

## History of Bright Futures Scholarships

In 1989, while home education was still relatively unknown, under attack by the teachers' union, and Democrats controlled the House, Senate and Governor's office, Rep. Daniel Webster successfully included home education students in the Florida Undergraduate Scholar's Fund Scholarships. In order to win support for his amendment, Rep. Webster had to agree to a 50-point higher SAT score for home education students than was required for public school students. The higher test score was a trade off for not having a GPA requirement in high school courses that were adopted by the Board of Regents and recommended by the State Board of Community Colleges as college-preparatory academic courses. Note also that home education students had to have attended a home education program exclusively during grades 9 through 12. At that time home education students had no options. If they started the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in home education, they could not go back into the public school system or a traditional private school without starting over at 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The Florida Undergraduate Scholars' Fund became the Bright Futures Academic Scholarship in 1997.

### 1989 Florida Statutes

#### **240.402 Florida Undergraduate Scholars' Fund---**

(1) There is created a Florida Undergraduate Scholars' Fund, to be administered by the Department of Education. The department shall award scholarships to each Florida student who:

(a) 2. Has obtained a 3.5 unweighted grade point average on a 4.0 scale, or the equivalent, in high school subjects acceptable for credit toward a diploma and has scored 1,200 or above on the combined verbal and quantitative parts of the Scholastic Aptitude Test of the college Entrance Examination or an equivalent score on the American College Testing Program; or

3. Has attended a home education program during grade levels 9 through 12 according to the provisions of s.232.02(4) and has scored 1,250 or above on the combined verbal and quantitative parts of the Scholastic Aptitude Test of the College Entrance Examination or an equivalent score on the American College Testing Program.

(c) Receives a Florida high school diploma, or its equivalent as described in s. 229.814. Any student who is enrolled on a full-time basis in the early admission program of an eligible postsecondary institution or has attended a home education program during grade levels 9 through 12 according to the provisions of s. 232.02(4) shall be exempt from this requirement.

#### **Commentary:**

Starting in 1994, HEF began to increase the awareness and education of legislators about home education through a full time lobbyist in Tallahassee. By 1997, home education was emerging as an acceptable way to meet compulsory attendance and to educate a child. Home education students were being accepted at Harvard, were winning national contests, and becoming more mainstream.

The SAT scores were recentered in 1995 which in effect lowered the required SAT score. A SAT test score on the original scale of 1180 became a 1250 on the recentered scale. Or, another way to look at it is that home education students from 1989 to 1997

actually had to score a 1310 on the recentered SAT to qualify for the Florida Academic Scholars Fund Scholarship.

The Bright Futures' Scholarship Program was created in 1997, and the Florida Undergraduate Scholars' Fund became the Florida Academic Scholars Award. The bill initially required home education students to have a 50-point higher score on the SAT, since that precedent had been set in the Florida Undergraduate Scholars' Fund.

Even though the required 1250 was actually a lower score, due to the recentering, most legislators were not aware of this and Brenda was able to successfully argue that a 1250 test score indicated a student had both a good education and the necessary skills to demonstrate mastery regardless of how the student learned the information. She was able to keep the exception of a GPA and course requirement for home education students while getting the score lowered to the same score of 1250 for public and private school students. She was also able to limit the years in home education to just 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, rather than the previously required four years. The requirement of a minimum of 75 hours of community service was added for all students. Following are the statutes passed in 1997.

### **1997 Florida Statutes**

#### **240.40205 Florida Academic Scholars award.—**

(1) A student is eligible for a Florida Academic Scholars award if the student meets the general eligibility requirements for the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program and the student:

(a) Has achieved a 3.5 unweighted grade point average on a 4.0 scale, or its equivalent, in high school courses that are adopted by the Board of Regents and recommended by the State Board of Community Colleges as college-preparatory academic courses; and

(b) Has attained at least the score identified by rules of the Department of Education on the combined verbal and quantitative parts of the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the Scholastic Assessment Test, or the recentered Scholastic Assessment Test of the College Entrance Examination, or an equivalent score on the American College Testing Program; or

(c) **Has attended a home education program according to s. 232.02(4) during grades 11 and 12, and has attained at least the score identified by rules of the Department of Education** on the combined verbal and quantitative parts of the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the Scholastic Assessment Test, or the recentered Scholastic Assessment Test of the College Entrance Examination, or an equivalent score on the American College Testing Program; or.....

Effective with the 1998-1999 school year, a student must complete a program of community service work, as approved by the district school board or the administrators of a nonpublic school, which shall include a **minimum of 75 hours of service work** and require the student to identify a social problem that interests him or her, develop a plan for his or her personal involvement in addressing the problem, and, through papers or other presentations, evaluate and reflect upon his or her experience.

