

## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

**BILL #:** PCS for HB 1361 Education  
**SPONSOR(S):** Education & Employment Committee  
**TIED BILLS:** None. **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 7038

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
Orig. Comm.: Education & Employment Committee		Dixon	Hassell

### SUMMARY ANALYSIS

To facilitate early intervention, the bill expands the eligibility for the New Worlds Scholarship to include students enrolled in a Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Program, who exhibit substantial deficiencies in early literacy or math skills based upon the results of the most recent progress monitoring assessment. The bill requires school districts and VPK program providers to notify parents of eligible students of the process to request and receive a scholarship, when providing results from the administration of each progress monitoring assessment. In addition, the bill expands the credentials for eligible part-time tutors and requires the Department of Education to release student scholarship funds to the program administrator within 45 days of eligibility determination.

To increase program efficiencies, the bill repeals individualized reimbursements and requires parents, of scholarship eligible students, to utilize the administrator's system to make direct purchases of qualifying program expenditures.

The bill designates the University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning as the administrator for the New Worlds Reading Initiative.

The bill renames the "micro-credential program" to the "New Worlds micro-credential program."

The bill expands existing requirements to provide results from the first two administrations of the progress monitoring to a student's teacher and parents, by also requiring results be delivered to prekindergarten student instructors.

The bill codifies the Lastinger Center for Learning at the University of Florida in law and establishes duties for the center.

To support school districts and schools in improving student achievement in reading and mathematics, the bill establishes a tutoring program to be administered by an eligible nonprofit scholarship-funding organization. The tutoring program must be provided to students in kindergarten through grade 5 who have a substantial deficiency in reading or mathematics. The bill establishes a grant program that provides stipends for in-person tutoring during the school day, before or after school, or during a summer program.

The bill establishes a grant program to expand the use of artificial intelligence in order to improve student outcomes and reduce teacher workload. Grants funds may be used for subscription fees and professional learning to support and accelerate learning for students in grades 6 through 12.

The bill would have an indeterminate fiscal impact. See Fiscal Analysis.

The bill has an effective date of July 1, 2024.

# FULL ANALYSIS

## I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

### A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

#### Present Situation

##### New Worlds Reading Initiative (NWRI)

In 2021, the Florida Legislature created the New Worlds Reading Initiative (NWRI or initiative), Florida's first statewide book distribution program. The purpose of the NWRI is to instill a love of reading by providing high-quality, free books to students in prekindergarten through grade 5 who are reading below grade level and to improve the literacy skills of students in prekindergarten through grade 12.<sup>1</sup> This initiative, established under the Department of Education (DOE), consists of:<sup>2</sup>

- The program providing high quality, free books to students;
- New Worlds Scholarship Program;<sup>3</sup>
- The New Worlds Scholar program,<sup>4</sup> which rewards high school students who instill a love of reading and improve the literacy skills of students in kindergarten through grade 3; and
- The micro-credential program,<sup>5</sup> which emphasizes strong core instruction and a tiered model of reading interventions for struggling readers.

To facilitate the NWRI initiative, the DOE designated the University of Florida (UF) Lastinger Center as the administrator,<sup>6</sup> also serving as the nonprofit scholarship-funding organization (SFO).<sup>7</sup> Among other responsibilities, the administrator is responsible for:<sup>8</sup>

- Developing, in consultation with the Just Read, Florida! Office, a selection of high-quality books encompassing diverse subjects and genres for each grade level to be mailed to students in the initiative and an online repository of digital science of reading materials and science of reading instructional resources that is accessible to public school teachers, school leaders, parents, and educator preparation programs and associated faculty.
- Distributing books at no cost to students either directly or through an agreement with a book distribution company.
- Assisting with local implementation of the initiative by providing marketing materials to school districts and any partnering nonprofit organizations to assist with public awareness campaigns and other activities designed to increase family engagement and instill a love of reading in students.
- Maintaining a clearinghouse for information on national, state, and local nonprofit organizations that support efforts to improve literacy and provide books to children.
- Developing, for parents of students in the initiative, resources and training materials that engage families in reading and support the reading achievement of their students.
- Providing professional development and resources to teachers that correlate with the books provided through the initiative.
- Developing and administering an early literacy micro-credential program for teachers.
- Submitting to the DOE an annual financial report that includes, at a minimum, the amount of eligible contributions received by the administrator; the amount spent on each activity, including administrative expenses; and the number of students and households served under the initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 1003.485(2), F.S.

