

Florida Shines

College and Career Handbook

**EXPLORE YOUR INTERESTS & PLAN FOR
LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL.**

- **Discover Yourself & Set Goals**
- **Explore Educational Options**
- **Application & Admission Process**
- **Paying for College & Training**
- **Skills for Success**



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Welcome Letter to Students

Your future is full of possibilities—and FloridaShines is here to help you explore them.

This College and Career Handbook is designed to help you begin thinking about life after high school. Whether your plans include college, career and technical education, military, apprenticeships, or another path, this handbook will guide you as you explore options, set goals, and start planning your future.

One of the best things you can do is start early. Taking time now to explore careers, learn about education and training opportunities, and think about your interests can help you make confident decisions later. As you work through this handbook, be curious—ask questions, research your options, and keep an open mind about the many pathways available to you.

Inside, you will find activities and resources to help you discover your strengths, explore career fields, and learn about programs and opportunities that can help you reach your goals. You will also learn about tools available through FloridaShines to support your research on colleges and training programs, careers, and opportunities across Florida.

Your future belongs to you. By exploring your options, asking questions, and taking an active role in planning your next steps, you are already beginning an important journey.

The FloridaShines logo, featuring the word "FloridaShines" in blue text, with a small yellow star above the letter "i".

FloridaShines is proud to support students, families, and educators in exploring possibilities and taking ownership of bright futures ahead.

Message to Parents and Guardians

Families play an important role in helping students explore their interests and plan for life after high school. This College and Career Handbook is designed to support those conversations by providing activities and information about career pathways, education and training options, and resources available through FloridaShines.

As your student works through this handbook, encourage them to share what they are learning, discuss their goals, and explore opportunities that match their interests. Together, these conversations can help students build confidence and begin planning their paths toward successful futures.



How to Use This Handbook

This College and Career Handbook is designed to help students explore their interests, learn about career pathways, and plan for life after high school. The handbook includes information, activities, and resources to guide students as they begin thinking about their goals and future opportunities.

Each student can work through the sections at their own pace. Each section introduces a different part of the planning process—from discovering personal interests and exploring career options to researching education and training pathways and preparing for the workforce. Along the way, activities and reflection prompts will help students think about what they enjoy, what they are good at, and what steps they can take next.

Parents, guardians, and educators are encouraged to use this handbook as a conversation starter. Reviewing sections together and discussing the activities can help students better understand their options and feel more confident about planning their futures.

The goal of this handbook is not to have all the answers right away. Instead, it is meant to help students ask questions, explore possibilities, and begin building plans for their futures.



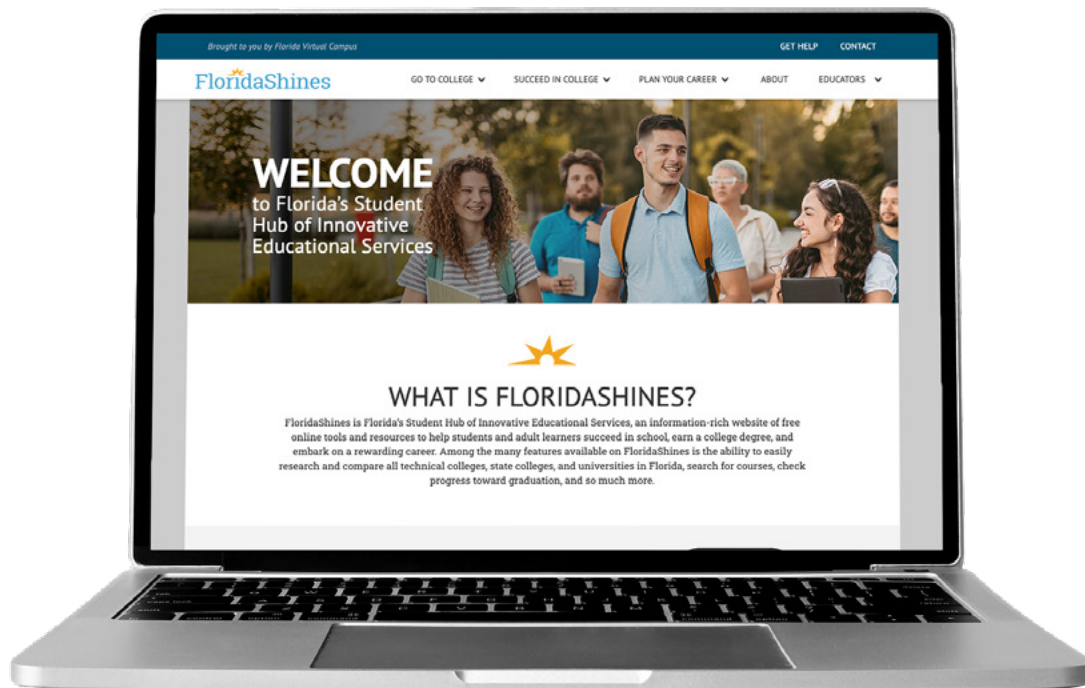
This icon highlights helpful tips and conversation starters for parents and families. Look for these throughout the handbook for ideas on how to support students as they explore careers, education options, and future goals.

Brought to You by FloridaShines

This handbook is brought to you by FloridaShines, Florida's student hub for education and career planning. FloridaShines provides free online tools and resources to help students explore careers, research colleges and training programs, find internships, and plan their next steps after high school.

Through FloridaShines, students can access helpful tools such as career exploration activities, college and program searches, and information about paying for college and training. These resources are designed to help students discover opportunities, make informed decisions, and plan pathways toward their future goals.

Visit FloridaShines.org to explore these resources and learn more about the many education and career opportunities available across Florida.



Disclaimer

The information contained in this handbook is based on official resources published by the Florida Department of Education, the Florida Board of Governors, and the Office of Student Financial Assistance. Because college and university admissions requirements may change as a result of policies and rules adopted by the State Board of Education and the Board of Governors, students should refer to official institutional and state resources for the most current information.

How Ready Am I?

Before you dive into this handbook, it is helpful to take a moment to reflect on your confidence and readiness for making decisions about your future. Everyone is at a different stage in exploring education and career options, and it is okay if you are just starting to think about these things.

Ask yourself questions such as:

- How confident do I feel about what I want to do after high school?
- Do I know what types of education or training I might be interested in?
- Have I explored my interests and strengths enough to identify potential careers?
- Am I comfortable asking questions and seeking help from adults, teachers, or counselors?



Your answers do not need to be perfect—this is just a starting point. Being honest about where you are now can help you focus on the areas where you want to learn more or gain experience.

Use this handbook to explore your interests, ask questions, and take small steps toward building the knowledge and confidence you will need to make decisions about your future. Remember, being “ready” does not mean having all the answers—it means being curious, engaged, and willing to take ownership of your journey.

Activity

Check how confident you feel in each area right now. There are no right or wrong answers!

How Confident Do I Feel?	Not Yet	Somewhat	Pretty Confident	Very Confident
 I know what I want to do after high school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
 I know the types of training or education I might be interested in.	☐	☐	☐	☐
 I have explored my interests and strengths enough to identify potential careers.	☐	☐	☐	☐
 I am comfortable asking questions and seeking help from adults, teachers, or counselors.	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Discover Yourself & Set Goals

The FloridaShines Career Interest Activity: Discovering Your Career Goals

Choosing a career path can feel like a big decision, but you do not have to figure it all out at once. One of the best ways to start is by learning more about your interests, strengths, and what motivates you.

Think about questions such as:

- What subjects do you enjoy most in school?
- Do you prefer working with people, technology, ideas, or hands-on projects?
- What types of problems do you enjoy solving?



Exploring these questions can help you identify career fields that may be a good fit for you.

The FloridaShines Career Interest Activity

If you are not sure where to start, the [Career Interest Activity](#) on FloridaShines is a great tool to help you explore possibilities.

This short activity asks questions about the types of tasks and environments you enjoy. Based on ***your responses***, it identifies career cluster areas that align with your interests and connects you to:

- Career pathways you may want to explore
- Programs offered by Florida colleges and technical schools
- Opportunities to learn more about careers in high-demand fields

The results can help you start thinking about possible majors, training programs, and careers that match what you enjoy.

Interest Activity – Write Down Top 3 Career Clusters

1. Career Cluster	
2. Career Cluster	
3. Career Cluster	

Xello

Xello is all about your future and helping you create a map to get there. Xello is an engaging, fun-to-use program offered through most of Florida's public school districts. You can access Xello online, even from your phone. Through its full suite of career planning tools, it will help you create your very own, unique roadmap to your future.



Explore Options & Create a Plan

You can explore thousands of careers and majors. Watch interviews with professionals in the field. Follow your curiosity from a favorite subject, to a job, to a career. The information you uncover will give you a visual glimpse into your future. Then, create plans that outline the steps needed to achieve school, career, and life goals.

Build Self-
knowledge



Explore
Options



Create
a Plan



Learn &
Reassess

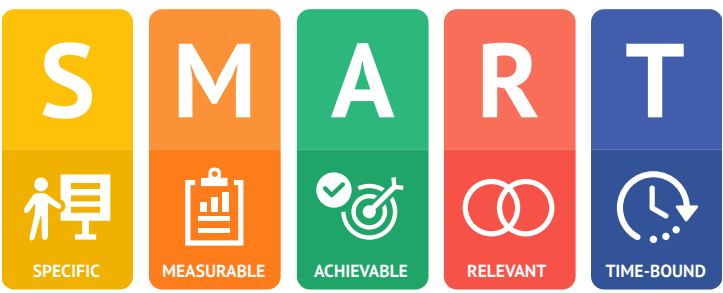


Want to Know More?

With Xello, thinking about your future can be fun. For more information, please contact your school.

Goal Setting

Setting goals can help you stay focused and motivated as you plan for life after high school. Start by thinking about your long-term goals, such as the career you might want to pursue or the type of education or training you hope to complete. Then, break those ideas into short-term goals—the steps you can take now—such as choosing classes, exploring careers, or getting involved in activities that build useful skills.



A helpful way to think about goals is using the **SMART** approach, which means making goals **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound**. This helps turn big dreams into manageable steps. Remember, you do not have to accomplish everything at once—start with goals that are realistic and meaningful to you. As you grow and gain new experiences, your goals may change, and that is part of the journey toward discovering what you want to do next.

Examples of SMART Goals:

- I will complete the Career Interest Activity by the end of the month.
- I will complete a draft of my resume in one week.
- I will raise my math grade from a C to a B by the end of the semester by attending tutoring once a week.

Goals Activity – Write Down 3 Long and/or Short Term Goals

Goal 1 – Long Term Short Term

Goal 2 – Long Term Short Term

Goal 3 – Long Term Short Term

High School Diploma Requirements

To earn a standard high school diploma in Florida, most students complete the 24-credit program, which includes courses in core subjects, electives, and statewide assessment requirements.

This pathway helps ensure students graduate with a strong academic foundation while also allowing flexibility to explore career interests, advanced coursework, and career and technical education opportunities.

