THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE
OPPAGA
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- Education
  - School Districts
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Education
Summary of 2011 Reports

Board of Governors of the State University System

The Florida Solar Energy Center Eliminated the Backlog for Testing and Certification and Reduced its Reliance on State Funds, Report No. 11-19, September 2011. Subsequent to our 2009 report, the University of Central Florida directed the Florida Solar Energy Center to reduce its testing and certification backlog. The center analyzed its testing process for barriers and made several improvements, including increasing the number of test stands and automating test data collection. These changes reduced test times from 227 to 129 days, a 43% decrease. The center also transferred some of the backlog to other laboratories. As a result, the backlog was eliminated and the laboratory capacity increased.

In addition, the university directed the center to reduce its reliance on state funds for testing and certification services. The center significantly increased testing fees and used other funds such as additional contract and grant funds from the Solar Rating & Certification Corporation to cover costs. The amount of state funds used to pay for testing decreased from $256,255 in Fiscal Year 2007-08 to $77,931 in Fiscal Year 2010-11, a 70% reduction.

The Board of Governors Has Developed a Funding Formula and Uniform Reporting Procedures for Medical Education Programs, Report No. 11-09, February 2011. Since our prior report in 2009, the Legislature required the Board of Governors to determine a uniform reporting procedure for medical education program expenditures and develop a funding methodology to determine the per-student state funding for medical education.

The board has developed uniform cost reporting procedures for medical education programs; to provide more complete information, the board could incorporate more detail into its procedures to account for all related program costs and faculty activities. The board has developed a funding formula as directed.

Department of Education

Some States Allow School Districts to Charge Parents for School Bus Transportation or to Advertise in or on School Buses to Raise Additional Revenue, Report No. 11-24, December 2011. Some states allow school districts to raise additional revenues

to supplement the funds they receive from traditional state and local student transportation sources. For example, 12 states allow and 1 state mandates districts to charge parents fees to transport their children to and from school. In addition, 13 states allow school districts to advertise on the inside and/or outside of school buses. In general, states give school districts considerable decision-making authority to determine how to implement such policies.

State-Funded Mentoring Program Performance Mixed; Take Stock and Best Buddies Do Well, Report No. 11-11, March 2011. The Legislature appropriated $10 million for Fiscal Year 2010-11 to six mentoring programs intended to help K-12 students enhance their social, life, and/or academic skills. These programs served over 28,000 students during the past year. Although there is some overlap, the programs generally vary in structure, portion of budget supported by state appropriations, and primary focus.

Students who participated in two programs (Best Buddies and Take Stock in Children) outperformed comparison groups of similar students in three or more performance areas by achieving better academic and behavioral outcomes, such as reading at grade level and having few disciplinary incidents. Results for the remaining programs were mixed, with students exceeding the performance of peers in some areas but performing comparably or lower in other areas.

Students with Developmental Disabilities Have Limited Postsecondary Options; A New Institution Would Expand Choices but Require Additional State Funding, Report No. 11-08, February 2011. Students with developmental disabilities have limited options for education beyond high school. Most are not eligible to enroll in college credit programs because they do not have a standard high school diploma. The majority of programs for adults with developmental disabilities provide basic transition services that focus on improving employability and skills needed to live independently. At least 13 Florida school districts offer programs that include aspects of postsecondary education for students with developmental disabilities in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs. Three entities (one state university, one state college, and one school district technical center) offer postsecondary education to students who are no longer enrolled in district ESE programs.

Stakeholders have proposed creating a new postsecondary institution for adults with developmental disabilities. While this would give students an additional choice and address some current barriers, establishing a separate program that limits interaction with non-disabled students is inconsistent with emerging national trends. Estimated state costs to create such an institution range from $1.2 million to $40 million in recurring operational funds, and up to $36 million in non-recurring funds.

Summary of OPPAGA Reports Examining Workforce Education Programs and Legislative Options, Report No. 11-07, February 2011. Both colleges and school districts provide workforce education, which includes adult education and postsecondary career education. Recent proposals to give colleges responsibility for all postsecondary career education and school districts responsibility for all adult education have both positive and negative aspects.