<sup>2</sup> Section 1003.485(2)(a)-(d), F.S.

<sup>3</sup> See section 1002.411, F.S.; The New Worlds Scholarship program consists of scholarship accounts that are established to provide educational options for students.

<sup>4</sup> See section 1008.365(8), F.S.

<sup>5</sup> See section 1008.365, F.S.

<sup>6</sup> Rule 6A-6.0532, F.A.C.; see also s. 1003.485(1)(a), F.S. Administrator means a state university registered with the department and designated to administer the initiative by implementing the NWRI and to receive funding as provided in s. 1003.485, F.S.

<sup>7</sup> See ss. 1002.394(11) and 1002.395(6) and (15), F.S.

<sup>8</sup> Section 1003.485(4), F.S.

- Maintaining separate accounts for operating funds and funds for the purchase and delivery of books.
- Expending eligible contributions received only for the purchase and delivery of books and to implement the requirements for NWRI, as well as for administrative expenses not to exceed two percent of total eligible contributions.
- Upon receipt of a contribution, providing the taxpayer that made the contribution with a certificate of contribution.

The DOE, in addition to designating a state university to administer the initiative, must also publish information about the initiative and tax credits<sup>9</sup> available for the NWRI<sup>10</sup> on its website,<sup>11</sup> including the process for a taxpayer to select the administrator as the recipient of funding through a tax credit.<sup>12</sup> Beginning September 30, 2022, and annually thereafter, the DOE must also report on its website the number of students participating in the initiative in each school district and the academic achievement and learning gains, as applicable, of participating students based on data provided by school districts as well as the administrator's annual financial report. The DOE is required to establish a date by which each school district must annually provide the data necessary to complete the report.<sup>13</sup>

In the 2022-2023 school year, NWRI program served a total of 199,765 K-5 students in approximately 148,707 households statewide. Over 3.7 million books have been shipped to students since the inception of the program in October 2021.<sup>14</sup> Students enrolled in the program demonstrated significant gains, of up to 55 percent growth rates in reading achievement during the 2022-2023 school year.<sup>15</sup>

### *New Worlds Scholarship Accounts*

In 2018, the Florida Legislature established Reading Scholarship Accounts to provide educational options for public school students in grades 3 through 5 who struggle with reading.<sup>16</sup> In 2022, the program was renamed the New Worlds Reading Scholarship Accounts Program and the Florida Legislature expanded eligibility for the scholarship to include public school students in grades kindergarten through 5 who have a substantial reading deficiency.<sup>17</sup> In 2023 the program was renamed the New Worlds Scholarship Accounts Program and was expanded to include public school students in grades kindergarten through 5 who have a substantial math deficiency.<sup>18</sup>

The New Worlds Scholarship Accounts are contingent upon available funds, and on a first-come, first-served basis. Each student who is enrolled in a Florida public school in kindergarten through grade 5 is eligible for a scholarship account if the student:<sup>19</sup>

- Has a substantial reading deficiency or exhibits characteristics of dyslexia<sup>20</sup> or scored below a Level 3 on the statewide, standardized English Language Arts (ELA) assessment in the prior school year. An eligible student who is classified as an English Language Learner and is

<sup>9</sup> See section 1002.395, F.S. and rule 6A-6.0960, F.A.C. The University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning is a registered Scholarship Funding Organization (SFO) and accepts tax credit contributions to support the New Worlds Reading Initiative.

<sup>10</sup> See section 1003.485(5), F.S. New Worlds Reading Initiative Tax Credits; Applications; Transfers and Limits.

<sup>11</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Florida Tax Credit Scholarships*, <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/ftc/> (last visited Dec. 20, 2023) and Florida Department of Education, *New Worlds Scholarship Accounts*, <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/reading/> (last visited Jan. 3, 2024).

<sup>12</sup> Section 1003.485(3)(a) and (b), F.S.

<sup>13</sup> Section 1003.485(3)(c), F.S.

<sup>14</sup> UF Lastinger Center for Learning, *NWRI 2022-2023 Annual Enrollment Report*, at 5 and 11, available at [New Worlds Reading 2022-2023 Annual Enrollment Report FINAL 9.29.23 \(fldoe.org\)](https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/reading/).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 5.

<sup>16</sup> Ch. 2018-6, L.O.F.