Minimum Graduation Requirements

To graduate, students must earn **24 total credits** in high school including:

Subject Area	Credits Required
English Language Arts	4 credits
Mathematics (must include Algebra I and Geometry)	4 credits
Science (including Biology)	3 credits
Social Studies - World History - U.S. History - U.S. Government (½ credit) - Economics (½ credit)	3 credits
Fine or Performing Arts, Speech & Debate, or Career & Technical Education	1 credit
Physical Education (includes health concepts)	1 credit
Electives chosen based on student interests or career goals	8 credits
TOTAL	24 credits

Additional Requirements

In addition to completing coursework, students must also:

- Earn at least a 2.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale
- Pass required statewide assessments, including Grade 10 English Language Arts and the Algebra I End-of-Course assessments
- Complete at least one online course during high school

Other Diploma Pathways

Florida also offers several additional pathways that may fit different learning goals:

- [Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) pathway](#)
- 18-credit ACCEL option (accelerated graduation track)
- International Baccalaureate (IB) program
- Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) program



**Pro
Tip**

Each student should work with their school counselor to select the pathway that best supports their college and career plans.

Making the Most of High School Opportunities

Preparing for college or career training while in high school can feel overwhelming, but breaking the process into smaller steps can make it much easier. The FloridaShines [“Get Ready for College”](#) checklists are designed to help you stay organized and focused throughout your high school journey.

These checklists provide year-by-year guidance for freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, highlighting important actions such as exploring careers, researching colleges, preparing for admissions tests, applying for financial aid, and completing applications. By following the suggested steps each year, you can build a strong plan for life after high school.



**Pro
Tip**

Use the checklists in this handbook as a guide to help you stay on track, meet important deadlines, and feel confident as you prepare for your next step after graduation.

CTE Opportunities

[Career and Technical Education \(CTE\)](#) programs allow you to explore careers while gaining real-world skills that prepare you for college and the workforce. These programs combine classroom learning with hands-on experiences in fields such as healthcare, information technology, engineering, business, agriculture, and many more.

Participating in a CTE program can help you discover what interests you while building valuable skills that employers look for.

CTE Programs May Offer Opportunities Such As:

Career-Focused Programs of Study - CTE programs are organized around specific career fields and help students develop technical knowledge and practical skills related to that industry.

Program Completions - Completing a CTE program shows that you have gained a set of specialized skills within a career area. Program completion can demonstrate commitment and readiness for further education or entry-level employment.

Industry Certifications - Many CTE programs prepare you to earn industry-recognized certifications. These credentials show employers that you have mastered specific skills that meet industry standards.

Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) - CTSOs are student organizations connected to CTE programs that allow you to develop leadership skills, compete in career-related events, and connect with other students who share your interests. Examples include organizations such as SkillsUSA, Future Business Leaders of America, Health Occupations Students of America, and Distributive Education Clubs of America.

Exploring CTE opportunities can help you discover what you enjoy, build confidence in your abilities, and begin developing skills that will support your future career goals.

FloridaShines offers a collection of [Career Clusters webpages and downloadable worksheets](#) designed to help you explore different career fields and learn how they connect to your interests and goals. Each of Florida's 17 Career Clusters has its own webpage with information about the types of careers in that field, the skills those careers require, and examples of related education and training pathways.

What Is Florida Dual Enrollment?

Dual Enrollment allows high school students to take college courses and earn credit toward both their high school diploma and a college degree at the same time. These courses can count toward a high school diploma, a career certificate, or even a college degree. Dual enrollment is available to public, private, and home school students and can be taken through Florida colleges, universities, technical colleges, or eligible private institutions.



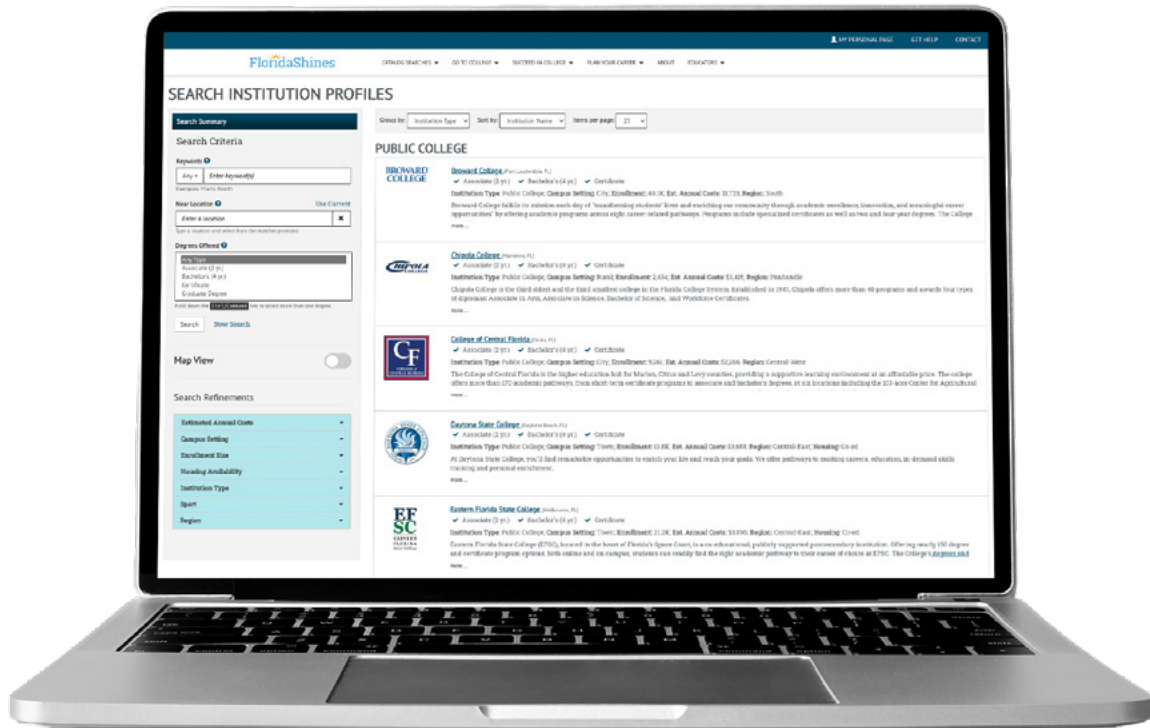
Watch the Video: What is Dual Enrollment



3. Explore Educational Options

FloridaShines Catalog

The [FloridaShines Catalog](#) is an online tool that helps you explore programs, certificates, and online courses offered by Florida's public colleges and universities, as well as the state's technical colleges and career centers. You can access the catalog any time at [FloridaShines.org](#).



The catalog acts as a convenient one-stop resource where you can search for programs, compare options, and find the courses you need to stay on track toward graduation.

You can also use the catalog to:

- Explore degree programs and certificates across Florida
- Learn more about Florida's different post-secondary institutions
- Find online courses offered by multiple institutions
- See which classes have no textbook costs, helping reduce expenses

3. Explore Educational Options

Florida College Options: What Are the Differences?

Florida offers several types of colleges and career training programs. Each option is designed to help students reach different educational and career goals. Understanding the differences can help you choose the path that fits you best.

State Universities	State Colleges	Technical Colleges and Centers
A state university is a public, four-year institution where students can earn bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. State universities offer a wide range of academic programs and often focus on research, innovation, and advanced study. Many students attend a state university after graduating from high school and spend about four years earning a bachelor's degree. • Public, four-year universities • Offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees • Strong focus on academics, research, and innovation • Offer a large variety of majors such as: ■ Business ■ Education ■ Science ■ Engineering ■ Health fields ■ Arts and humanities • Most students enroll after high school • Bachelor's degrees typically take about four years Great for Students Who: • Want a traditional college experience • Are interested in research or advanced degrees • Want many major and career options	A state college is a public college that offers both two-year and select four-year degree programs. Students can earn associate degrees (usually in about two years), workforce certificates, and some bachelor's degrees in career-focused fields. State colleges often offer smaller class sizes and can be a more affordable option. Many students begin their education at a state college and later transfer to a state university to complete a bachelor's degree. • Public colleges offering: ■ Two-year associate degrees ■ Career certificates ■ Some four-year bachelor's degrees in career-focused fields • An associate degree usually takes about two years • Often offer: ■ Lower tuition ■ Smaller class sizes • Many students choose this path to: ■ Stay close to home ■ Prepare for a career ■ Transfer to a state university Great for Students Who: • Want to save money on the first two years of college • Prefer smaller campuses • Plan to continue their education at a university	Technical colleges and centers focus on hands-on job training and career skills. Instead of traditional college degrees, these schools offer certificates and diploma programs designed to prepare students for specific careers. Programs are often shorter and can lead directly to employment in high-demand industries. • Focus on hands-on career training • Public colleges and centers offer: ■ Certificates ■ Diplomas ■ Industry certifications • Programs prepare students for careers such as: ■ Healthcare ■ Automotive technology ■ Construction ■ Culinary arts ■ Information technology ■ Skilled trades • Programs may take a few months to one to two years • Often work closely with local employers Great for Students Who: • Want to start working sooner • Prefer hands-on learning • Want training for a specific career or trade

State Universities

Florida's **State University System** includes 12 public universities located across the state. Many of these universities also offer branch campuses, research centers, and online programs, giving students flexible options for how and where they learn. State universities offer a wide range of academic opportunities, including bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and professional degrees. Students can take classes on campus, online, or through a mix of both, depending on their program and preferences.



State University System Fast Facts

- There are 12 public universities across Florida
- 430,000+ students are enrolled statewide
- Average tuition and fees for Florida residents are about \$200 per credit hour, or approximately \$6,000 for 30 credit hours (two semesters)
- 11 honors colleges and honors programs are available for high-achieving students
- Hundreds of fully online degree programs are offered across the system
- Universities offer programs in fields such as business, education, health, engineering, science, the arts, and more

Admission to a State University

To apply to one of Florida's state universities, students must meet minimum admissions requirements. Universities review several factors during the admissions process, including:

- Completion of a college preparatory high school curriculum
- Grade Point Average (GPA)
- College entrance exam scores (such as the SAT or ACT)
- Additional academic achievements or application materials, depending on the university

