

FEA Frontline Report

2020 Legislative Session

Week 3 – Day 18

January 31, 2020

Bills and budgets, budgets and bills

It was a cold and rainy week – dodging raindrops and running around the Capitol building kept us plenty warm and dry. This week the budget committee Chairs released their respective budgets, and each chamber released the full Appropriations packages, including implementing bills. We’re starting to get a better sense of where the House and Senate are headed with respect to the “Year of the Teacher.”

Budget dollars and cents – is it really the “Year of the Teacher”

On Tuesday the [Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education](#) rolled out their PreK-12 budget as well as their Higher Education budget. We know this is the part everyone REALLY cares about. At long last, we can begin to answer your question – am I going to see a raise? As you may recall the budget passed last session, for the current fiscal year, included a \$75 increase in the Base Student Allocation (BSA) – which has translated to a raise for most educators in most counties in Florida. But the fiscal year budget also included bonuses for some, not all educators.

The Senate recognized that our educators do an amazing job. Their budget over last year and this year is starting to reflect that sentiment. Chair Kelli Stargel (R-Lakeland) even went so far as to say “Teachers are very important to our state. What they do is a job that I honestly could say I could not do and I appreciate every day what they are doing.”

Now down to the brass tacks: The Senate has proposed an increase in the BSA by \$40.17, with a new funding categorical – funds that MUST be used by the district as defined by the legislature – specifically for raises. That categorical has \$500 million allocation for raises. The Senate also swept the Best & Brightest bonus funds, zeroing the categorical out and is proposing no bonuses for the coming year. (HORRAY!) The Senate maintains the Teacher Classroom Supply allocation at no change, (so what you got this year you should get next year) and proposed an increase in the Mental Health allocation by \$25 million.

And on Wednesday, the [House PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee](#) released their PreK-12 budget. In a shock to most of us who have been in this process for a long time – the House’s budget is better in terms of dollars. Yes, you read that right. Chair Chris Latvala (R-Clearwater) kept his promise and has more money for educators. The House budget proposes a \$50 increase in the BSA, with \$650 million categorical for raises – currently for teachers only. They also maintain the Teacher Classroom Supply allocation at the same amount as this year and also propose a \$25 million increase to the Mental Health allocation. And the icing on the cake, the Best & Brightest bonuses are also swept and the House is not proposing any bonus program this year! (HORRAY AGAIN!)

What we are hearing from Chairs is that strings are attached to the funds (I know, shocker). The Senate’s proposal is that of the \$500 million – 80% of the funds should be used to increase the minimum classroom teacher salary towards the Governor’s goal of \$47,500 – the intent is that the goal of \$47,500 would be met over the next several years. It authorizes districts that if the goal of \$47,500 is met within the 80% of funds and the minimum salary is increased by at least 5%, to spend any remaining funds within that 80% allocation to provide salary increases for other teachers or other instructional personnel. The remaining 20% gives districts flexibility to give raises for classroom teachers and other instructional personnel – including prekindergarten teachers.

The House’s proposal to allocate the \$650 million allocation differs from the Senate. \$500 million is provided to increase the base salary of classroom teachers to an amount that will get the state to a weighted statewide average starting salary of \$47,000. The remaining \$150 million is provided to school districts to decide how to provide salary other

compensation enhancements for their veteran teachers. So yes, that means currently the House is only focused on classroom teachers, whereas the Senate expands to all educators, including prekindergarten teachers.

For our higher education folks: The House and Senate are at complete odds when it comes to funding. The House is proposing a \$25.7 million cut to Universities and a \$12.8 million cut to Colleges over the current fiscal year funding. The Senate however, proposes an increase of \$87.1 million to Universities and a \$2.5 million increase to colleges.

So what does all of this mean? Well, we have a LONG way to go to bring the budgets (and conforming policy) in for a landing. We are watching SB 62 by Senator Stargel and SB 2502, as well as APC 02 and APC 05 – the House’s education conforming policy which will obtain actual bill numbers after the Appropriations committee adopts the bills next week. And of course, we’ll continue to advocate for no bonuses, raises for ALL educators that are fair and sustainable, and that any funds allocated to the districts meet the constitutional right to collectively bargain – which means that the school board and the local bargaining agent – not the legislature – determines the wages, hours, and working terms and conditions for employees.

Legislation of note

It was a busy week for bills FEA is monitoring. Between budget negotiations, your PPA team was running this week, meeting with legislators and working amendments to bills.