<sup>17</sup> Ch. 2022-154, L.O.F.

<sup>18</sup> Ch. 2023-108, L.O.F.

<sup>19</sup> Section 1002.411(1)-(2), F.S.

<sup>20</sup> See s. 1008.25(5)(a), F.S.; see also Rule 6A-6.053(10)(a), F.A.C., specifying criteria for the determination that a student has a substantial deficiency in reading, including scoring the lowest level or benchmark on any assessment approved by the school district, scoring the lowest achievement level during a progress monitoring assessment approved by the school district, or demonstrating minimum skill levels in one or more areas of phonological awareness; phonics; vocabulary, including oral language skills; reading fluency; and reading comprehension.

enrolled in a program or receiving services that are specifically designed to meet the instructional needs of English Language Learner students shall receive priority.

- Has a substantial deficiency in mathematics or characteristics of dyscalculia<sup>21</sup> or scored below a Level 3 on the statewide, standardized Mathematics assessment in the prior school year.

By September 30, school districts are required to notify the parent of each eligible student about the process to request and receive a scholarship, subject to available funds.<sup>22</sup> To receive a scholarship account, parents of eligible students must:<sup>23</sup>

- submit an application to an eligible nonprofit scholarship-funding organization by the deadline established by the organization; and
- submit eligible expenses to the eligible nonprofit scholarship-funding organization for reimbursement of qualifying expenditures.

Qualifying expenditures may include:<sup>24</sup>

- instructional material;
- curriculum;
- tuition and fees for part-time tutoring services provided by a person who holds a valid Florida educator’s certificate,<sup>25</sup> a person who holds a baccalaureate or graduate degree in the subject area, a person who holds an adjunct teaching certificate,<sup>26</sup> or a person who has demonstrated a mastery of subject area knowledge;<sup>27</sup>
- fees for summer education programs designed to improve reading, literacy, or mathematics skills;
- fees for after-school educational programs designed to improve reading, literacy, or mathematics skills.

The amount of the New Worlds scholarship for an eligible student is specified in the General Appropriations Act (GAA)<sup>28</sup> and for the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the amount specified was \$500 for each eligible student.<sup>29</sup>

The table below displays the history for enrollment figures for students who participated in the program.<sup>30</sup>

School Year	Grades of Students Participating in program	Number of Students Participating in Scholarships Accounts
2018-2019	Grades 3-5	5,639
2019-2020	Grades 3-5	6,792
2020-2021	Grades 3-5	4,964
2021-2022	Grades 3-5	2,035
2022-2023	Grades K-5	12,464

One hundred percent of the funds appropriated for the scholarship accounts will be released to the DOE at the beginning of the first quarter of each fiscal year.<sup>31</sup> Once an eligible nonprofit SFO notifies

<sup>21</sup> See s. 1008.25(6)a, F.S.; see also Rule 6A-6.0533, F.A.C. for determining substantial math deficiency for students in kindergarten through grade 4.

<sup>22</sup> Section 1002.411(6)(a), F.S.

<sup>23</sup> Section 1002.411(3)(a)1.-2., F.S.; see also, Florida Department of Education, Scholarship Funding Organizations, *Applications*, <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/sfo/applications.stml> (last visited Jan. 3, 2024).

<sup>24</sup> Section 1002.411(3)(a)2.a.-e., F.S.

<sup>25</sup> See s. 1012.56, F.S.

<sup>26</sup> See s. 1012.57, F.S.

<sup>27</sup> See s. 1012.56(5), F.S.

<sup>28</sup> Section 1002.411(7)(a), F.S.

<sup>29</sup> Specific Appropriation 97, s. 2, Chapter 2023-239, L.O.F.

<sup>30</sup> Email, Step Up for Students, July 27, 2023 (on file with the House PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee).

