizations.

**Increases reporting and auditing to improve accountability to taxpayers**

- Requires the Auditor General to annually conduct an end-of-year FTE audit of the scholarship programs.
- Requires the SFOs to return funds as a result of the audit findings.

- Requires the DOE to report on student mobility within the scholarship program.

**Increases the state's oversight of the scholarship programs**

- Authorizes the DOE to access the SFO's records and data to assist in reconciling scholarship payments.
- Requires the DOE to provide recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the programs, including costs associated with Department contracts for scholarship administration.

For more information, please visit [www.FLSenate.gov](http://www.FLSenate.gov).