



A DIMMER FUTURE

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For the past two years, nearly 75% of each Trinity graduating class qualified for the Bright Futures Scholarship program, one of the most integral pathways students in Florida have to attend college. For over 20 years, Bright Futures has utilized funding from the Florida Lottery to provide high-achieving high school

up in arms over sweeping changes proposed to the program, including removing the Florida Lottery as its main source of funding. While the bill has largely been scaled back over the past few weeks, Senate Bill 86 passed the Florida Senate by a vote of 22-18, without a single Democrat in support. With Bright Futures now thrust into the spotlight, it is incredibly important to understand exactly what Bright Futures does and why politicians in Tallahassee want to change the status quo.

In 1997, the Florida legislature created the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship program to curb the “brain drain,” a phenomenon where highly talented and educated students leave for cheaper or more prestigious options elsewhere. According to GoBankingRates, a personal finance research tool, Florida is still ranked as the 47th best place for a college graduate to start their life due to the state’s increased real estate prices and low wages.

The latter covers 100% of college tuition if students achieve a 1330 on the SAT or a 29 on the ACT, coupled with a minimum weighted GPA of 3.5 and 100 community service hours throughout high school. In 2019, 111,973 students received Bright Futures scholarships, costing the state \$618.6 million, according to the Florida Department of Education.

“Our students are able to go to university tuition-free to fabulous schools,” college counselor Christine Grover said. “Some people even move to Florida to have that opportunity for their children.”

Social science teacher Robin Grenz said that Bright Futures can often be a lifesaver for low-income families.

“I’ve seen students in my career where the only way they were going to go through college was to get Bright Futures because their families couldn’t afford elsewhere,” Grenz said. “It’s their saving grace.”

Although the Bright Futures program has remained largely unchanged since its inception, a new bill passed by the Florida Senate aims to make sweeping changes and cuts to the scholarship. In its original form, SB-86 would have required the state to create a list of college majors that would lead to employment soon after graduation. Full-tuition scholarships would have only gone to students majoring in those areas. The Orlando Sentinel further detailed in March that the bill would have also reduced funding for students who earned college credits in high school through AP courses, IB courses and dual-enrollment. Although these proposals were removed after intense backlash,

the bill still maintains that its goal was and is to “assist students and families in making better-informed decisions about educational options and future employment opportunities.” However, many disagree.

“Our society as a whole needs people that can think, collaborate, write and innovate,” Grenz said. “Often, that doesn’t necessarily

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- Christine Grover, College Counselor

Bright Futures aimed to fix that by awarding two levels of scholarships: Florida Medalion Scholars and Florida Academic Scholars.

students with the opportunity to attend a Florida public college tuition-free.

However, in early March, students, parents and teachers across the state of Florida were



Proposed changes to Bright Futures create uncertainty

come from one particular college degree that leads directly to employment. A society never loses if their population is educated.”

After sudden and uproarious pushback from students, teachers and parents across the state, State Republicans rolled back many of the controversial aspects of the bill. According to the Tampa Bay Times, the bill currently mandates that the total amount of money available for scholarships would fluctuate according to the state’s annual budget, rather than come directly from Florida Lottery proceeds. This means that funding could vary wildly each year, and legislators get to choose how much aid they want to provide students with.

“Based on their budget, they can change this annually, which essentially means that Bright Futures is up for debate every year,” Grover said. “You have to consider whether or not you want to stay in-state when there’s this uncertainty over your future.”

The form of the bill currently heading to the Florida State House still mandates the creation of a career dashboard, which will include helpful information on post-graduation salaries, average student loan debt, debt-to-income ratio and much more. But, the most controversial aspect has been eliminated, as in its current form, SB-86 will no longer limit scholarships based on college degrees.

Grover explained that the changes and uncertainty will still have a pronounced impact on the thought process of students as they create their collegiate and career plans.