<sup>31</sup> Section 1002.411(7)(b), F.S.

the DOE of a student's eligibility for a scholarship, the DOE will release the student's scholarship funds to the organization for deposit into the student's account.<sup>32</sup>

The SFO must provide scholarship payments at least quarterly.<sup>33</sup> The accrued interest in the student's account is in addition to, and not part of, the awarded funds. Account funds include both the awarded funds and accrued interest.<sup>34</sup>

The eligible SFO<sup>35</sup> may develop a system for payment of scholarship funds by funds transfer, including, but not limited to, debit cards, electronic payment cards, or any other means of payment that the DOE deems to be commercially viable or cost-effective. A student's scholarship award may not be reduced for debit card or electronic payment fees. Commodities or services related to the development of such a system will be procured by competitive solicitation unless they are purchased from a state term contract.<sup>36</sup>

A student's scholarship account must be closed, and any remaining funds must be sent back to the DOE after:<sup>37</sup>

- Denial or revocation of scholarship eligibility by the Commissioner of Education for fraud or abuse, including but not limited to, the student or student's parent accepting any payment, refund, or rebate, in any manner, from a provider of any services; or
- Three consecutive fiscal years in which an account has been inactive.

### *New Worlds Micro-Credential Program*

Micro-credentials are a hybrid model of asynchronous, on-demand modules, and instructor-supported courses and practicum that equips birth to twelfth-grade instructional personnel to:<sup>38</sup>

- Identify literacy difficulties and determine appropriate interventions.
- Apply evidence-based practices.
- Effectively use progress monitoring and intervention materials.

As the administrator for NWRI, the UF Lastinger Center is responsible for developing a micro-credential<sup>39</sup> that requires teachers to demonstrate competency to diagnose literacy difficulties and determine the appropriate range of literacy interventions based upon the age and literacy deficiency of the student; use evidence-based instructional and intervention practices grounded in the science of reading, including strategies identified by the Just Read, Florida!; and effectively use progress monitoring and intervention materials.<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, the administrator must administer the early literacy micro-credential program, designed specifically for instructional personnel in prekindergarten through grade 3, which includes components on content, student learning, pedagogy, and professional development, built on a strong foundation of scientifically researched and evidence-based reading instructional and intervention programs that incorporate explicit, systematic, and sequential approaches to teaching phonemic awareness, phonics,

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<sup>32</sup> Section 1002.411(7)(c), F.S.

<sup>33</sup> Section 1002.411(7)(f), F.S.

<sup>34</sup> Section 1002.411(7)(d), F.S.

<sup>35</sup> For the 2023-24 school year, Step Up For Students is the only Scholarship Funding Organization administering this scholarship program; see Florida Department of Education, *New Worlds Reading Scholarship Accounts*, <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/reading/> (last visited Jan. 2, 2024).

<sup>36</sup> Section 1002.411(7)(e), F.S.

<sup>37</sup> Section 1002.411(7)(h), F.S.

<sup>38</sup> University of Florida, UF Lastinger Center for Learning, *Flamingo Literacy Micro-Credentials*, <https://lastinger.center.ufl.edu/work/literacy/flamingo-literacy/literacy-microcredentials/> (last visited Jan. 3, 2024).

<sup>39</sup> Section 1003.485(1)(g), F.S.; Micro-credential means evidence-based professional development activities grounded in the science of reading which are competency-based, personalized, and on-demands.

<sup>40</sup> Section 1003.485(h), F.S.

vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension and incorporate decodable or phonetic text instructional strategies.<sup>41</sup> Micro credentials must also be available, at no cost, to:<sup>42</sup>

- Instructional personnel who are K-12 staff members and whose function includes the provision of direct instructional services to students.
- Prekindergarten instructors who instruct at a private or public voluntary prekindergarten education program.
- Child care personnel who are owners, operators, employees, and volunteers working in a child care facility.

In the 2023-2024 school year, the Division of Early Learning in partnership with the UF Lastinger Center established opportunities for instructional and child care personnel who work in a public or private early learning program to earn emergent<sup>43</sup> or elementary literacy micro-credentials. The elementary literacy micro-credentials provide high-quality, evidence-based online course content to build their literacy knowledge and skills to effectively support literacy learning for students, birth through grade 5. Each micro-credential consists of three 20-hour (60 hours total)<sup>44</sup> components.<sup>45</sup> Micro-credential completers may receive a completion stipend of up to \$2,000 if they meet stipend eligibility criteria.<sup>46</sup>

### *New Worlds Reading Initiative Tax Credits*

Under the NWRI, taxpayers can make private monetary contributions to the administrator of the initiative and receive a dollar-for-dollar credit against the following Florida taxes:

- corporate income tax;
- excise tax on liquor, wine, and malt beverages;
- gas and oil production tax;
- insurance premium tax; and,
- use tax due under a direct pay permit.<sup>47</sup>

Taxpayers who wish to participate must apply to the Department of Revenue for an allocation of tax credit.