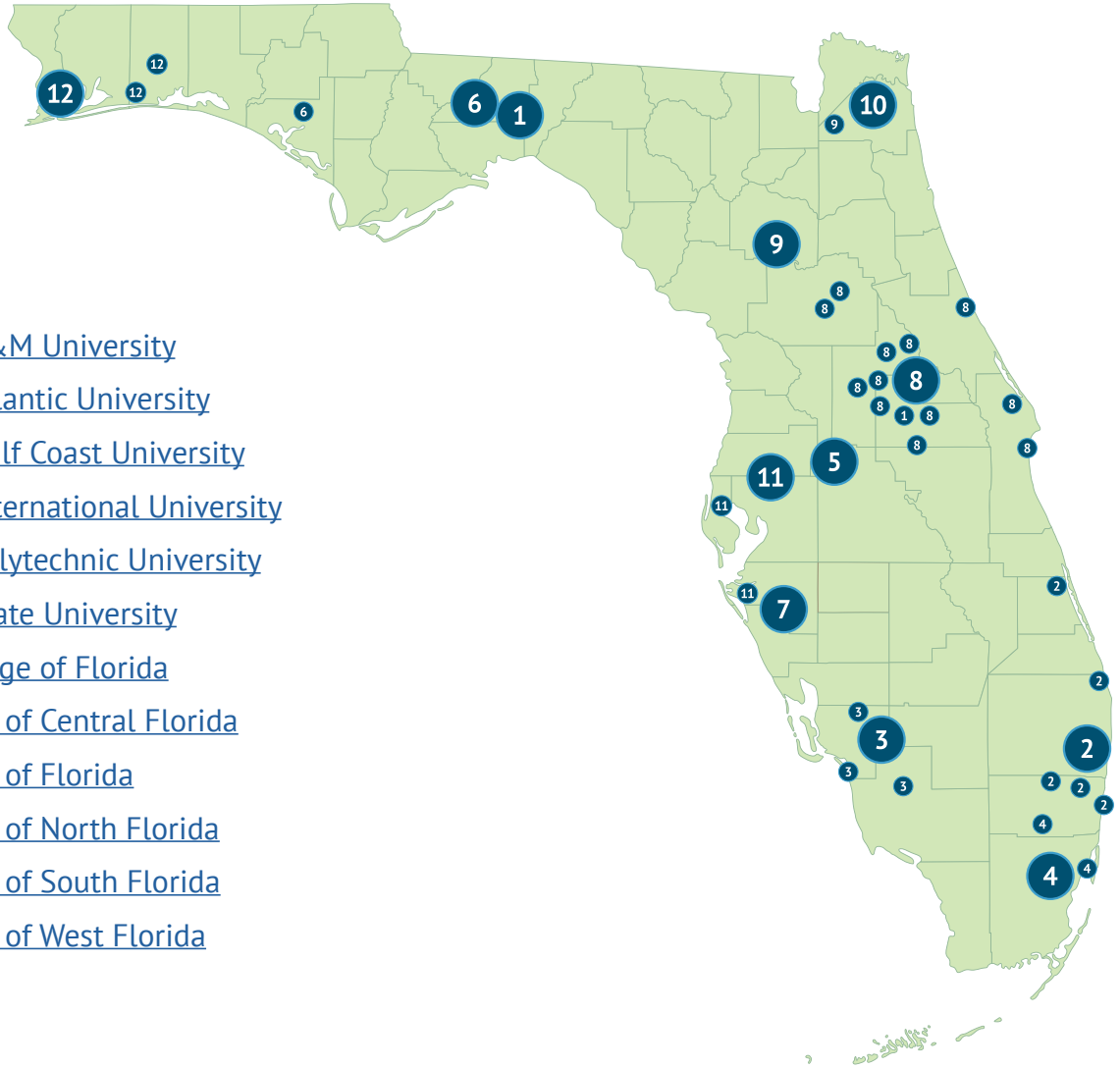
While all universities share minimum requirements, each institution may have additional or higher standards depending on the program or the number of applicants. Students are encouraged to explore each university's admissions website for the most up-to-date information.

3. Explore Educational Options

Florida's Universities

Florida's State University System includes:

1. [Florida A&M University](#)
2. [Florida Atlantic University](#)
3. [Florida Gulf Coast University](#)
4. [Florida International University](#)
5. [Florida Polytechnic University](#)
6. [Florida State University](#)
7. [New College of Florida](#)
8. [University of Central Florida](#)
9. [University of Florida](#)
10. [University of North Florida](#)
11. [University of South Florida](#)
12. [University of West Florida](#)



Talented Twenty (T20) Program

The Talented Twenty Program is a state university admissions category that guarantees admission to one of Florida's State University System universities (not necessarily the university of your choice) if you:

- Graduate with a standard diploma from a Florida public high school
- Rank in the top 20% of your graduating class after seventh-semester grades are posted
- Complete all 18 college preparatory credits required for state university admission
- Take the ACT or SAT (no minimum score required)

For more information, consult with your school counselor and visit the [Talented Twenty](#) homepage.

State Colleges

The **Florida College System (FCS)** includes 28 public state colleges located throughout the state, with campuses and learning centers serving communities across Florida. These colleges provide accessible and affordable opportunities for students to earn degrees, certificates, and industry credentials. Florida's state colleges offer a wide variety of academic and career-focused programs, including associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, workforce certificates, and industry certification training. Students can take classes in person, online, or through hybrid programs, allowing flexibility for different learning styles and schedules. Many students begin their education at a Florida state college and then transfer to a university to complete a bachelor's degree, while others pursue programs designed to prepare them directly for careers in high-demand fields.

Florida College System Fast Facts

- There are 28 public state colleges
- There are 178 campuses and learning sites
- 300,000+ students are served each year
- 115,000+ degrees and certificates are awarded annually
- They cost \$100–\$110 per credit hour for Florida residents
- They have strong partnerships with local industries to support workforce development
- They provide flexible learning options, including online and hybrid courses

Admission to a State College

Florida's state colleges provide broad access to higher education for students across the state. Most Florida College System institutions have an open-access admissions policy for students who have earned a high school diploma or equivalent.

Students may apply to pursue:

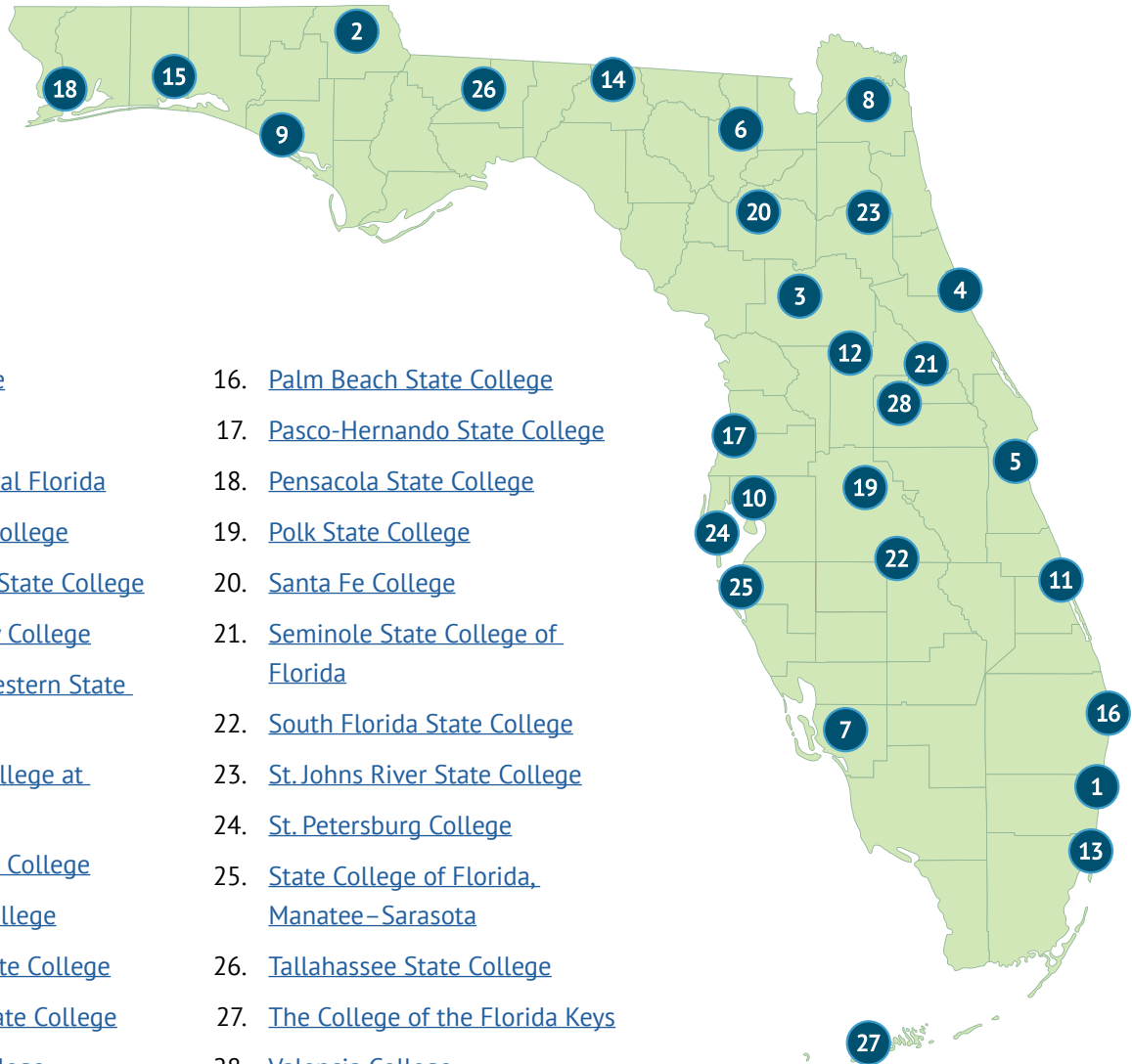
- Associate in Arts (A.A.) degrees, designed for students who plan to transfer to a university
- Associate in Science (A.S.) degrees, which prepare students for entry into the workforce or further study in related bachelor's programs
- Career certificates, which provide specialized training and skills for in-demand careers
- Bachelor's degrees offered at many state colleges in high-demand workforce areas

Students are encouraged to review admissions requirements and program information directly through the college they plan to attend.

3. Explore Educational Options

Florida's State Colleges

Florida's College System includes the following institutions:



1. [Broward College](#)
2. [Chipola College](#)
3. [College of Central Florida](#)
4. [Daytona State College](#)
5. [Eastern Florida State College](#)
6. [Florida Gateway College](#)
7. [Florida SouthWestern State College](#)
8. [Florida State College at Jacksonville](#)
9. [Gulf Coast State College](#)
10. [Hillsborough College](#)
11. [Indian River State College](#)
12. [Lake-Sumter State College](#)
13. [Miami Dade College](#)
14. [North Florida College](#)
15. [Northwest Florida State College](#)
16. [Palm Beach State College](#)
17. [Pasco-Hernando State College](#)
18. [Pensacola State College](#)
19. [Polk State College](#)
20. [Santa Fe College](#)
21. [Seminole State College of Florida](#)
22. [South Florida State College](#)
23. [St. Johns River State College](#)
24. [St. Petersburg College](#)
25. [State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota](#)
26. [Tallahassee State College](#)
27. [The College of the Florida Keys](#)
28. [Valencia College](#)

Technical Colleges

Florida's Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs provide hands-on learning and specialized training that prepare students for careers in high-demand industries. Across the state, Florida has technical colleges and centers operated by school districts, offering programs designed with input from employers and industry leaders. Many programs can be completed in months or one to two years, allowing students to quickly gain the skills and certifications needed to begin careers.

CTE programs focus on real-world learning and are organized into career clusters such as healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, construction, hospitality, and transportation. Students often graduate with industry-recognized certifications that employers value.

Career & Technical Education Fast Facts

- Nearly 50 public technical colleges operate across Florida
- Programs prepare students for careers in healthcare, skilled trades, IT, aviation, construction, manufacturing, and more
- Florida's CTE system serves hundreds of thousands of students each year across secondary and postsecondary programs
- Many programs can be completed in a few months to two years
- Programs are designed in partnership with local employers and workforce needs
- Students may earn industry certifications, technical certificates, or career diplomas

Admission to a Technical College

Technical colleges provide accessible pathways to career training for students who have completed high school or earned an equivalent credential. Some programs also allow dual enrollment opportunities for high school students who want to begin career training early.