### **1997 Florida Statutes**

#### **240.40208 Eligibility for the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program; transition.—**

(3) Effective for the 1997-1998 academic year, a student is eligible for an initial award of a Florida Merit Scholarship if the student:

(b) Has completed a college-preparatory curriculum in 1997 through an approved home school program and has attained a score of 970 on the combined verbal and quantitative parts of the recentered Scholastic Assessment Test of the College Entrance Examination, or an equivalent score on the American College Testing Program. Eligibility shall be determined in the same manner as for public school students. For students whose parents are unable to document a college-preparatory curriculum, a score of 1070 on the SAT, or equivalent score on the ACT, shall be required for award eligibility.

### **Commentary:**

A new lower level scholarship was added in 1997 when the Bright Futures Scholarship Program was created. The Merit Scholarship (later renamed Medallion) provided students who earned a minimum score of 970 a scholarship equal to 75% of tuition and fees in a public postsecondary institution. Prior to the creation of this scholarship, students who missed the 1270 SAT score by only 1 point were unable to get any assistance from the state for college tuition. This scholarship also set a precedent because it was not based on financial need. It was based strictly on the hard work and educational achievements of students.

The Bright Futures Scholarship Program came under a lot of attack for a period of about 5 years by groups that wanted to make the Merit Scholarship a needs-based scholarship rather than a merit-based scholarship. They argued that low income students were not able to go to college because the state did not provide enough needs-based scholarships.

Brenda fought for 5 years against an amendment that would require parents of all students to fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aide (FAFSA). This application requires a lot of personal financial information which is not necessary for the US Dept. of Education or the Florida Dept. of Ed. to have, if the scholarship is not needs-based. For several years the whole Merit/ Medallion program was in jeopardy, and in 2002, the DOE made the FAFSA form a requirement by rule so they could collect the information they wanted. HEF objected to the FAFSA because it is such an invasion of privacy, but it became apparent that this requirement was necessary in order to preserve the lower level scholarship.

In 1997, Brenda was able to get equal requirements for home education students in the new Merit Scholarship with the same SAT score. However, home education students had to document the GPA in the required 15 courses in the same manner as public school students. The DOE began requiring coursework from regionally accredited programs such as the American School, University of Florida and University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Since qualification by this method was not possible for or not chosen by most home education students, another option was added for parents who did not want to provide that kind of documentation. Student could qualify without a GPA or documentation of coursework with a 100-point higher SAT score.

Simultaneously, beginning in the summer of 1996, HEF Board member, Bob Muni and Brenda Dickinson worked with Alachua Co. and Orange Co. on the first Advisory Board of Project Orange, which later became the Florida Virtual School. Brenda lobbied for the

Florida Virtual School funding and establishment and served on the Board until 2001 when a law was passed to give the Board of Trustees the authority to operate the school.

By 2002, with the inclusion of home education students in dual enrollment and the Florida Virtual School, home-educated students had a way to document both the 15 required courses and the GPA to qualify with the 970 SAT score. However, very few home educated students have used this option. Most qualify with the 1070 SAT score.

## **2005 Florida Statutes**

### **1009.537 Eligibility for the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program; transition.—**

3) Effective for the 1997-1998 academic year, a student is eligible for an initial award of a Florida Merit Scholarship if the student:

(a)1. Is scheduled to graduate from high school in 1997;

2. Completes, or is enrolled in all courses required to complete, the high school college-preparatory coursework required in this act;

3. Achieves an unweighted grade point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale, or the equivalent, in high school courses that are adopted by the <sup>1</sup>Board of Regents and recommended by the <sup>1</sup>State Board of Community Colleges as college-preparatory academic courses; and

4. Earns a score of 970 or above on the combined verbal and quantitative parts of the recentered Scholastic Assessment Test of the College Entrance Examination, or an equivalent score on the ACT Assessment Program; or

(b) **Has completed a college-preparatory curriculum in 1997 through an approved home school program and has attained a score of 970 on the combined verbal and quantitative parts of the recentered Scholastic Assessment Test of the College Entrance Examination, or an equivalent score on the ACT Assessment Program. Eligibility shall be determined in the same manner as for public school students. For students whose parents are unable to document a college-preparatory curriculum, a score of 1070 on the SAT, or equivalent score on the ACT, shall be required for award eligibility.**

Many students taught by their parents are enrolled in nontraditional schools and qualify with the 970 SAT score, because the private school documents the 15 required courses and the GPA. Therefore, students who are taught at home have 3 ways to qualify for the Bright Futures Medallion Scholarship.

Many home educated students are getting all or part of their tuition and books paid for by with scholarships as a result of HEF,s work on dual enrollment, the Florida Virtual School and Bright Futures scholarships. Florida has recognized home education as a equal and viable way to meet compulsory attendance and has provided opportunities to home educated students that are not available in many other states. This has been all been possible because Florida has a full time lobbyist in Tallahassee.