### Coordinated Screening and Progress Monitoring System

The recently procured statewide, standardized coordinated screening and progress monitoring system (system) measures student progress in the VPK and public schools to identify the educational strengths and needs of students.<sup>48</sup> The system measures student progress in meeting the appropriate expectations in early literacy and mathematics skills and in ELA and mathematics standards.

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<sup>41</sup> Section 1003.485(i), F.S.

<sup>42</sup> Section 1003.485(i)3., F.S.

<sup>43</sup> The UF Lastinger Center for Learning's emergent literacy micro-credential prepares early learning instructional personnel and child care providers to support student outcomes for school readiness, identify literacy difficulties accurately, apply evidence-based practices, and engage in effective progress monitoring and intervention. University of Florida, UF Lastinger Center for Learning, Flamingo Literacy Micro-Credentials, <https://lastinger.center.ufl.edu/work/literacy/flamingo-literacy/literacy-microcredentials/> (last visited Jan. 3, 2024).

<sup>44</sup> Section 1003.485(i)2., F.S. The micro-credential must be competency based and designed for eligible instructional personnel to complete the credentialing process in no more than 60 hours.

<sup>45</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Professional Learning*, <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/early-learning/providers/pro-learning.shtml> (last visited Jan. 3, 2024). [hereinafter, NWRI Professional Learning]

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> Section 1003.485(5), F.S. Florida Department of Revenue, *New Worlds Reading Initiative-Tax Credit*, <https://floridarevenue.com/taxes/taxesfees/Pages/newworlds.aspx> (last visited Jan. 4, 2024). See also ss. 211.0252, 212.1833, 220.1876, 561.1212, and 624.51056, F.S.

<sup>48</sup> Section 1008.25(9)(a)1., F.S.

To facilitate timely interventions and supports, the system must provide results from the first two administrations of the progress monitoring to a student's teacher within 1 week and to the student's parent within 2 weeks of the administration of the progress monitoring.<sup>49</sup>

### Science of Reading Literacy and Intervention Program

The Just Read Florida! Office is required to work with the Florida Center for Reading Research<sup>50</sup> to identify scientifically researched and evidence-based reading instructional and intervention programs grounded in the science of reading which incorporate explicit, systematic, and sequential approaches to teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension and incorporate decodable or phonetic text instructional strategies.<sup>51</sup>

To assist with the pursuit of evidence-based reading practices, in 2023, the Legislature appropriated \$16.0 million in nonrecurring funds for the Science of Reading Literacy and Tutoring Program. The funds are to be used to provide additional reading literacy support to students in kindergarten through grade 5 enrolled in a public school who either scored below Level 3 on the final English Language Arts (ELA) assessment in the prior year or who the district has determined through progress monitoring to be below grade level and in need of additional reading intervention.<sup>52</sup>

Each school district received a minimum of \$150,000. The balance of the appropriation was allocated to districts that had more than 50 percent of third grade students score below Level 3 on the ELA assessment in the prior year. Each school district received their allocation by August 15, 2023.<sup>53</sup>

School districts may use the funds for: stipends for tutors during the school day, before and after school, or a summer program; licenses for computerized or automated literacy tutoring that provides each student with the ability to read to the software and receive, in real time, tutoring interventions that are based in science of reading principles and individually tailored to the needs and ability of each student; professional development; or curriculum, resources, and materials necessary to implement explicit and systematic instructional strategies.

As of January 3, 2024, no funds have been disbursed to school districts.<sup>54</sup>

### *The Use of AI in Education*

Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to improve K-12 education in the United States. For students, AI can provide them a personalized learning experience tailored to their individual preferences and needs, immediate feedback on their work and answers to their questions, and increased access to tutoring and other educational materials. For teachers, it can help automate some of their workload, design better interventions, and reduce burnout. And for administrators, AI can monitor student progress and provide preemptive interventions with the help of predictive analytics.<sup>55</sup>

### **Effect of Proposed Changes**

#### New Worlds Reading Initiative

The bill designates the University of Florida (UF) Lastinger Center for Learning as the administrator for the New Worlds Reading Initiative (NWRI).

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<sup>49</sup> Section 1008.25(9)(c), F.S.

<sup>50</sup> Florida State University, Florida Center for Reading Research, <https://fcrr.org/> (last visited Dec. 20, 2023).

