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Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2021 Legislative Session

Week 1 - Day 4

Mar. 5, 2021

Pomp and Circumstance

The first day of session began with a bang ... or maybe more like a fizzle when you consider the lackluster pomp and even less circumstance. Add to it a few legislators watching from home in quarantine due to positive Covid tests, and some less than enthusiastic speeches, and that about sums up the 2021 Opening Day of session.

Friends and Champions of Public Education





We honored another Friends of Education award winner this week, Rep. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando), who was presented the award by FEA lobbyist Cathy Boehme. We also honored our Friends of Education award recipients Senate President Bill Galvano (R-Bradenton) and Sen. Rob Bradley (R-Orange Park) who left the Senate last year.

Protecting our Unions - Take Action!

As you read in the last *Frontline*, [SB 78](#) – legislation putting your employer between you and your union – wasn't considered by the Rules Committee due to a procedural ruling. This week the bill was temporarily postponed as we hear the sponsor is considering changes to the bill. Every week this bill is delayed is another win for workers' rights. We want to thank the large display of individuals who were at the civic center ready to testify or waive in opposition to the bill again this week, including representatives from the UFF-FSU Chapter, UFF at Tallahassee Community College, FSU Graduate Assistants United and Florida A&M University Graduate Assistants United. Please keep up the calls and emails to not only Senate [Rules Committee](#) members, but your senators as well; they are working!

But now it is the House's turn to take up not one, but two anti-workers' rights bills on Monday in the [Government Operations Subcommittee](#). The companion to SB 78 – [HB 947](#) by Rep. Scott Plakon (R-Longwood) – will be heard. Also up on Monday, for the first time this session, is the bill targeting all education staff professional unions to also meet a 50 percent threshold to remain the bargaining agent and incorporating the same provisions within SB 78. That bill is [HB 835](#) by Rep. Cord Byrd (R-Jacksonville Beach). The committee meets at 10 a.m. Monday, so we need you to contact the members of the Gov Ops Subcommittee as soon as possible! [Click here](#) or visit the [FEA website](#) for ways to contact the committee members. While you have been making a ton of calls and sending emails into the Senate, House members have not yet heard from our members on anti-worker bills, so please make sure to contact them before Monday.

House Education

The House [Early Learning & Elementary Education Subcommittee](#) finally began taking up and passing significant policy bills Wednesday morning, beginning with the 180-page Early

Learning bill, [HB 419](#) by Rep. Grall (R-Vero Beach). This year's version picks up on multiple attempts to pass this legislation in prior sessions. HB 419 reorganizes the Office of Early Learning into the Department of Education (DOE) to better integrate early childhood with the rest of our state's education system. The central policy for this bill would be a uniform accountability system for the private and public pre-kindergarten providers around the state, along with professional training standards for programs and teachers. The bill would replace the current kindergarten readiness screener, which is used to evaluate Pre-K programs months after the child exited the program. Instead, programs would use progress-monitoring assessments to measure learning gains along with observations of the teaching process and parent satisfaction surveys. In past sessions, disagreements among private providers, public providers, parents and the DOE, and the costs of implementation have tanked this bill in the Senate. We will see if this one moves given the tight budget and the increased costs associated with the new system and reimbursement rates that have been proposed.

Also on the committee agenda was [HB 149](#) by Rep. Bobby DuBose (D-Fort Lauderdale), legislation creating a standard for the use of seclusion and restraint for children in schools, which FEA supports. However, the bill would also create a pilot project allowing parents to request cameras be placed in self-contained special education classrooms, which FEA opposes. FEA Vice President Carol Gauronskas has become our resident expert on this policy as we continue to monitor and provide input with bill sponsors. If you are a longtime *Frontline* reader, you will remember this bill has been filed and modified year after year but has yet to pass both chambers. In this modification, Volusia County was amended out of the bill, leaving Broward County as the only remaining district in the pilot project for cameras in classrooms.