“If it passes, there’s the potential that students studying at university will choose careers for money instead of passion,” Grover said. “You’re equating money with happiness. Are you doing a job because you love it, and you feel like you contribute to society every day, or are you just here for the paycheck?”

Senior Gabby Cochran, who will be attend-

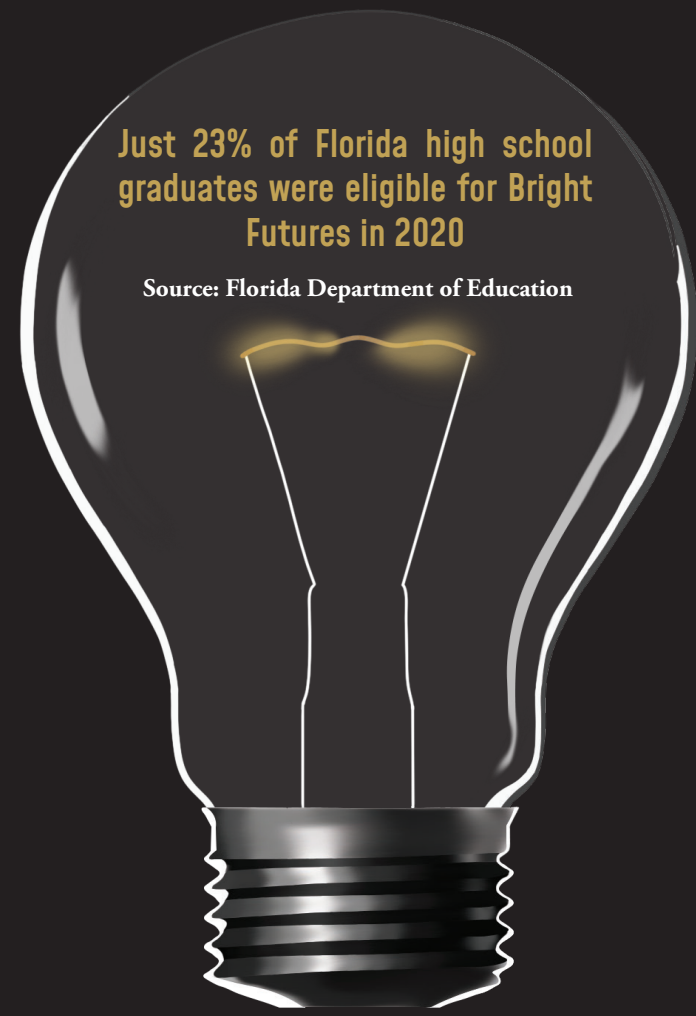
ing Florida State University this fall as a Media/Communications major with the help of a Bright Futures scholarship, cautioned students against letting future earnings take precedence over their passions.

“I chose my major because it was something I am genuinely interested in and that I thought I would enjoy,” Cochran said. “Personally, I would not feel comfortable applying to a major that I know I don’t enjoy just to receive Bright Futures.”

There is no doubt that Bright Futures has succeeded in its mission, with hundreds of thousands of low-income, first-generation, and racial minority students receiving the opportunity to attend university without the threat of student loans

is simple: what is the end goal of college? Is it to prepare you for a successful and lucrative career? Or is it to provide you with the tools of knowledge? That question will be answered by the Florida House soon, and whichever choice they make will reverberate for generations to come.

“By thwarting [the ability to choose], we’re creating a society that says the meaning of ed-



We are placing the value of education in the market, rather than its value to the human experience. It’s a lens of education being a market commodity, and it shouldn’t be.

- Robin Grenz, Social Science Teacher

and crippling debt. As the bill heads to the Florida State House, questions are still being asked of legislators and their intentions.

“Education is important, and families deserve to know what it will cost,” Orlando Sentinel Columnist Scott Maxwell said.

In the end, the question that is being posed

education is to get a job,” Grenz said. “We are placing the value of education in the market, rather than its value to the human experience.”