<sup>51</sup> Section 1001.215(4), F.S.

<sup>52</sup> Specific Appropriation 96, s. 2, Chapter 2023-239, L.O.F.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> Email, Department of Education (January 5, 2024) (On file in PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee).

<sup>55</sup> Gillian Diebol and Chelsea Han, *How AI Can Improve K-12 Education in the United States* (April 2020), available at <https://www2.datainnovation.org/2022-ai-education.pdf>.

The bill renames the “micro-credential program” to the “New Worlds micro-credential program.”

The bill requires the DOE to provide the program administrator with progress monitoring data for eligible prekindergarten to grade 12 students within 30 days of the close of each progress monitoring period, in an effort to create program efficiencies and better serve eligible students.

The bill requires that the annual financial report, submitted by the program administrator, also include the number of micro-credentials and reading endorsements earned, and the number of students and households served under each component of the NWRI, by school district, including the means by which additional literacy supports was provided by students.

The bill replaces references to the term “professional development” with the term “professional learning”. This was a change made throughout the education code during the 2023 Legislative session.<sup>56</sup>

### *New Worlds Scholarship Accounts*

To facilitate early intervention, the bill expands the eligibility for the New Worlds Scholarship to include students enrolled in a Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Program, through either a public or private provider, who exhibit substantial deficiencies in early literacy or math skills based on the results of the most recent progress monitoring assessment. VPK students exhibiting substantial deficiencies in any of the three progress monitoring assessments would be eligible for the program.

In addition, the bill expands the credentials for eligible part-time tutors to include a person who holds a micro-credential under the NWRI; or for a prekindergarten student, by a person who holds a child development associate credential issued by the National Credentialing Program of the Council for Professional Recognition or a credential approved by the Department of Children and Families; holds a bachelor’s or higher degree in early childhood education, prekindergarten or primary education, preschool education, or family and consumer science; or holds a bachelor’s or higher degree in elementary education, if the prekindergarten instructor has been certified to teach children any age from birth through 6th grade.

The bill requires parents, of scholarship eligible students, to utilize the administrator’s system to make direct purchases of qualifying program expenditures and repeals individualized reimbursements to increase the efficiency of the program.

The bill requires school districts and VPK program providers to notify parents of eligible students of the process to request and receive a scholarship, when providing results from the administration of each progress monitoring assessment.

The bill provides that the department must release the student’s scholarship funds to the SFO with 45 days of eligibility determination.

The bill repeals outdated language that required the payment of the scholarships on a quarterly basis. The entire scholarship amount is placed in the student’s account upon eligibility determination.

### University of Florida (UF) Lastinger Center for Learning

The bill codifies the Lastinger Center for Learning at the University of Florida in law and establishes the following duties for the center:

- Develop and administer programs to improve student achievement outcomes in early learning, literacy, and mathematics.
- Provide professional learning for educators to improve the quality of instruction in early learning, literacy, and mathematics. Professional learning must include the development of micro-credentials that require educators to demonstrate competency. The bill requires micro-



credentials be provided at low or no cost, be personalized, and specifies that the credentials can be provided online or in person.

- Provide technical assistance and support to school districts and schools in improving student achievement.
- Conduct and publish research on teaching and learning in early learning, literacy, and mathematics as well as professional learning for educators.

### Tutoring Program

The bill establishes a tutoring program to be administered by an eligible nonprofit SFO. The tutoring program is established to support school districts and schools in improving student achievement in reading and mathematics. The tutoring program must:

- Provide best practice science of reading guidelines for districts in consultation with the Just Read, Florida! Office.
- Provide best practice guidelines for mathematics tutoring in alignment with Florida's Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) Standards for mathematics.
- Establish minimum standards that each school district must meet to participate in the program. The minimum standards must address:
  - Appropriate group sizes for tutoring sessions.
  - The frequency and duration of tutoring sessions.
  - Minimum staffing qualifications for tutors.
  - The use of ongoing, informal and formal assessments to target instructional interventions.
  - Prioritization strategies for tutoring students.
- Provide access during the school day to additional literacy or mathematics support through evidence-based automated literacy tutoring software that provides each student with real-time interventions that are based in science of reading principles or mathematics instructional best practices and individually tailored to the needs and ability of each student. The bill provides that access must be provided to students in kindergarten through grade 5 enrolled in a public school who have a substantial deficiency in reading or mathematics in accordance with s. 1008.25.
- Award grants to school districts that may be used for stipends for in-person tutoring during the school day, before and after school, or during a summer program. At a minimum, in-person tutoring may be provided to prekindergarten through grade 5 students enrolled in a public school who have a substantial deficiency in reading or mathematics in accordance with s. 1008.25.
- Provide technical assistance and professional learning to school districts, including:
  - Advising district staff on tutoring program design and intervention selection upon request.
  - Assisting districts in reviewing tutoring programs, professional learning programs, curriculum, and resources to ensure that they adhere to the science of reading or best practices in mathematics.
  - Providing professional learning to district staff to build their knowledge and skills around the science of reading or best practices in mathematics.