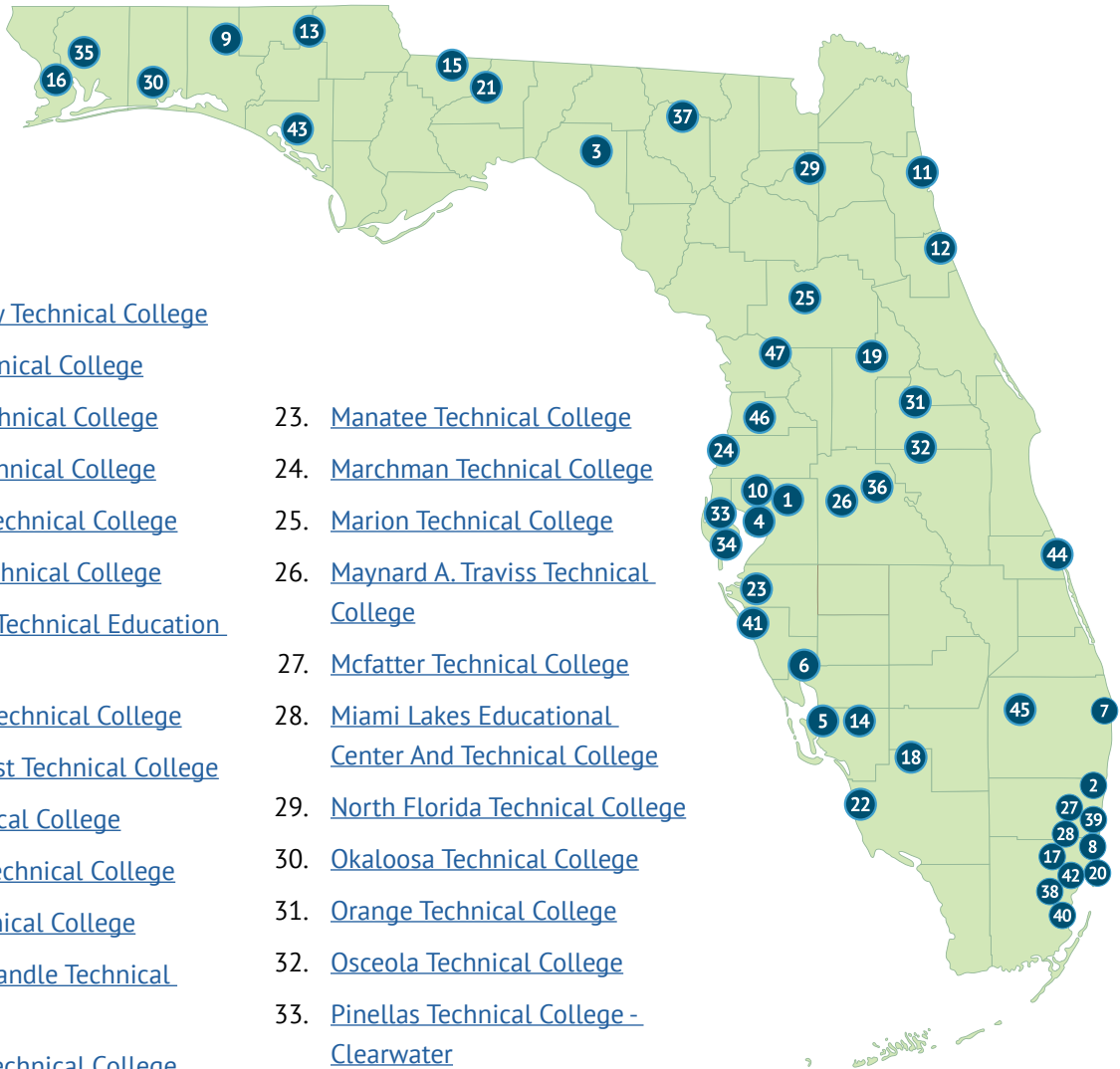
Students may enroll in programs that lead to:

- Career certificates or diplomas
- Industry-recognized certifications
- Apprenticeships or workforce training
- Entry into careers in high-demand technical fields

Because programs focus on specific career skills, students often gain hands-on experience with equipment, tools, and technology used in their fields. Financial aid may be available for many programs, including options such as the Bright Futures Gold Seal Vocational Scholars Award, which can help eligible students pay for career education programs.

3. Explore Educational Options

Florida's Technical Colleges:



- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Aparicio-Levy Technical College | 23. Manatee Technical College | |
| 2. Atlantic Technical College | 24. Marchman Technical College | |
| 3. Big Bend Technical College | 25. Marion Technical College | |
| 4. Brewster Technical College | 26. Maynard A. Traviss Technical College | |
| 5. Cape Coral Technical College | 27. Mcfatter Technical College | |
| 6. Charlotte Technical College | 28. Miami Lakes Educational Center And Technical College | |
| 7. Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center | 29. North Florida Technical College | |
| 8. D.A. Dorsey Technical College | 30. Okaloosa Technical College | |
| 9. Emerald Coast Technical College | 31. Orange Technical College | |
| 10. Erwin Technical College | 32. Osceola Technical College | |
| 11. First Coast Technical College | 33. Pinellas Technical College - Clearwater | |
| 12. Flagler Technical College | 34. Pinellas Technical College - St. Petersburg | |
| 13. Florida Panhandle Technical College | 35. Radford M. Locklin Technical College | |
| 14. Fort Myers Technical College | 36. Ridge Technical College | 42. The English Center |
| 15. Gadsden Technical College | 37. Riveroak Technical College | 43. Tom P. Haney Technical College |
| 16. George Stone Technical College | 38. Robert Morgan Educational Center And Technical College | 44. Treasure Coast Technical College |
| 17. George T. Baker Aviation Technical College | 39. Sheridan Technical College | 45. West Technical Education Center |
| 18. Immokalee Technical College | 40. South Dade Technical College | 46. Wilton Simpson Technical College |
| 19. Lake Technical College | 41. Suncoast Technical College | 47. Withlacoochee Technical College |
| 20. Lindsey Hopkins Technical College | | |
| 21. Lively Technical College | | |
| 22. Lorenzo Walker Technical College | | |

Florida Technical Colleges

Florida's district technical colleges are located across the state and serve communities in 31 school districts, providing training aligned with regional workforce needs.

These centers offer programs in areas such as:

- Healthcare and medical professions
- Automotive and aviation technology
- Construction and skilled trades
- Information technology and cybersecurity
- Culinary arts and hospitality
- Public safety and emergency services

For students who already have a clear career goal—or who prefer hands-on learning and faster entry into the workforce—Career and Technical Education can be an excellent pathway to a rewarding career.

ICUFs / Private Institutions

In addition to public institutions, Florida is home to 30 private, not-for-profit colleges and universities that are members of the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF) and are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

These institutions serve more than 156,000 students across about 160 campuses statewide and award over 20% of Florida's bachelor's degrees and higher. They range in size from small colleges with a few hundred students to larger universities enrolling tens of thousands.

Many students choose private colleges for smaller class sizes, specialized programs, and close-knit campus communities. Financial aid is widely available, with nearly 95% of full-time undergraduate students receiving some form of assistance.

College Visits / Virtual Visits

Visiting an institution's campus can help you decide whether a school feels like the right fit for you. During a campus visit, you can explore the environment, see classrooms and facilities, and learn more about the programs and services available to students. If you are unable to visit in person, many colleges also offer virtual tours that allow you to explore campuses online.

When exploring colleges—either in person or virtually—consider a few key factors that may affect your college experience:

Housing Options

Some students choose to live on campus, while others commute from home or nearby housing. Consider which option works best for your lifestyle and budget.

Transportation and Commuting

Think about how you would travel to campus. If you plan to commute, consider the distance, travel time, and available parking or public transportation.

Campus Resources

Look for resources that support student success, such as tutoring centers, libraries, academic advising, career services, and student organizations.

Campus Environment

Pay attention to the size of the campus, class sizes, and overall atmosphere. Ask yourself if the campus culture feels like a place where you would be comfortable learning and growing.

To help you explore colleges across Florida, FloridaShines offers a [collection of statewide virtual college tours](#) that allow you to learn more about institutions from anywhere. These tours can help you get a sense of different campuses as you begin narrowing down your education options.

Exploring campuses—whether in person or online—can help you make a more informed decision about where you want to continue your education.

3. Explore Educational Options

Campus Visit / Virtual College Visit Checklist

Touring a school—whether in person or virtually—is one of the best ways to see if an institution is the right fit for you. Use this checklist to stay organized, ask meaningful questions, and reflect on what matters most so you can confidently compare your options.

Before the Visit

- ☐ Choose the schools you are interested in. Research in-person and/or virtual tour options at selected institutions.
- ☐ Browse the school's website and research basic details (location, size, majors, campus setting).
- ☐ Identify your institution priorities (programs, cost, campus, location, student life, etc.).
- ☐ Prepare two or three questions to ask.

During the Visit

- ☐ Take notes on academic programs and opportunities.
- ☐ Pay attention to campus support services (advising, tutoring, career services, health services, technology).
- ☐ Explore campus facilities including classrooms, housing, dining, health services, library, fitness center, bookstore, etc.
- ☐ Talk with current students about college and campus life.
- ☐ Notice your overall impression. Can you see yourself here?

Tour guides are often current students at the institution. Take advantage of the opportunity to ask questions to a student who is familiar with the school and campus life.

Questions to Ask on the Tour

- ☐ Why did you choose this school?
- ☐ What are some opportunities for student involvement (campus groups, extracurricular activities, volunteerism, athletics, academic, or special interest student organizations)?
- ☐ What are your classes like?
- ☐ What do you wish you could change about this school?

Do not stop here! Continue exploring other schools to find your best fit!

Making Your Credits Count

What Is Articulation?

In Florida, “articulation” refers to how your credits move from one education level or institution to another without being lost or duplicated. Florida has multiple articulation agreements that help students transition from high school to college, from state colleges to universities, and from career and technical (CTE) programs into college-level degrees. Whether you are earning college credit in high school through dual enrollment, starting at a state college before transferring, or completing a CTE certificate, these agreements help keep you on track toward your goals.

- If you earn an Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree at a state college, you fulfill the general education requirements for a bachelor’s degree at a state university in Florida.
- Because of statewide agreements, most of your credits from a Florida College System institution will transfer and be accepted by a state university.
- But key point: *Admission to a particular university or to a limited-access major is not guaranteed just by transferring.* The articulation system supports credit transfer, not automatic access to every program.

University Transfer-Support Programs

Many Florida universities also offer special programs to support students who plan to start at a state college and then transfer to a university. These programs:

- Connect you with advisors who understand your target university’s requirements
- Help you choose the right courses for your future major
- Sometimes offer extra perks, such as access to campus resources or events

These programs can make the transfer process smoother – but they are not required.

You do not have to join one of these programs to transfer to the university of your choice and joining one does not automatically guarantee admission to a specific university or major.

3. Explore Educational Options

You can explore examples of these university-supported pathways in the table below.

Institution	2+2 Program
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University	IGNITE
Florida Atlantic University	Link2FAU
Florida Gulf Coast University	Destination FGCU
Florida International University	Connect4Success
Florida Polytechnic University	N/A
Florida State University	Aspire Transfer Program through TSC (Traditional, Elite, Honors, Online Options)
New College of Florida	Guaranteed Admission Program
University of Central Florida	Direct Connect to UCF
University of Florida	Gator Engineering @ Santa Fe; Gator Design and Construction @ Santa Fe
University of North Florida	Transfer2UNF
University of South Florida	FUSE
University of West Florida	2UWF

Career Certificate Articulation

Career certificate articulation allows students who complete a CTE program to apply their coursework and industry certifications toward a related postsecondary certificate or AS/AAS degree. This helps reduce duplicate coursework and shortens the time needed to earn a degree. [Statewide articulation agreements](#) outline how specific career certificate programs transfer into aligned college programs.