Florida's current structure allows school districts and colleges to locally decide how to divide workforce responsibilities, resulting in varying service delivery systems across the state. Despite the variation, districts and colleges typically avoid duplicating programs.

Consolidation could create more uniformity and make it easier to align and articulate postsecondary career education programs, but could weaken operational connections between districts' secondary and postsecondary career education programs and reduce the availability of flexible training options that benefit students. Our analysis of student outcomes for workforce education programs found slight but not overwhelming performance differences between district and college programs.

We provide options the Legislature could consider if it chooses to maintain the current

workforce education structure but improve uniformity; implement a consolidation; or charge fees to offset some state costs and potentially motivate adult education students to achieve learning gains before leaving programs.

Several States Offer High School Diploma Options to Address Students' Needs and Future Goals, Report No. 11-05, January 2011. While many states have taken steps to strengthen academic standards, eight states with high school graduation requirements similar to those recently adopted in Florida also allow students the option of earning a diploma with less rigorous requirements. In general, these less rigorous options give students who cannot meet the state's higher graduation standards the opportunity to earn a high school diploma rather than drop out of school. However, some states raised concerns that such a policy has the potential to undermine their efforts to raise student achievement.

In addition, 10 states offer diploma options designed to prepare high school students for the workforce. These diplomas enable students to choose among various academic pathways depending on their post-high school goals–entry into the workforce or postsecondary education. However, the workforce-ready diplomas currently used by these states can limit students' postsecondary education choices and might not fully prepare students for the current job market.

Completing Adult Education Programs Improves Students' Employability, But Program Completion Rates are Low, Report No. 11-04, January 2011. School districts and colleges annually receive approximately $300 million in funding for adult education programs that serve 330,000 students in a variety of community locations. Some of these students are teenagers (age 18 and under) who enroll for dropout prevention and recovery purposes, but most are adults seeking to improve their employability.

Adult education programs have varying levels of success. Nearly three-quarters of high school students who co-enrolled in adult education stayed in school or graduated. In contrast, most adult students left programs before achieving documented learning gains. Those who remained and made gains had a better chance of improving their employment outcomes. Approximately half of unemployed adult students who made learning gains subsequently found employment. Adults who were employed prior to enrolling experienced higher earnings increases than employed adults who did not make gains.

The Legislature could consider several options for charging tuition and fees for adult education programs that should not jeopardize federal grant funding.

Special Facility Construction Projects Appear Needed, but Have Excess Capacity, Report No. 11-02, January 2011. The Special Facility Construction Program provides financial assistance to school districts that lack the resources to address urgent construction needs. The Department of Education has followed statutory requirements in administering the program. Although funded projects appeared to be needed, most schools built with program funds were larger than justified given the number of students currently enrolled. Unused student stations resulted in nearly $108 million in additional construction costs. There are several options the Legislature could consider to improve program effectiveness.

Department of Lottery

Lottery Profits Decline; Options Available to Enhance Transfers to Education, Report No. 11-12, March 2011. Lottery transfers to the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund declined by $41 million in Fiscal Year 2009-10, due to a variety of economic and demographic factors, and are projected to further decline by $106 million in 2010-11. During 2010, the Lottery took several steps to maintain and stimulate sales including launching a new game and

expanding its use of instant ticket vending machines.

To increase transfers to education, the Lottery should continue expanding its retailer network. In addition, it should evaluate the benefits of adding a fast keno game and continue to assess the option of joining another multi-state game. The Legislature could consider authorizing full-service vending machines, Internet sales, and video lottery terminals. However, these options represent expanded gambling, and video lottery terminals would violate the revenue sharing agreement of the gaming compact between the State of Florida and the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

The Lottery's operating expense rate continues to decline, making it among the most efficient U.S. lotteries. It could realize additional efficiencies and increase transfers to education by ensuring that its retailer compensation structure represents the best value for the state.