The bill requires the DOE to provide the program administrator with math and reading progress monitoring data for eligible prekindergarten to grade 12 students within 30 days of the close of each progress monitoring period.

The bill requires the SFO to provide an annual report, by July 1, to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Commissioner of the Department of Education, summarizing school district use of program funds and student academic outcomes as a result of participating in the program.

### Coordinated Screening and Progress Monitoring System

The bill expands existing requirements to provide results from the first two administrations of the progress monitoring to a student's teacher and parents, by also requiring results be delivered to prekindergarten student instructors.

### Digital Learning

To customize and accelerate learning for students and reduce teacher workload, the bill provides opportunities for school districts to utilize artificial intelligence. The bill authorizes grants funds for subscription fees and professional learning to support and accelerate learning for students in grades 6 through 12 for artificial intelligence. Grant recipients must select an artificial intelligence platform that:

- Uses large language models based on GPT-4, its equivalent, or successor.
- Provides professional learning to teachers.
- Provides one on one tutoring aligned to the Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) Standards for reading.
- Provides standards aligned lesson plans and provides insights on student progress.

## B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

- Section 1:** Amends s. 1002.411, F.S.; expanding eligibility for New Worlds Scholarship Accounts to certain students enrolled in the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program; revising program eligibility criteria; revising eligible expenses for students who have an account; requiring parents to use a specified system to make direct purchases if such system is available; providing that certain organizations are administrators for purposes of establishing scholarship accounts; revising school district and private prekindergarten provider notification requirements; revising requirements for the Department of Education to release scholarship funds; authorizing certain organizations to develop a system for the direct purchase of qualifying expenditures; deleting provisions relating to fund transfers and certain payment methods; deleting a requirement for quarterly payments of scholarships.
- Section 2:** Amends s. 1003.485, F.S.; providing that the University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning is the administrator for the New Worlds Reading Initiative; revising definitions; deleting a requirement that the department designate an administrator for the initiative; requiring the department to provide specified data to the administrator within specified timeframe; requiring the administrator to include certain information in a specified annual report; revising eligibility criteria for the initiative; deleting obsolete language.
- Section 3:** Amends s. 1004.646, F.S.; creating the Lastinger Center for Learning at the University of Florida; providing duties and responsibilities of the center.
- Section 4:** Amends s. 1008.25, F.S.; making technical changes; requiring progress monitoring results to be provided to prekindergarten instructors within a specified timeframe.
- Section 5:** Amends s. 1008.366, F.S.; providing academic supports for students; authorizing a nonprofit scholarship funding organization to administer a tutoring program; providing duties and responsibilities of the organization; requiring the organization to annually provide a report to the Legislature and the department by a specified date.
- Section 6:** Amends s. 1002.321, F.S.; creating a grant program for school districts to implement artificial intelligence in support of students and teachers; establishing requirements.
- Section 7:** Establishes an effective date.

## II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

### A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

*See Fiscal Comments.*

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

Although the fiscal impact is indeterminate, the number of scholarships awarded is based upon the availability of funds and on a first-come, first-served basis.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

Section 16 of the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 GAA provides for the reversion of the unexpended balance of funds provided to the DOE for the New Worlds scholarship program and for these remaining funds to be appropriated for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 for the same purpose. A total of \$22.8 million was reverted and appropriated for Fiscal Year 2023-2024; added to the \$4 million in recurring general revenue funds brings the total for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 to \$26.8 million. As of January 13, 2024, a total of \$890,500 has been disbursed. If disbursements stay in this range, it is anticipated that there will be a balance of unexpended funds available for purposes of funding the scholarships in Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

### III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

None.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

### IV. AMENDMENTS/COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

Not Applicable.