Military Service Options

Joining the U.S. military is another path you may consider after graduating from high school. Each branch offers training, career opportunities, educational benefits, and financial support for college. To enlist in the military, students typically take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). The ASVAB measures strengths in areas such as math, science, and technical skills; and it helps determine eligibility for enlistment and which military career fields may be a good fit. To learn more about the ASVAB, visit:

<https://www.officialasvab.com>

You can also explore enlistment requirements, career paths, and benefits on the official websites for each branch of the U.S. military:

- United States Air Force – <http://www.airforce.com>
- United States Army – <http://www.goarmy.com>
- United States Coast Guard – <https://www.uscg.mil>
- United States Marine Corps – <http://www.marines.com>
- United States Navy – <http://www.navy.com>



**Pro
Tip**

Speaking with a recruiter or school counselor can also help you learn more about military careers, training opportunities, and educational benefits such as tuition assistance and the GI Bill.

Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) is a high school and college program that allows students to earn a college degree while training to become an officer in the U.S. military. Students who join ROTC attend their regular classes while also taking leadership and military science classes and participating in physical training.

Why Students Choose ROTC

Many students choose ROTC because it can offer:

- Leadership experience
- Scholarships or help paying for college
- A clear career path after graduation
- Opportunities to serve their country

Pre-Apprenticeships / Apprenticeships

Pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships are great options for students who want to learn by doing while preparing for a career. These programs combine paid, hands-on work experience with classroom instruction, allowing you to develop skills directly related to a specific career field.



Watch the Video: Pre-Apprenticeships / Apprenticeships



**Pro
Tip**

Exploring apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships can help you gain real-world experience, valuable skills, and a clear pathway into a rewarding career. If you are interested in exploring apprenticeship opportunities in Florida, you can use the [Apprenticeship Finder Map](#) on the Apprentice Florida website to locate programs near you.

Admissions Requirements - SUS / FCS / Technical College

Florida offers several different pathways after high school, including State Universities (SUS), Florida College System institutions (FCS), Career and Technical Education (CTE) centers, and private institutions. Each type of institution has its own admissions requirements, application timelines, and program expectations.

Because requirements vary by institution and program, students should always review the admissions information for the schools they are interested in and work with their high school counselor for guidance.

No matter which pathway you choose, the application process generally follows the same basic steps. The checklists below can help you stay organized as you prepare to apply.



Use this checklist to stay on track as you apply to a Florida college or university. From applications to test scores and financial aid, these steps will help you stay organized and meet important deadlines.

4. The Application & Admission Process FloridaShines

College / University Checklist

1. Research Colleges and Programs

☐	Explore Florida's public university, colleges, and technical colleges and centers on FloridaShines.org .
☐	Compare programs , campus life, costs, scholarships, and locations.
☐	Check each school's application deadlines and admission requirements.

2. Prepare for and Take Required Tests

☐	Know which tests your college of interest require. - For Florida's public universities, first-year applicants must submit scores from the SAT, ACT, or CLT. Make sure you research each of those and determine which might be best for you. - If your schools are test-optional, confirm whether submitting scores could strengthen your application.
☐	Take tests early enough to allow for retakes if needed.
☐	Test scores may not be automatically sent to your institutions of interest; you may need to send them directly from the testing source.

3. Complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

☐	The FAFSA opens on October 1 each year (for the following academic year).
☐	Florida also uses FAFSA info to determine eligibility for state aid programs (such as Bright Futures and the Florida Student Assistance Grant).
☐	Submit it as early as possible to maximize aid opportunities.
☐	Check out this helpful guide for completing the FAFSA: Steps to Completing the FAFSA .

4. The Application & Admission Process FloridaShines

4. Apply for Scholarships and Florida Bright Futures

☐	The Bright Futures Scholarship Program offers major tuition help for Florida high school grads who meet GPA, test score, and volunteer-hour requirements.
☐	For specific requirements and additional details, use this handy guide to track your progress toward the best Bright Futures scholarship for you!
☐	Make sure to check out other financial programs and scholarships to help pay for college.

5. Gather and Prepare Application Materials

☐	Request transcripts, letters of recommendation, and test scores early.
☐	Should your institution of interest require them, make sure to write and revise your college essays or personal statements.
☐	Create accounts for Common App or school-specific portals. • Make sure to use an appropriate email address for all admissions communication.

6. Apply

☐	Check your email and admissions portal to confirm your application was received.
☐	Continue to check your email should your institution of interest need additional materials or documentation.
☐	Keep your grades up throughout your senior year.
☐	Track admissions decisions.
☐	Decide and accept an offer.
☐	Celebrate!



Use this checklist to guide your next steps toward a career-focused program. Whether you are earning a certification or building hands-on skills, these steps will help you prepare and apply with confidence.

Career & Technical Education (CTE)

Admissions Checklist

Florida
Shines

What is CTE, and is it right for me?

Career & technical training combines classroom lessons with hands-on training to teach you the skills needed for a specific job or trade. Most CTE institutions also offer certifications that can help you get hired and grow in your career. Since CTE programs are shorter and less expensive than 4-year college degrees, you're able to start your career faster and at a lower cost. CTE is a practical and affordable way to get the skills you need for a great job!



CTE Admissions Checklist

Explore Institutions & Programs

- ☐ **Find the Right Technical College or Center for You**
You can see profiles of all technical colleges and centers in Florida at floridashines.org/tech.

- ☐ **Discover a Program or Certificate that Interests You**
Once you've found your CTE institution, use the "Keywords" box to search for programs and certificates that they offer. After that, consider contacting them to find out more about classes and availability.

Gather Your Documents

- ☐ **CASAS Assessment/ Basic Skills Test**
Students enrolled in a career and technical program of 450 hours or more must demonstrate specific levels of reading, language, and mathematic competency. Contact the CTE institution to schedule a test or to see if you're eligible for an exemption.
- ☐ **Transcript**
To enroll in a program, you'll need your unofficial or official transcripts from HS, proof of GED, a college diploma, or TABE results. Contact the CTE institution for more information.
- ☐ **Residency Affidavit**
Florida Residency Declaration requires two (2) documents proving state residency. For a list of documents, visit floridashines.org/residency-for-in-state-tuition.
- ☐ **Time to Apply!**
Visit the CTE institution's website and complete your application.

Discover Financial Resources

- ☐ **Find Ways to Make Your Education Affordable**
There are lots of sources that can help make your education more affordable. Here are a few:
 - **Florida Bright Futures Scholarship**
floridashines.org/bf-scholarships.pdf
 - **Florida's Open Door Grant Program**
floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org
 - **FAFSA: Free Application for Federal Student Aid**
studentaid.gov/fafsa
 - **Florida Financial Aid Application (FFAA)**
floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org

Enroll, Register, and Pay!

- ☐ **Once you've been accepted**, complete the institution's enrollment requirements.
- ☐ **Register** for your first classes!
- ☐ **Pay for your courses** by contacting the institution's Financial Services Office.

For more information about careers
and technical training, visit:
floridashines.org/careers-middle-high-school

Common App / Institution Application

When applying to colleges, you may see two different types of application options: the Common App and an institution-specific application.

The [Common Application](#) is a single online application you can use to apply to many different colleges. Instead of filling out a brand-new application for every school, you complete one main application and then send it to multiple colleges that accept it.

What this means for students:

- You fill out your basic information only once (name, activities, grades, etc.).
- You can apply to multiple schools more easily.
- Some colleges may still ask for extra questions or essays, but most of your information carries over.

An institution-specific application is an application that is created and used by just one college. You must apply directly through that school's website or application portal.

What this means for students:

- You fill out a separate application for each school.
- The questions and format may be different at every college.
- Some schools prefer this because they want more customized information from applicants.

Essays / Personal Statements

Some colleges ask students to submit essays or personal statements as part of the application process. These essays give you the chance to share your story, interests, and goals in your own words. Focus on writing clearly and honestly; and use examples that highlight your achievements, your experiences, or challenges you have overcome. Take time to revise your work, and make sure it reflects your best effort. It is also a good idea to ask a teacher, counselor, or trusted adult to review your essay and provide feedback before you submit it.

Letters of Recommendation

Some colleges and scholarship programs may request letters of recommendation from people who know you well. Teachers, school counselors, coaches, employers, or community leaders are often good choices. When asking for a recommendation, give the person plenty of time to write the letter; and provide helpful information, such as a brief resume, a list of activities, or examples of your accomplishments. This helps them write a stronger letter that highlights your strengths, character, and potential.

4. The Application & Admission Process

A brag sheet is a document where students highlight their achievements, activities, skills, and goals to help others write strong letters of recommendation. It typically includes academic accomplishments, extracurricular involvement, leadership roles, and personal interests, along with reflections on strengths and future plans. Brag sheets give counselors and teachers a fuller picture of the student, making recommendations more detailed and personalized.

Student Brag Sheet for Letter of Recommendation

Student Name:

Graduation Year: **High School:**

This brag sheet is a tool to help your teacher write a strong, personalized recommendation letter for your college applications. Use it to highlight your achievements, strengths, activities, and goals so your teacher has all the details they need to tell your story.

About Me: *Briefly describe who you are, your interests, and what motivates you.*

Academic Highlights: *Mention favorite subjects, achievements, or a project you are proud of.*

Activities & Involvement: *List clubs, sports, jobs, or volunteer work. Include roles and leadership.*

Goals & Future Plans: *Include colleges, programs, or career interests.*

4. The Application & Admission Process

Strengths & Qualities: *List three to five strengths and examples.*

Challenges & Growth: *Describe a challenge and what you learned.*

Why I Am Asking You: *Why did you choose this teacher? What should they highlight?*

Additional Information: *Add anything you would like your recommender to know.*

Logistics

Deadline: Submission Method:

Resume Attached: Yes / No

Requesting Transcripts / Self-Reporting Grades

During the application process, many colleges ask students to self-report their grades and coursework from high school. This means you will enter your classes and grades directly into the application. After you graduate, however, colleges will require an official final transcript from your high school to confirm the information you reported. Be sure to follow your school's process for requesting transcripts and submit them by the deadlines provided by the college.

Standardized Testing

Some colleges and training programs require standardized test scores as part of the admissions process. Common exams include the SAT®, ACT®, and CLT®, which many four-year colleges use to help evaluate a student's academic readiness for college-level work.

For some career and technical education programs, students may be asked to take placement tests such as the TABE® (Test of Adult Basic Education) to help determine the best starting point for coursework.

Many colleges now offer test-optional admissions, meaning students can choose whether to submit SAT, ACT, or CLT scores as part of their application. Because testing requirements vary by institution and program, students should research the requirements for the schools they are interested in and plan ahead for testing dates if scores are required or recommended.



4. The Application & Admission Process FloridaShines

Types of Standardized Testing

SAT

The SAT is a college entrance exam used by many colleges to help evaluate students for admission.

What it tests:

- Reading
- Writing and language
- Math



Good to know:

- Usually taken in 11th or 12th grade
- Accepted by many colleges across the United States
- Some colleges are test-optional, meaning you may not have to submit a score

Think of the SAT as a test that helps colleges understand your college readiness in reading and math.

