

FEA Frontline Report

2020 Legislative Session

Week 6 – Day 39

February 21, 2020

Week 6 – It's all downhill from here

It was another busy week in Tallahassee, filled with good conversations with legislators on issues of importance to our members – from the budget and pro-public education bills to anti-union legislation. Yes, it's all downhill from here. We are just holding on and hoping we keep our feet under us as we fly towards March 13th.

Republican Cadre

This week we had 28 of our Republican Cadre members in town to lobby their legislators on budget and the policy that impacts our members. Members of the Republican Cadre traveled to Tallahassee from Pensacola to the Keys (yes, the Keys!). Over the course of two days they met directly with 38 legislators or aides, testified in committee on legislation and ultimately helped shape the course of policy moving through the legislature. They also ran into many more legislators in the halls and around town and took those opportunities to advocate for our issues as well. We thank Chair Chris Latvala (R-Clearwater) for recognizing cadre members on the House floor.



Bills

Turnaround

This week [SB 1498](#) by Senator Baxley (R-Lady Lake) and [HB 7079](#) by Rep. Aloupis (R-Miami) were heard. These bills would change the definition and criteria for requiring a school to implement turnaround, from two consecutive “D” or single “F” grades, to a single “D” or “F” grade. For those of you who haven’t yet experienced turnaround, it brings instability, increased assessments, pacing guides and intrusive monitoring of teacher practice. Teachers would be retained or removed based solely on their VAM scores, not their full evaluation.

Schools in turnaround would be required to contract with an External Operator or Charter school so that they are ready to take over if the commissioner does not approve of the district’s plans for turnaround. If the school successfully leaves turnaround status (meaning their grade rose to a “C” or higher), but fell back to a “D” or “F” at any time in the next 4 years after leaving turnaround, the school would be immediately turned over to an External Operator or converted into a Charter School or the commissioner could recommend the school be closed.

Oh, it gets worse. The bill also allows charter schools access to the Turnaround School Supplemental Allocation without requiring them to be labeled as “failing and deficient”, the new term for schools with a low school grade. Charter schools are only required to implement a school improvement plan without the endless DOE supervision and “failing and deficient” label even though they make the same school grade as the public school in turnaround. And remember, a charter school gets three consecutive years of a grade lower than “C” before it must implement a modified turnaround program.

The change to a single “D” means that the number of schools placed in District Managed Turnaround would quadruple and dilute the available funding and resources from schools that need them the most. Add to that the impact of changing standards like the BEST standards that have just been released. In 2016, 150 of the schools that made a D that first year of accountability for the new standards, have made only A’s, B’s or C’s every year since then. The first testing year for new standards has been shown time and again in Florida to result in falling grades while we adjust to the new assessments. This is not the time to also punish our schools.

As you can see, this legislation is more about feeding external operators and charter school expansion than it is about helping schools with high population of students in poverty. You can be assured that FEA is working hard on this bill. We thank the numerous members who testified in both committees this week about the impact these bills will have. And the sponsors and committee members are getting it. We thank House sponsor Rep. Aloupis for spending nearly an hour with our members to discuss this bill and for his three helpful amendments to make the bad bill a little better – including putting a four-year implementation delay on the bill. And we thank the many Senators in leadership who have committed to amending this bill as it moves through the process in the Senate. HB 7079 could be on the House floor as early as next week, but likely to be the week of March 2nd.

School Safety

Also heard this week was a bill implementing the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission’s (MSDC) school safety recommendations was unanimously approved this week by the [Senate Committee on Appropriations](#). Both [SB 7040](#) and the House companion - [HB 7065](#) - are headed for their respective chamber floors for consideration and votes.

The bills contain additional safeguards for schools and students reflecting recommendation by the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission and a grand jury report. Some of the provisions include:

- Law enforcement officers responsible for responding to the school in the event of an emergency to be on campus and directly involved in the execution of emergency drills.
- Requiring each district school board to adopt policies to ensure the accurate and timely reporting of all school safety and discipline incidents.
- Enhances the safe school officer position and the role of the county sheriff by requiring school safety officers to complete mental health crisis intervention training.

A big change in the school safety laws requires charter schools to have a law enforcement officer, school safety officer or trained, vetted guardian on campus. If a charter school fails to meet this obligation, school districts can force them to do so. The bill clarifies that county sheriff departments, not private security companies, are responsible for all provisions of the training for volunteers who enroll in the Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program, which allows volunteer school employees to carry guns on campus if they pass training and background reviews. Sheriff's offices must also approve psychological evaluations, drug-test results and background checks before candidates can enter training. And, the 19-member MSDC making these recommendations would grow by three members to include a school superintendent, classroom teacher and principal.

Tax Package

Last, but certainly not least, the House tax package [HB 7097](#)– Taxation by Ways & Means ([Analysis](#)) was heard this week.

It provides for several tax reductions and other tax-related modifications designed to directly impact both families and businesses. One of the reductions we have come to expect is the three-day “back-to-school” tax holiday in early August 2020 for certain clothing, school supplies, and personal computers. Another familiar item is the seven-day “disaster preparedness” tax holiday in May and June of 2020 for specified disaster preparedness items.

Of concern in the bill is the requirement for districts seeking approval from local voters for a School Capital Outlay sales surtax to require that any revenue garnered from the sales tax be proportionately shared with charter schools based on their proportionate share of the total school district enrollment. There are several problems with this requirement, but the two greatest are:

- Funds would be distributed to charter schools based on enrollment, regardless of any demonstrated need. The opposite is true for traditional public schools in which funds are distributed without regard to enrollment and are based only on the demonstrated needs identified, in priority order, in the district's 5-year capital outlay plan.
- Funds would be distributed to support capital facilities that are not, and may never be, owned by the public that is supplying the funds. Again, the opposite is true for traditional public schools in which the funds support ONLY those facilities that are owned by the public.

We will of course be working with receptive legislators to discuss these issues and attempt to delete or amend this provision.

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?

Big thank you to our Alachua, Hillsborough, Orange, Manatee, Palm Beach, Pasco, St. Johns, and St. Lucie leaders and members who traveled to Tallahassee this week. 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 Cathy Boehme and Kevin Watson for assisting with the content this week!