The [Senate Education committee](#) met and passed [SB 1688](#) by Senator Gayle Harrel (R-Stuart), which would restructure Florida’s VPK and early learning programs. Included in this restructure would be a high-stakes accountability system which includes three tests a year, as well as financial awards, incentives, and intensive reading interventions; for Pre-K students. It appears in Florida if it walks, and maybe talks, were going to test it, regardless of age. And for you Pre-K teachers, that also means a VAM score tied to testing. Because the legislature couldn’t resist leaving you out of the high-stakes testing area. Btw, funny joke: What does Jeb Bush’s Foundation, a childcare provider, and the Florida Education Association all have in common? Their distaste for A-F school grading systems, of course! If you are really confused (I know, we were too) the Foundation only has distaste for A-F school grades for VPK programs where the majority of providers are private. They are perfectly fine with public schools receiving A-F grades which serves no purpose and many states are moving away from... but I digress.

In the higher education arena, [SB 774](#) by Senator Manny Diaz (R-Hialeah) was also heard and passed. The bill would take presidential university searches out of the sunshine, and consequently remove the public from the beginning formative process in looking for their next university president, and often, community leader. The bill sponsor asserted that the need for this legislation was a consequence of sitting presidents and other talent not wanting to put themselves into a predicament where they compromise their current job in applying for a president position. Opponents responded that this is a solution in search of a problem and there is no real evidence that this is an issue. Can we say, hello FSU President John Thrasher? The current system is designed for the public, who pay for the institutions, and the voting taxpayer has every right to be in the sunshine, and not the shade. The FEA-UFF strongly opposes this bill.

The [House PreK-12 Innovation Subcommittee](#) heard and passed the House’s companion to the VPK and early learning bill – [HB 1013](#) by Rep. Erin Grall (R-Vero Beach) which is largely similar to SB 1688 as mentioned earlier.

The [House Criminal Justice Subcommittee](#) took up and amended two of the potential campus carry bills we’re watching this session. Rep. Jayer Williamson (R-Pace) filed [HB 1437](#) which originally would have allowed any religious institution who rented, leased or otherwise allowed a religious institution to use a public school facility (a church who uses a high school gym or a college auditorium for example) to permit individuals with a concealed carry permit to carry on campus during worship services. The bill as amended now ensures that the property owner can prohibit the religious institution from authorizing individuals to carry a firearm on the property. There is no Senate companion to this bill.

[HB 183](#) as originally filed by Rep. Mel Ponder (R-Ft. Walton Beach) would have allowed an elected member of a governing body to carry a weapon to a meeting of a governing body (in our case the State Board of Ed or Board of Governors). The bill was amended by the sponsor to ensure that if the location where a meeting is being held prohibits the carrying of a concealed weapon or firearm (i.e. a college or university or a public school campus) they still would not

be permitted to carry a weapon to that location. The Senate companion, [SB 1524](#) by Senator George Gainer (R-Panama City) has yet to be heard in its first committee of reference.

Last but certainly not least, it wouldn't be a session in Florida without another expansion of so-called "school choice". The [House Education committee](#) dropped a Proposed Committee Bill (PCB) late Tuesday night for an early Thursday morning committee meeting. [EDC 01](#) revises eligibility criteria, enrollment limits, and/or accountability provisions for four of the state's major voucher programs. The most significant provisions of the bill relate to the Family Empowerment Voucher (FES). The provisions for the FES have a particular impact on public school funding because the FES is funded through the FEFP – the main funding source for public schools – thus the FES depletes funding that, otherwise, would be directed to public schools.

Don't forget to visit the [2020 Legislative Session](#) page on the FEA website to track important bills and get talking points as well.

[Are you coming to Tallahassee?](#)

We are working closely with the AFL-CIO Working Families Lobby Corps to lobby legislators in Tallahassee on pro-public education issues and against anti-union legislation. If you haven't already, be sure to let us know when to expect you via [AFL-CIO Working Families Lobby Corps "I'm coming" tab](#), and book your hotels ASAP.

If you have any questions about coming to Tallahassee please don't hesitate to contact Tina Dunbar at Tina.Dunbar@floridaea.org. Remember that your visit to Tallahassee should include proper capitol attire – suits or slacks and button up shirts and ties for the men; dresses or slacks and blouses for the ladies; and especially comfortable dress shoes for everyone. We also recommend you bring a light jacket or sweater, and an umbrella. Tallahassee weather is notoriously unpredictable for winter, not to mention committee room temperatures!

Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078

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Thanks to Yale Olenick for assisting with the content this week!