ACT

The ACT is another college entrance exam, which is similar to the SAT.

What it tests:

- English
- Math
- Reading
- Science
- Writing section (optional)



Good to know:

- Also usually taken in 11th or 12th grade
- Accepted by most colleges in the U.S.
- Some students choose the ACT because they prefer the style or timing of the questions

In general, colleges treat SAT and ACT scores the same, so you can take whichever one works best for you.

CLT

The Classic Learning Test (CLT) is a newer college entrance exam accepted by some colleges.

What it tests:

- Verbal reasoning
- Grammar and writing
- Quantitative reasoning (math)



Good to know:

- Accepted by some universities and scholarship programs
- Often used by classical or liberal arts-focused schools
- Can sometimes be taken online

Not every college accepts the CLT yet, so students should check with the schools they are applying to.

PERT

The Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT) is a placement test, not a college admissions test.

What it is used for:

- Determines which math, reading, and writing classes you should start in once you enroll in college



Good to know:

- Commonly used in Florida colleges
- Helps place students in the right levels of courses (for example, whether or not they need a preparatory math class first)

Think of PERT as a test that helps colleges place you in the right classes, not decide whether or not you are admitted.

TABE

The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) is a test used mainly in adult education or workforce programs.

What it tests:

- Reading
- Math
- Language skills

Good to know:

- Often used for adult education programs, GED prep, or workforce training
- Helps schools understand current skill levels and learning needs



Positive Online Presence

Your online presence is an important part of how you present yourself to colleges, employers, and scholarship organizations. The photos, comments, and posts you share online can create a digital footprint that others may see when they learn more about you. In fact, many employers review publicly available online information when evaluating applicants. Building a positive online presence starts now. Think of your social media and online activity as opportunities to show your interests, achievements, and goals. Sharing accomplishments, school activities, volunteer work, or career interests can help demonstrate who you are and what you care about.

Being ready for college also means being prepared to learn and communicate responsibly in digital environments. Successful online students practice skills such as clear communication, time management, and responsible technology use, which are important for both online learning and professional settings.

Before you post, ask yourself: *Would I be comfortable with a teacher, college admissions officer, or future employer seeing this?* Making thoughtful choices online can help you build a digital reputation that supports your future goals.

Extracurricular Activities

Participating in extracurricular activities is a great way to explore your interests, develop new skills, and connect with your school and community outside of the classroom. These activities can include clubs, sports, student government, performing arts, volunteer work, part-time jobs, internships, or community service. Participating in extracurricular activities helps students build leadership, teamwork, communication, and time management skills, which are valuable for both college and career success. Colleges and scholarship programs also look for students who are engaged in activities that demonstrate commitment, initiative, and personal growth, so getting involved in activities that interest you can help strengthen your future applications.



5. Paying for College & Training

Financial aid is money that helps students pay for college or career training. It can come from federal and state governments, colleges, private organizations, and nonprofit groups. Financial aid can help cover expenses such as tuition, housing, books, supplies, and other education-related costs. As long as you meet basic eligibility requirements, there are many programs available to help make education after high school more affordable.

Each year, students across the United States receive more than \$150 billion in financial aid to help pay for college and career training programs. Taking the time to explore financial aid opportunities can make a big difference in how you plan and pay for your education.

There are several different types of financial aid available—including grants, scholarships, work-study programs, loans, and savings plans—and many students qualify for more than one type of assistance. Understanding these options can help you build a financial plan that supports your education and career goals.

FAFSA

Bright
Futures

Scholarships

College
Savings
Accounts

Grants

Loans

Work-Study

FAFSA

The U.S. Department of Education is the largest provider of federal student financial aid. To apply for federal grants, work-study, and student loans, students should complete the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) each year.

Students are encouraged to submit the FAFSA as soon as it becomes available, typically in December for the following academic year. Completing the FAFSA early helps ensure students are considered for the maximum amount of financial aid.

The FAFSA is also used by many states, colleges, and private organizations to determine eligibility for additional need-based financial aid. Because deadlines for these programs may be earlier than the federal deadline, students should check the specific requirements for their state and the schools they plan to attend.

**Pro
Tip**

Check out these 10 steps to help you get ready to complete your FAFSA application.

10 Steps to Completing the FAFSA

Step 1: Gather Required Information & Documents

You will need these before you start—both your info and (if you are a dependent student) your parents' info:

- Personal & Identification Information
 - Social Security Number (SSN)
 - Driver's license (optional)
 - Alien registration number (if you are not a U.S. citizen but are an eligible non-citizen)
- Financial Information
 - Federal income tax returns (most recent)
 - W-2s or records of money earned
 - Bank statements and records of savings/investments
 - Records of untaxed income (such as child support or veteran benefits)

Tip: You can use the IRS Direct Data Exchange tool during the FAFSA to automatically pull your tax data. This is much faster and less error-prone.

Step 2: Create Your FSA ID

The FSA ID (username + password) lets you sign the FAFSA electronically.

- Go to studentaid.gov/fsa-id
- Create an ID for you and a separate one for a parent (if dependent)
- Each person must have their own unique email address and phone number

Tip: Do not forget to save your FSA ID somewhere safe; you will need it every year.

Step 3: Start Your FAFSA Application

Go to studentaid.gov and click “Start Here.”

- Choose the correct FAFSA year (select the FAFSA for the year you are starting school)
- Log in with your FSA ID
- The form takes about 30–45 minutes if you have your documents ready

Tip: Check out the FAFSA Help Center for any questions you may have.

Step 4: Fill Out Student Information

You will answer basic questions about:

- Your full name, date of birth, mailing address, etc.
- Citizenship and residency status
- Your high school and the colleges you are considering

Tip: You can list up to 20 schools to receive your FAFSA. Include all schools you are even considering.

Step 5: Determine Dependency Status

The FAFSA will ask questions to see if you are a dependent or an independent student.

You are independent only if, for example you:

- Are 24 or older
- Are Married
- Are a veteran or active-duty military
- Have dependents of your own
- Are an orphan, a foster youth, or a ward of the court

Tip: If you are a dependent, you must provide your parents' financial info.

Step 6: Enter Parent Information (if required)

For dependent students:

- Enter your parents' names, birthdates, SSNs, and marital status
- Include tax info, income, and assets (you can use IRS Direct Data Exchange to fill this in automatically)

Tip: If your parents are divorced or separated, report on the parent you lived with most during the past year (and that parent's spouse, if remarried).

Step 7: Provide Financial Information

Now, you will enter financial details:

- Adjusted gross income (AGI)
- Taxes paid
- Untaxed income
- Assets (such as savings, investments, etc.)

Tip: Use the IRS data tool if you can – it saves time and prevents mistakes.

Step 8: Review, Sign, and Submit

- Review everything carefully for typos or wrong numbers
- Sign the form with your FSA ID (and your parent's or guardian's FSA ID, if applicable)
- Click Submit FAFSA

Tip: You will get a confirmation page and an email summarizing your submission.

Step 9: Check Your Student Aid Report (SAR)

Within a few days to a week, you will get a Student Aid Report (SAR) showing:

- Your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) or new Student Aid Index (SAI)
- Any errors you need to correct
- What data colleges will use to calculate your aid

Tip: Only after successfully submitting your Free Application for Federal Student Aid will you receive a Student Aid Report.

Step 10: Review Your Aid Offers

Each college you listed will send a financial aid award letter (usually in the spring) showing:

- Grants
- Scholarships
- Work-study offers
- Federal loans you qualify for

Tip: Compare offers before accepting admission.

Bright Futures

Florida offers many scholarships and grants to help students pay for college. One of the most well-known programs is the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program, which is funded by proceeds from the Florida Lottery. Bright Futures rewards Florida high school students for their academic achievements and community involvement.



Watch the Video: Bright Futures



Depending on the award level, Bright Futures funding can be used at a Florida public university, state college, or career and technical center. It may also be used at many eligible private institutions in Florida. Since the program began, more than 725,000 Florida students have received Bright Futures scholarships to help pay for their educations.

Bright Futures Award Options

Florida Bright Futures offers [four scholarship options](#):

- Florida Academic Scholars (FAS)
- Florida Medallion Scholars (FMS)
- Gold Seal CAPE Scholars (GSC)
- Gold Seal Vocational Scholars (GSV)

Each award has specific requirements based on high school coursework, GPA, test scores, and community service or work hours.

How to Apply

Students must apply for Bright Futures by completing the Florida Financial Aid Application (FFAA).

Important Deadline

Students must submit the FFAA by August 31 after graduating from high school to be considered for a Bright Futures award. Students should work with their school counselor and review the latest eligibility requirements each year, since program details can change based on updates from the Florida Legislature.

Bright Futures Tips

Start planning early! Bright Futures eligibility is based on your high school coursework, GPA, test scores, and service or work hours, so it is important to track your progress throughout high school.

Helpful tips for staying on track:

- Take the required college-prep courses in high school
- Maintain a strong GPA
- Prepare for and take the SAT or ACT
- Complete community service or paid work hours
- Track your progress each year with your school counselor

FloridaShines provides helpful tools—including the Bright Futures planning worksheet included in this handbook—to help students track their progress toward meeting the scholarship requirements. Using this worksheet will help you stay organized and monitor your progress toward earning this scholarship!

Florida Bright Futures Scholarships:

Which One is Right for Me?

FloridaShines

For school year 2026-27

Florida offers a variety of scholarships and grants to help you fund your education and earn a degree without debt. The **Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program** is a state-funded initiative providing merit-based financial aid to Florida high school graduates for postsecondary education.

Applying for these scholarships and grants is straightforward. This guide includes requirements and details about each scholarship and grant so you can find the right scholarship for you!

Scholarship Name	Minimum Requirements**†		Award Amount / Benefits
Florida Academic Scholars (FAS) Considered the most competitive award, this scholarship is for students with a 3.5 GPA or higher and high ACT, CLT, or SAT scores.	Courses 4 English 4 Math 3 Science 3 Social Science 2 World Language Hours 100 volunteer service hours, or 100 paid work hours, or Combination of 100 total hours	GPA 3.5 weighted ACT CLT SAT 29 95 1330 <i>Note: See "Other Ways to Qualify" (on reverse) for ways to qualify without test scores.</i>	100% of tuition and applicable fees
Florida Medallion Scholar (FMS) This award is based on high school academic achievement.	Courses 4 English 4 Math 3 Science 3 Social Science 2 World Language Hours 75 volunteer service hours, or 100 paid work hours, or Combination of 100 total hours	GPA 3.0 weighted ACT CLT SAT 24 82 1190 <i>Note: See "Other Ways to Qualify" (on reverse) for ways to qualify without test scores.</i>	75% of tuition and applicable fees
Florida Gold Seal CAPE (GSC) This scholarship is for students who earn industry certifications that can be applied to college credit. Career and Technical Education credentials, including: - Career Certificate - Associate in Science (AS) - Associate of Applied Science (AAS) - Applied Technical Diploma (ATD) - College Credit Certificate (CCC) Bachelor of Science (BS) is eligible when the corresponding AS is earned first.	Standard High School diploma, or equivalent Minimum of 5 postsecondary credit hours through CAPE industry certification that articulate for college credit Complete at least one of the following: 30* volunteer service hours 100 paid work hours - A combination of 100 total hours <i>*75 volunteer service hours will be required for students entering grade 9 in the 2024-2025 school year and thereafter.</i>	GPA No requirement ACT SAT No requirement	Award is a set amount per training hour earned No award provided for summer term
Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars (GSV) This award is for students who want to pursue a vocational degree or certificate program. Instead of covering a percentage of tuition, the program pays a fixed amount per credit hour, which varies by program. Career and Technical Education credentials, including: - Career Certificate - Associate in Science (AS) - Associate of Applied Science (AAS) - Applied Technical Diploma (ATD) - College Credit Certificate (CCC)	Standard Florida high school diploma, or equivalent Earn a minimum 3.0 weighted GPA in non-elective high school courses Complete at least 3 full credits in Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses Earn a minimum 3.5 unweighted GPA in those CTE courses Complete at least one of the following: 30* volunteer service hours 100 paid work hours - A combination of 100 total hours <i>*75 volunteer service hours will be required for students entering grade 9 in the 2024-2025 school year and thereafter.</i>	ACT SAT PERT Achieve minimum score on tests taken by August 31st of high school graduation year ACT Reading 19 English 17 Math 19 PERT Reading 106 Writing 103 Math 114 SAT Reading 24 Writing and Language Test 25 Math 24	Award is a set amount per training hour earned No award provided for summer term

*Eligibility requirements are subject to change with each legislative session

†Different requirements apply to students graduating mid-year and seeking postsecondary funding in the immediate spring. See "Other Ways to Qualify" (on reverse) for details.

