K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



Florida
Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in Florida.

This guide profiles **Florida**'s education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN FLORIDA

Florida runs one of the largest public education systems in the country, serving roughly 2.8 million K–12 students across 67 county school districts — an unusual structure in which each district is county-wide (several rank among the nation's largest). The system is overseen by the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) and the State...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- **Start age** — 6 (by Feb 1 of the school year)
- **End of compulsory age** — 16 (may remain enrolled to 18)
- **Kindergarten entry** — Child must be 5 by September 1
- **Enrollment** — Through your county school district

PRE-K AND FLORIDA'S VPK PROGRAM

Florida offers a signature early-childhood benefit: Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) — a free , state-funded prekindergarten program for all Florida 4-year-olds (a child who turns 4 by September 1), regardless of family income. Families can choose a school-year program or a summer program, offered through approved public schools and...

BRIGHT FUTURES & STATE AID

- **Florida Academic Scholars (FAS)** — Higher award; ~3.50 weighted GPA, 1330 SAT / 29 ACT, and 100 hours of service or paid work (2025–26)
- **Florida Medallion Scholars (FMS)** — ~3.00 weighted GPA, 1210 SAT / 25 ACT, and 75 hours of service or paid work (2025–26)

AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	**Ages 6–16**
Districts	**67 counties**
State Test	**FAST**
Diploma	**24 credits**
Choice	**Universal**

DISTRICTS, CHARTERS & MAGNETS

- **Miami-Dade County** — The largest in Florida (~330,000 students)
- **Broward County** — (Fort Lauderdale area)
- **Hillsborough County** — (Tampa area)
- **Orange County** — (Orlando area)
- **Palm Beach County** — (West Palm Beach area)
- **Duval County** — (Jacksonville area)

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN FLORIDA

- **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed college-prep schools such as Ransom Everglades and Gulliver Prep (Miami), Pine Crest and American Heritage (Fort...
- **Catholic & parochial schools** — A very large network across the Archdiocese of Miami and dioceses statewide (Belen Jesuit, Christopher Columbus, and many more)
- **Other religious & Christian schools** — An extensive network of Christian and faith-based schools
- **Specialty schools** — Montessori, Waldorf, and schools for specific learning needs

READ FLORIDA'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

FLORIDA — PART 2 OF 7

State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Florida replaced the old FSA with FAST — the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking — starting in 2022–23 . FAST uses a progress-monitoring model : instead of one high-stakes spring test, students are checked three times a year so teachers and families can track growth. FAST is built on Florida's B.E.S.T. standards (Benchmarks for...

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- **FAST — ELA Reading** — Progress-monitoring assessments in grades 3–10 (with an earlier-grades reading/screening component)
- **FAST — Mathematics** — Progress-monitoring assessments in grades 3–8
- **End-of-Course (EOC) exams** — Algebra 1, Geometry, Biology 1, Civics, and U.S. History, tied to those courses
- **Statewide Science** — Science assessments at designated grades
- **Alternate assessment** — For eligible students with significant cognitive disabilities

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

FAST is computer-based and given as three checkpoints across the year (commonly called PM1, PM2, and PM3 — fall, winter, and spring), with the final window serving as the year's summative result. The progress-monitoring design aims to give faster, more frequent feedback than a single end-of-year test.

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades and courses are expected to participate; Florida does not offer a formal statewide opt-out. Ask your school about make-up windows and testing-day questions.

AT A GLANCE

Main test	**FAST**
Model	**Progress monitoring 3×/year**
Grades	**3–10 (ELA & Math)**
Replaced	**FSA (2022–23)**
HS EOCs	**Algebra 1, Geometry, Biology 1…**
Grad requirement?	**Yes (Gr. 10 ELA + Algebra 1)**

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

Yes — for specific tests. To earn a standard diploma, Florida students must pass the Grade 10 ELA assessment and the Algebra 1 EOC (or earn an approved concordant/comparative score on the SAT, ACT, or PSAT for ELA, and an alternative for Algebra 1). Other EOCs (Geometry, Biology 1, Civics, U.S. History) typically count as a percentage of…

HOW IT'S SCORED

FAST reports achievement levels 1–5 , with Level 3 generally considered on-grade-level (satisfactory) and the graduation bar set at the required level for the Grade 10 ELA and Algebra 1 tests. Progress-monitoring results also show growth from PM1 to PM3.

READ FLORIDA'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

Florida's standard diploma requires 24 credits , and Florida is one of the few states that still requires passing state assessments to graduate. There are also accelerated options and special designations for high achievers.

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The 24-credit standard diploma includes 4 English, 4 math (including Algebra I and Geometry), 3 science (including Biology), 3 social studies (U.S. history, world history, U.S. government, economics), 1 fine/performing art or CTE, 1 physical education (with health), and electives. A personal financial literacy half-credit is required...

TESTING TO GRADUATE

Yes — Florida requires passing the Grade 10 English Language Arts assessment (FAST) and the Algebra I End-of-Course (EOC) exam to earn a standard diploma. Concordant/comparative scores (like SAT/ACT/PSAT) can substitute in some cases.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Beyond the standard diploma, Florida offers the 18-credit ACCEL option, and diplomas via AICE (Cambridge), IB, and AP programs. High achievers can earn the Scholar or Merit designation on their diploma, plus the Seal of Biliteracy.

