

Ryan Petty, *Chair*  
MaryLynn Magar, *Vice Chair*  
*Members*  
Grazie P. Christie  
Layla Collins  
Daniel P. Foganholi, Sr.  
Erika Fritz-Ochs  
Luis Fuste

August 27, 2026

Dear Florida College System Community,

As a new academic year begins, I extend my best wishes to the students, faculty, staff, administrators, presidents, and trustees of Florida’s “Great 28”—the workforce engine of our state.

Florida has held its position as the number one state in the nation for higher education since those rankings began in 2017, and we remain number one in workforce education and talent attraction. The Florida College System is indispensable to that record. Our colleges deliver industry-standard, affordable programs that place students into in-demand occupations and prepare them for the responsibilities of free citizenship—without the historical burden of student debt.

Higher education in a republic has never been merely a private ticket to employment, however. Its purpose is to form the habits of mind and heart necessary for a well-lived life and for democratic citizenship: to transmit the enduring knowledge of Western Civilization and the American political order; to cultivate intellectual and moral virtue; and to equip every student with the skills, credentials, and character required for meaningful work in service of the Common Good.

**Purpose and process are inseparable.** The curriculum we teach, the credentials we award, and the work-based pathways we build must all serve that dual mission.

That mission now aligns with a national priority. President Trump’s [America’s Talent Strategy](#) rejects the old “college-for-all” orthodoxy and directs education and workforce systems toward industry-led, high-quality pathways—Registered Apprenticeships, career and technical education, and short-term credentials of value. The President has set a national goal of reaching and surpassing one million active registered apprentices, expanded federal support for skilled trades and strategic industries, and, through Workforce Pell, opened Pell Grant aid to high-quality short-term programs that prepare students for high-skill, high-wage, in-demand jobs in weeks and months, not years.

Florida students deserve multiple high-quality routes—academic, technical, and industry-credentialed—so every graduate can reach family-sustaining wages and contribute to our communities.

Florida College System, Welcome Back  
Page Two  
August 27, 2026

As you begin the year, I ask each college to work with the Department of Education, employers, and our workforce partners (especially CareerSource) to expand interest in the skilled trades, scale Registered Apprenticeships and other earn-and-learn models, and stand up Workforce Pell-eligible programs that move Floridians into opportunity faster. Do not default to “no”—find a way to get to yes. Do not let others default to “no”—let’s find a way to drive change, guarantee opportunity, and deliver on the promise we have made to the next generation of Floridians.

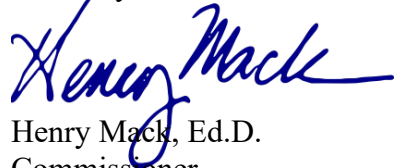
As you know, Florida is already positioned to lead: our colleges sit at the intersection of civic formation and talent development, and the state is a national partner in expanding apprenticeships in defense, shipbuilding, maritime manufacturing, and other critical industries.

To our new and returning students: Welcome. You are entering classrooms, labs, shops, and campuses across the state to pursue discovery, mastery, and a vocation worthy of your effort. We are proud of your determination. Do not stop. Ask questions, learn, listen, and take the time to form those habits that will carry you through life.

To our college leaders, faculty, and staff: *Thank you* for the instruction and counsel you provide each day. You form citizens and workers at once—students who can reason, work, and live well. If it were not for you, we would not be able to tout our exceptional status. As a faculty member myself, I am particularly grateful for the sacrifice you make to uplift lives.

I look forward to our work together this year to strengthen both missions of Florida higher education and to help shape the future of our state and nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Henry Mack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Henry" and last name "Mack" clearly distinguishable.

Henry Mack, Ed.D.  
Commissioner

HM/

Cc: Paul Burns, Ed.D., Senior Chancellor  
Kathy Hebda, Chancellor, Division of Florida Colleges  
Ashley Yopp, Chancellor, Division of Career, Technical and Adult Education  
Flannery Sloan, Chief of Staff