A proposed committee bill was the third bill heard, entitled Student Literacy (now [HB 7011](#)). The legislation will require DOE and the Office of Early Learning to coordinate literacy instruction and progress monitoring of literacy skills from PreK to grade 8. If passed, HB 7011 would provide resources to help students work on literacy skills at home. The other major component of the legislation updates teacher preparation to make sure new teachers have the skills they need to help their students learn to be readers. One of the encouraging things in this bill is that it will allow teachers to earn reading endorsement by stacking micro-credentials with competency-based mini-courses as opposed to the current requirements of completing a single sequence of five courses. The missing component is how to support out-of-field, alternatively certified teachers while they earn their reading endorsement. FEA lobbyist Cathy Boehme testified as to this missing piece and received a commitment from the sponsor to work on adding it to the bill moving forward.

Vouchers

It wouldn't be a *Frontline* if we didn't tell you about the latest voucher scheme moving through the legislature. [SB 48](#) was heard in Senate [Appropriations Committee](#), its final committee of reference, and passed by an 11-8 party-line vote after a 151-page delete-all amendment

dropped mere hours before the bill was to be heard. We thank leader Gary Farmer (D-Fort Lauderdale) and Sens. Bobby Powell (D-West Palm Beach) and Darryl Rouson (D-St. Petersburg) for filing several amendments to make the worst provisions better. Not surprisingly, all amendments failed. We also thank the many people who were there to testify in opposition to the bill, including Linda Edson from Florida Retired Educators and Judith Mandela, president of the Gadsden County Classroom Association. This bill now heads to the Senate floor. Currently there is not a House companion, so we'll be watching and ready for when the proposed committee bill drops.

Priority Legislation

We wanted to highlight for you some positive bills that have been filed that we encourage you to monitor and let your senators and representatives know you support.

SB 886 by Sen. Thurston (D-Fort Lauderdale) and **HB 359** by Rep. Bartleman (D-Weston) would suspend using student's FSA test scores for the 2020-2021 school year to determine student third-grade retention, teacher evaluations, school and school district grades, and schools in turnaround status, essentially leaving the FSA for benchmark purposes only. SB 886 passed the Senate [Education Committee](#) by a 9-1 vote Tuesday, with only charter and voucher champion Sen. Manny Diaz (R-Hialeah Gardens) voting in opposition. We hope HB 359 will be given a hearing soon.

SB 1610 by Sen. Jones (D-Miami Gardens) and **HB 865** by Rep. Plasencia (R-Titusville) would create changes to the Teacher Salary Increase Allocation categorical in the budget. If SB 1610 and HB 865 were to become law, it would give school districts more flexibility on how they use their state-allocated funds to provide raises for not only newly hired teachers, but for veteran teachers, other instructional personnel, and education staff professionals. It would also phase in changes to the multiple salary schedules districts are required to have under Florida statute.

SB 1782 by Sen. Ausley (D-Tallahassee) and **HB 1479** by Rep. Diamond (D-St. Petersburg) would provide school districts with the option to provide current annual contract teachers with a two- or three-year contract who are rated effective or highly effective, and maintain those evaluations during the contract period. It would maintain current language on suspension and dismissal for cause.

Keep contacting your legislators!

As you can see, your calls and emails are working as we continue to make progress on stopping attacks like SB 78 and advancing our pro-active agenda. Please take a few minutes if you have not already, to contact [your senator](#) and [your representative](#) about the issues that are important to you, and ask for their help in making Florida the place where we provide a

world class education to our students. Ask them to consider co-sponsoring our priority legislation and talking to the committee chairs to place these important bills on the next committee agenda.

Legislators need to hear from the people who they represent! Visit the [FEA website legislative page](#) to get familiar with bills that are filed and let us know if you need help in talking about bills. You can always email us at ppa@floridaea.org and we'll help answer your questions.

How You Can Take Action Today

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