AT A GLANCE

Standard diploma	**24 credits**
Exit exam?	**Yes — Grade 10 ELA + Algebra I E...**
Accelerated	**18-credit ACCEL option**
Designations	**Scholar & Merit**
Also	**Personal financial literacy**
Confirm with	**Your district**

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Accelerated options (ACCEL, dual enrollment, AICE, IB, AP) let students graduate with college credit or a faster path. Talk to a counselor about which fits.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Florida requires a personal financial literacy course (a half credit, phasing in), plus civics/government coursework. Confirm the current details with your district.

READ FLORIDA'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

Florida gives each school an A-F grade — one of the longest-running letter-grade systems in the country. Grades are published each year by the Florida Department of Education.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

Florida's A-F grade combines several components: achievement (test proficiency in ELA, math, science, and social studies), learning gains (growth, including for the lowest-performing students), graduation rate , and college/career acceleration . Points across components add up to a percentage that maps to a letter grade.

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school's grade on the Florida Department of Education school-grades pages. Review the component breakdown (especially learning gains) and the trend, not just the letter.

AT A GLANCE

Format	A-F school grades
Based on	Achievement, learning gains, gra...
Tool	FLDOE school grades
Long-running	Since the late 1990s
Look up at	fldoe.org

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How does Florida rate schools?** — Florida assigns an A-F school grade based on achievement, learning gains, graduation rate, and acceleration.
- **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ FLORIDA'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

School Choice

AT A GLANCE

Florida has among the broadest school-choice programs in the country . Its scholarships are universal-eligible (open to essentially all K-12 students, with priority for lower-income families), and are administered by scholarship-funding organizations like Step Up For Students . Florida also has a very large public charter sector.

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

Florida's main programs include the Family Empowerment Scholarship (for educational options and for students with unique abilities) and the long-running Florida Tax Credit Scholarship (which has been converted toward a tax-credit ESA). Together they let eligible families use state-supported funds for private-school tuition and approved...

ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility is broadly universal (all Florida K-12 students can apply), with priority for lower-income families. Confirm current income priorities and any caps.

APPLYING

Apply through a state-approved scholarship-funding organization (such as Step Up For Students). Watch the application window and confirm requirements on the official site.

AT A GLANCE

Programs	Family Empowerment + FL Tax Cred...
Type	Scholarships/ESAs (universal-eli...
Scale	Among the largest in the U.S.
Admin	Step Up For Students & others
Plus	Extensive public charters
Confirm with	The scholarship organization

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Does Florida have a private-school-choice program?** — Yes — Florida has among the broadest, universal-eligible scholarship programs in the U.S.
- **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ FLORIDA'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Florida educator certification is handled by the Florida Department of Education . You earn a Temporary Certificate (which lets you begin teaching) and then a Professional Certificate after meeting all requirements, including the FTCE exams.

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- **General Knowledge Test (GK)** — Basic skills in reading, writing, and math
- **Professional Education Test (PEd)** — Pedagogy and professional knowledge
- **Subject Area Examination (SAE)** — The content test for your certification subject
- **FELE** — For those seeking educational-leadership certification

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency

AT A GLANCE

Agency	**Florida Department of Education**
Basic skills	**FTCE General Knowledge**
Pedagogy	**FTCE Professional Education**
Subject	**FTCE Subject Area Exam(s)**

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Florida, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams) are...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with Floridas agency and your current state

READ FLORIDA'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
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Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

Florida's best-known state aid is the lottery-funded Bright Futures merit scholarship, alongside need-based grants — all administered by the Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) within the Florida Department of Education. Florida also accepts AICE, IB, and AP results toward Bright Futures eligibility.

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- **Florida Student Assistance Grant (FSAG)** — Need-based aid for Florida residents at eligible in-state colleges.
- **Effective Access to Student Education (EASE)** — Tuition assistance for Florida residents attending eligible private, nonprofit Florida colleges.

MERIT & LOTTERY SCHOLARSHIPS

- **Florida Bright Futures — Academic Scholars** — Covers 100% of tuition and fees at Florida public colleges for top students (GPA, test scores, and service hours).
- **Florida Bright Futures — Medallion Scholars** — Covers 75% of tuition and fees — the next tier of the program.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Florida offers the popular Florida Prepaid College Plan (lock in tuition) and the Florida 529 Savings Plan .

DEADLINES & TIMING

Submit the FFAA for Bright Futures by graduation, and file the FAFSA early for need-based grants (which are limited). State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific...

AT A GLANCE

Merit	Bright Futures (Academic & Medal...
Need-based	Florida Student Assistance Grant
Private colleges	EASE Grant
Prepaid/529	Florida Prepaid & 529 Savings
Agency	OSFA (Florida DOE)
Funded by	State lottery (Bright Futures)

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- **Register with OSFA** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How do I get Florida state aid?** — File the FAFSA (and any state form) by the deadline; OSFA administers the programs.
- **Is it need-based or merit?** — Both — Florida offers need-based grants and merit scholarships.
- **Are the deadlines earlier than federal?** — Usually yes — file early, as some aid is first-come.
- **Can I use it out of state?** — Most Florida aid is for in-state schools; check each program.
- **Does this list private scholarships?** — No — this guide covers official state programs only.

READ FLORIDA'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
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