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Florida Bright Futures Scholarships:

Track My Progress

FloridaShines

For school year 2026-27

Use this section to track your progress.

Today's Date:

Volunteer Service Hours / Paid Work Hours:

Industry Certifications:

Test Scores

ACT: SAT: CLT: PERT:

Tips

- Your school counselors are great resources. Make an appointment to meet with one to seek advice on college planning.
- Take the most challenging (and realistic) course load for which you are eligible.
- Check your eligibility by discussing your academic requirements and courses with your counselor.
- Use your test scores and current GPA to evaluate your college options and scholarship opportunities.
- Prepare for your tests early! Remember, you can test more than once to reach your desired score.

Additional Resources



Florida Students Scholarship & Grant Programs

<https://www.floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org>



Open Door Grant Program

<https://www.floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org>



FAFSA: Free Application for Federal Student Aid

<https://studentaid.gov/fafsa>



Other Ways to Qualify

<https://www.floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org/PDF/BFHandbookChapter1.pdf>



Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program

<https://floridabrightfutures.gov>

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Scholarships

Scholarships are popular ways to help pay for college because they are money that does not have to be repaid. Scholarships can come from colleges and universities, private organizations, community groups, employers, and foundations. Some scholarships are based on academic achievement, talents, leadership, or community service; while others may consider financial need, career interests, or background. Students should begin researching scholarships early and continue applying throughout high school and college, since thousands of scholarship opportunities are available each year. Florida offers [additional scholarship offerings](#) specifically for students across the state!

College Savings Accounts

Families can also prepare for college costs by saving money over time in college savings accounts, such as 529 College Savings Plans or prepaid tuition plans. These accounts allow families to set aside money specifically for education expenses such as tuition, housing, books, and other qualified costs. Many plans offer tax advantages, meaning the money can grow over time and be used for education expenses without being taxed. Starting to save early—even small amounts—can help reduce the amount students may need to borrow later.

Some families may utilize [Florida Prepaid](#), the state-guaranteed program allowing students to utilize a 529 plan specifically designed to help pay for education at Florida colleges and universities.

Grants / Pell

A grant is another type of financial aid that does not need to be repaid. Most grants are awarded based on financial need and are funded by federal or state governments, colleges, or other organizations. One of the most common federal grants is the [Federal Pell Grant](#), which provides funding to eligible undergraduate students to help cover the cost of college. To be considered for grants, students should complete the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) each year they plan to attend college.

Loans

[Student loans](#) are a type of financial aid that must be repaid after graduation or when a student leaves school. Loans can help cover educational expenses that are not paid for by scholarships, grants, or savings. Federal student loans often offer lower interest rates and flexible repayment options compared to private loans. Before borrowing, students and families should carefully review loan terms and borrow only what is needed to help pay for education.

Work-Study

[Federal Work-Study programs](#) allow eligible students to earn money while attending college by working part-time jobs on campus or with approved community organizations. Work-study positions are designed to help students gain work experience while earning money for educational expenses such as books, transportation, or personal costs. Work-study awards are typically based on financial need and are determined through the FAFSA application process.

Budgeting / College Cost Estimator

Planning how you will pay for college or career training is an important step in preparing for your future. Creating a budget can help you understand the total [cost of your education](#) and identify the resources that may help cover those expenses.

When thinking about your budget, consider more than just tuition. The cost of education may also include fees, books and supplies, housing, transportation, meals, and personal expenses. These costs can vary depending on the school you attend, whether you live on campus, and the program you choose.

Creating a simple budget can help you estimate your costs and compare different educational options. It can also help you make informed decisions about where to attend school and how to manage your expenses while you complete your program. Planning ahead and understanding your budget can make the path to college or career training more manageable and less stressful as you work toward your goals.



Professionalism

Professionalism is an important skill that helps students succeed in school, college, and future careers. It includes being responsible, respectful, and dependable in your work and interactions with others. Simple habits such as arriving on time, communicating clearly, meeting deadlines, and showing respect for teachers, classmates, and coworkers all demonstrate professionalism. Developing these habits now can help prepare you for college expectations, internships, and the workplace.

Time Management

Time management is the ability to plan and organize how you use your time so you can balance school, activities, responsibilities, and personal time. Successful students often use tools such as calendars, planners, or digital reminders to track assignments, deadlines, and commitments. Breaking large tasks into smaller steps and starting assignments early can help reduce stress and improve performance. Learning to manage your time effectively will help you stay on track throughout high school and beyond.

Study Skills

Strong study skills can help students better understand and remember what they learn. Effective strategies may include taking organized notes, reviewing material regularly, asking questions in class, and practicing active learning techniques such as summarizing or teaching concepts to others. Creating a quiet and distraction-free study environment can also improve focus. Over time, students can discover the study methods that work best for them and build habits that support long-term academic success.



Visit FloridaShines to explore [printable worksheets](#) to support skills such as time management, study strategies, and planning for high school graduation, to help students stay organized and prepare for college and career success.

Managing Stress

Balancing school, activities, and future planning can sometimes feel overwhelming. Learning healthy ways to manage stress is an important part of maintaining both academic success and personal well-being. Strategies such as staying organized, getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, and taking breaks when needed can help reduce stress levels. Talking with trusted adults, counselors, teachers, or friends can also provide support when challenges arise. Developing healthy coping skills now can help students handle pressure and stay focused on their goals.

Managing Stress Activity – List 3 Strategies That Help You Reduce Stress

Strategy 1

Strategy 2

Strategy 3

Distance Education / Online Readiness

Online learning is an important part of college and career education today. Many Florida colleges, universities, and technical programs offer online or hybrid courses, allowing students to learn from different locations and, often, on flexible schedules. While online learning can offer convenience, it also requires strong study habits, time management, and personal responsibility.

Successful online students are able to manage their time, communicate clearly, stay motivated, and work independently. They also need reliable access to a computer and internet connection, as well as the ability to use learning platforms such as Canvas or Blackboard.

Students should also practice digital responsibility, including evaluating online information, protecting personal data, and using technology effectively for learning. The [FloridaShines Online Readiness Checklist](#) included in this handbook can help you reflect on these skills and determine if you are prepared to succeed in an online course.

Online Readiness Self-Check:

Are You Ready to Take an Online Course?

The following concept areas and reflective questions will guide you in understanding your strengths, areas for improvement, and the skills needed to thrive in a virtual learning environment. Embark on this journey to ensure you're fully prepared for success in online education!



Time Management & Self Regulation

- Can I stick to a schedule or routine when there are no set class times?
- Do I regularly set short-term goals and track my progress toward them?
- When distractions arise, how easily can I refocus and stay on task?

Time Management & Self Reflection includes the ability to work independently, be self-disciplined, set goals, track progress, and adhere to a schedule without the structured environment of a physical classroom.



Communication Skills

- Do I feel confident expressing my thoughts clearly in writing, such as in discussion boards or emails?
- How comfortable am I reaching out to peers or instructors when I have a question or idea?
- Do I take time to read and thoughtfully respond to others in online discussions?

Communication Skills involve the ability to interact effectively via emails, discussion boards, and other written formats while collaborating in a virtual space.



Learning Environment

- Do I have a consistent space that supports my focus and minimizes distractions?
- Is my internet connection and equipment (e.g., computer, webcam) reliable for attending virtual classes or completing online work?
- Does my learning space meet my institution's remote proctoring requirement for online examinations?

Maintaining a good Learning Environment means having a dedicated space free from learning distractions, secure internet, and appropriate technology.



Technical Proficiency

- Can I independently navigate my institution's learning management system (Canvas, Blackboard, etc.) and access course materials with ease?
- How confident am I in resolving common technical issues, such as video playback or file uploads?
- Do I know how to find help when I run into a technical problem?

Technical Proficiency includes familiarity with internet navigation, using a learning management systems (LMS), and troubleshooting common technical issues.



Digital Security & Information Literacy

- Do I evaluate the reliability of online sources before using them in assignments?
- Am I mindful of my digital privacy, such as using strong passwords and avoiding phishing attempts?
- Do I know how to distinguish between credible information and misinformation online?

Digital Security & Information Literacy includes skills in evaluating quality online information, resources, and tools while protecting one's privacy and security.



Help-Seeking Behavior & Resource Utilization

- When I'm stuck or struggling, do I know who or where to turn to for academic help at my institution?
- How often do I take advantage of my institution's student support services (tutoring center, life coaching, financial aid office, etc.)?
- Do I feel comfortable asking for help—even if I'm unsure where to start?

Help-Seeking Behavior & Resource Utilization involves being proactive in seeking help when needed, whether through academic support services, peer connections, or instructor interactions.



Adaptability & Resilience

- How well do I adjust when plans change or unexpected obstacles come up?
- Do I have backup strategies if my technology or schedule fails?
- When faced with setbacks, do I find ways to move forward and stay committed to my learning?

Adaptability & Resilience involves adapting to changing schedules, technologies, and unexpected challenges, managing cognitive load, and adjusting strategies when needed.



Mindset & Motivation

- Do I believe I can improve my skills and performance with consistent effort and feedback?
- How do I respond to constructive criticism or lower-than-expected grades?
- Am I motivated to engage in learning even when the material feels difficult or unfamiliar?

Having quality **Mindset & Motivation** includes believing that skills can be developed through effort; including asking for, reflecting on, and incorporating instructor feedback.



**Scan to explore Florida's
online course options, or visit
floridashines.org/learn-online**



Career Resume and Cover Letter

A successful job search starts with a great resume. Learn how to showcase your education, experience, skills, and qualifications to land your dream job.

Make a Good First Impression

A resume is an introduction. Its goal is to get you an interview. Great resumes are focused, easy to read, and demonstrate a clear connection between you and the job.

Choose the Right Resume Type

Select the best resume type to emphasize your strongest qualities.

- **Chronological:** Describes your work experience on a timeline (good for those with a steady work history in related career fields)
- **Functional:** Highlights skills and qualifications (good for those with gaps in their work history, making a career change, or just entering the workforce)
- **Combo:** Offers the best of both

Begin With the Basics

Your resume should include your contact information, education, and work experience. Additional sections such as qualifications & skills or community engagement can also be helpful.

- **Contact Information:** Your name, city and state, phone number, appropriate (professional) email.
- **Education:** Academic institution, diploma/degree/certificate, year, notable academic achievements (e.g., Dean's List, honor roll), student organizations.
- **Work Experience:** Job titles held, companies, years of service, primary responsibilities, accomplishments.
- **Qualifications & Skills:** Areas of expertise, professional abilities, technical credentials, industry certifications.
- **Community engagement:** Volunteer/service-hour experience, board or committee membership, fundraising efforts.

Let Your Words Shine

As you develop your resume, remember these guidelines:

- Be brief; keep it to one page if possible.
- Keep it relevant; incorporate key words from the job posting or used in the industry.
- List skills clearly and concisely; a few words will do.
- Describe your work experience in short, complete sentences; bullet points are easier to read than paragraphs.
- Start each bullet point with a strong action verb, but try not to use the same one repeatedly; check out this list of [Strong Action Verbs](#) to get you started.

Another helpful tip is to write everything down and then edit, edit, edit. Getting it right can take a few drafts.

Style for Success

Formatting should focus the reader's eyes on what is most important in your resume. Too many font sizes or too much formatting (bold, underline, and italics) can actually detract from your strengths. Here are some tips for keeping your resume simple but successful:

- Use a professional font such as Arial, Times New Roman, or Book Antiqua
- Use a larger font size for your name, but keep the rest of the text at 11- or 12-point font size
- Bold your name, section headers, and job titles; limit other formatting
- Maintain enough white space; overcrowding the text will make your resume hard to read
- Do not use abbreviations or acronyms; write out the full words

And please proofread!

Get a Second Opinion

Share your resume with friends, family members, teachers, mentors, and co-workers. Getting feedback from those in your field can be especially helpful.

Cameron Collins

123 Sunshine Blvd, Orlando, FL

(555) 123-4567

cameron.collins@email.com

Education –Orlando High School, Orlando, FL – GPA: 3.8 –Class of 2028

Advanced Placement (AP) Courses:

- AP Calculus AB
- AP Biology
- AP English Literature
- AP U.S. History

Extracurricular Activities

- Student Government – Class Secretary (2024–2026)
- Science Club – Vice President (2023–2026)
- Varsity Soccer – Team Captain (2022–2026)

Volunteer Experience / Community Service

- Local Community Center – Volunteer Tutor (2021–2025)
 - Tutored younger students in math and science, helping improve grades and confidence
- Orlando Food Bank – Volunteer (2022–Present)
 - Assisted in organizing food drives and distributing meals to families in need
- Beach Clean-Up Initiative – Volunteer (2023–Present)
 - Participated in monthly community events to clean and preserve local beaches

Work Experience

- Barista, Sunshine Cafe, Orlando, FL (2023–Present)
 - Provided customer service, handled transactions, trained new employees

Awards & Honors

- National Honor Society Member (2023–Present)
- AP Scholar Award (2024)
- Science Fair Regional Winner (2023)

Interview Tips

Make a great impression on your interview and land the job of your dreams. Follow these simple tips to shine.

Before the Interview

Research the Company and Role

- Understand the company's mission, values, products, and culture.
- Familiarize yourself with the responsibilities and skills required of the role.
- Be prepared to explain why you are a great fit for both the job and the company.

Practice Common Interview Questions

- Prepare answers for questions such as: "Tell me about yourself," "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" and "Why do you want to work here?"
- Focus on using the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to structure your responses for behavioral questions.

Dress Appropriately

- Wear professional attire that suits the company culture. It is better to be slightly overdressed than underdressed.
- Pay attention to grooming and cleanliness.

Be On Time

- Arrive 10–15 minutes early. It shows punctuality and respect for the interviewer's time.
- If it is a virtual interview, test your technology (camera, microphone, internet connection) beforehand.

During the Interview

Mind Your Body Language

- Offer a firm handshake (if in person) and maintain good posture.
- Make eye contact and listen attentively.
- Avoid fidgeting; stay calm and confident.

Ask Insightful Questions

- Prepare a few questions that show interest in the company and the role. For example, "What is the team culture like?" or "What are the key challenges the company is facing right now?"

Be Honest and Authentic

- Do not exaggerate your experience. If you do not know something, be honest and express a willingness to learn.

Demonstrate Your Value

- Highlight how your skills, experience, and achievements align with the needs of the company.
- Share examples of past successes that demonstrate your qualifications.

After the Interview

Follow Up

- After the interview, send a thank-you email within 24 hours. Express gratitude for the opportunity and reiterate your interest in the role.
- Offer to send references.
- Stay positive.

Mock Interviews: Practice for Success

Preparing for an interview can help you feel more confident and make a strong first impression. Practicing common questions ahead of time allows you to organize your thoughts, highlight your strengths, and communicate clearly. Use the sample questions and tips below to get started!

Common Interview Questions

“Tell me about yourself.”

Tip: Keep your answer focused and under one minute. Start with who you are now (student, interests), briefly mention relevant experiences, and end with your goals. Avoid sharing too many personal details, and keep your answer connected to the opportunity.

“Why are you interested in this school/program/job?”

Tip: Show that you have taken time to learn about the opportunity. Do your research so you can mention specific programs, features, or values that stand out to you and connect them to your own goals. This helps show genuine interest and effort.

“What are your strengths?”

Tip: Choose one or two strengths that are relevant, and back them up with a real example or two. Instead of just saying, “I am hard-working,” explain how you demonstrated that strength in school, at work, or during an activity. This makes your answer more believable and memorable.

“What is a challenge you have faced, and how did you handle it?”

Tip: Use a simple structure such as Situation, Action, and Result to stay organized. Focus on what you did to solve the problem and what you learned from the experience. Even small, everyday challenges can make great examples if you explain them clearly.

“Where do you see yourself in a few years?”

Tip: It is okay if you do not have everything figured out. Share a general direction, and show that you are motivated to grow, learn new skills, and take advantage of opportunities. Keep your answer realistic and connected to the path you are applying for.



Choose a mock job and record yourself answering these questions. Play back your responses to see how you did, and keep practicing with different roles until you feel confident!

Industry Certifications

Earning an industry-based certification tells employers you have the knowledge and skills to do the job, and that gives you the edge in a highly competitive job market.

Get Certified

Florida high schools, colleges and universities offer hundreds of certifications in a range of industries, from healthcare to emergency management to technology.

Did You Know?

The overwhelming majority of jobs in the future will require some education after high school, but most jobs will not require a four-year college degree. Half of the top jobs will require a career and technical certificate, while 40% will require a college degree (associate, bachelor's, or graduate).

What Is an Industry Certification?

An industry certification is an assessment offered by a professional certifying organization for students in specific career fields.

Why Earn an Industry Certification?

Passing and earning an industry certification proves to potential employers that you have the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for a particular career. This is an achievement you will want to include on your resume to set yourself apart from other candidates.

What Does an Industry Certification Require?

- Traditional exams
- Project-based test of skills
- Observance of hands-on skills

What Are the Most Popular Industry Certifications?

There are over 500 industry certifications tied to high-demand, high-wage careers within Florida's 17 career pathways. The top ten most popular industry certifications in Florida high schools are:

- Entrepreneurship & Small Business
- WordPress Certified Educator
- Adobe Certified Professional in Visual Design (requires Photoshop and Illustrator or InDesign)
- Certified Food Protection Manager (ServSafe®)
- Agriculture Associate Certification
- Information Technology Specialist (ITS)
- Autodesk Certified User - Fusion 360
- Certified Internet Web (CIW) Social Media Strategist
- Certified Food Safety Manager
- HBI Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate Training

Learn more about all of the [Industry Certifications](#) from the Florida Department of Education.



What Kinds of Careers are Available?

Certifications show employers that you have specialized knowledge and practical skills in a particular area. Here are just a few examples of popular job certifications and the types of careers they can open doors to, whether you are just starting out or looking to advance in your field.

Industry Certification	Content Covered	Potential Careers
Adobe Certified Professional	Digital design skills using tools such as Photoshop, Illustrator, and Premiere Pro	- Graphic Designer - Social Media Manager - Web Designer
Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)	Basic patient care, hygiene, vital signs, and safety procedures	- Nursing Assistant - Home Health Aide
ServSafe Food Protection Manager	Food safety, sanitation, handling, storage, and regulatory compliance	- Restaurant Manager - Food Service Worker
CompTIA A+	Computer hardware, software, troubleshooting, networking, and cybersecurity basics	- IT Support Specialist - Help Desk Technician
NCCER Core Certification	Computer hardware, software, troubleshooting, networking, and cybersecurity basics	- Electrician - Construction Worker
Microsoft Office Specialist	Proficiency in Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and other Office tools	- Administrative Assistant - Office Manager
Automotive Service Excellence	Validates technical skills in auto repair and maintenance	- Automotive Technician - Mechanic
Certified Welder	Welding safety, blueprint reading, and various welding techniques	- Welder - Fabricator
AutoCAD Certified User	2D design, drawing tools, and drafting using AutoCAD software	- Drafting Technician - CAD Operator
QuickBooks Certified User	Accounting basics, invoicing, payroll, and financial reporting	- Bookkeeper - Accounting Clerk

Internships / Work Experience

Internships and other work-based learning opportunities allow you to gain real-world experience while exploring potential career paths. These experiences help you apply what you learn in the classroom to real workplace situations while developing valuable professional skills.

Work-based learning can take many forms, including internships, job shadowing, cooperative education, and part-time employment related to your field of interest. Through these experiences, you can learn how workplaces operate, build your communication and teamwork skills, and begin developing a professional network.

Participating in an internship or work-based learning opportunity can also strengthen your resume, college applications, and future job applications. Employers often value candidates who have practical experience and a demonstrated interest in their chosen field.



To explore internship opportunities in Florida, visit the [Statewide Internship Database](#) for available opportunities. This resource helps connect students with internship opportunities across the state so you can begin building experience while working toward your career goals.

Getting Noticed

When applying for jobs, internships, or scholarships, it is important to present yourself in a way that helps employers quickly see your strengths. Today, many organizations use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)—software that scans resumes using artificial intelligence (AI) to identify candidates whose skills and experiences match the job description. Because of this, it is important to include clear descriptions of your skills, coursework, certifications, and work or volunteer experience using words that match the opportunity you are applying for.

Many employers search for candidates on professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn. Creating a LinkedIn profile allows you to showcase your achievements, career interests, certifications, projects, and experiences in one place. It can also help you connect with professionals, follow companies you are interested in, and discover internships or entry-level opportunities.

8. Helpful Resources and Links

Resources

- FloridaShines Website – <https://www.floridashines.org>
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) – <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>
- CollegeBoard/ Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) – <https://www.collegeboard.org>
- American College Test (ACT) – <https://www.act.org>
- Classic Learning Test (CLT) – <https://www.cltexam.com>
- O*Net – <https://www.onetonline.org>
- CareerOneStop – <https://www.careeronestop.org>
- Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) – <https://www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org>
- Florida Department of Education (DOE) – <https://www.fldoe.org>
- My Florida Future Tool – <https://www.flbog.edu/myfloridafuture>