

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2022 Legislative Session

3rd Committee Week

October 22, 2021

Week Three

Today marks the end of the third week of six dedicated weeks of committee meetings. Little changed from last week, as they were again mostly filled with presentations and opportunities to meet with lawmakers between committee meetings.

Special Session You Say?

On Thursday, Gov. Ron DeSantis, Attorney General Ashley Moody, Surgeon General Joseph A. Ladapo, M.D., and various speakers took to the podium in Clearwater to lambast vaccine mandates by private employers. With attendees holding “Don’t Tread on Florida” signs behind him, the governor announced his intention to call the Legislature into a special session on banning

vaccine mandates.

Usually when a governor calls a special session he knows the outcome – yet neither Speaker of the House Chris Sprowls (R-Clearwater) nor Senate President Wilton Simpson (R-Spring Hill) was at the press conference. No date was provided, so we’ll see if this occurs during one of the three remaining scheduled committee weeks, or if he wants it to be another week when legislators weren’t planning to be in Tallahassee.

Attorney General Moody stated at the press conference how horrible it is that people must upload documents into databases, and the governor said in Florida we won’t mandate a shot like they do in California to go to school. Perhaps Moody forgot that every parent in Florida with a child in public school must do the same to comply with the law that requires measles, mumps and rubella, chickenpox, and Hepatitis B vaccinations before entering or continuing their education.

Higher Education

This week the House Post-Secondary Education and Lifelong Learning Subcommittee met to hear from the state's universities and colleges regarding the updates made to their student codes of conduct. Last session, HB 233 required that all State University System (SUS) and Florida College System (FCS) schools meet a set of minimum due process protections when working with students through the code of conduct process (this is the same bill that brought us "viewpoint diversity" surveys and shielding laws).

Vikki Shirley, general counsel for the Board of Governors, explained the code of conduct process to the committee and indicated that many of the minimum requirements in HB 233 were already in practice at the SUS schools, but necessary updates have been made or in the process of being made at the universities.

Dr. Gerald Jones, vice president of Student Affairs at Tallahassee Community College (TCC), presented on the implementation process of the new codes of conduct. He provided insight into how the colleges and universities were informing students about the changes to the codes of

conduct. TCC has made the code of conduct student-friendly by making it accessible, simple, and mobile-friendly.

Florida Retirement

The Government Oversight and Accountability Committee met Wednesday to discuss the Florida Retirement System (FRS). The Reason Foundation – a Koch family-funded think tank – was invited to discuss the defined contribution, or 401(k), side of the FRS.

The chair of the committee, Sen. Jeff Brandes (R-St. Petersburg), pointed out that the defined contribution system does not provide sufficient retirement financial security. "If our goal is financial security from our retirement system, then we are not meeting that goal," to which the presenter agreed stating, "The FRS has a stated objective to provide retirement security, and the investment plan falls short of that stated objective."

Sens. Gary Farmer (D–Fort Lauderdale) and Victor Torres (D–Orlando) asked a series of questions of the presenter expounding the inherent flaws in the investment plan and pointed out that the Reason Foundation is a compromised think tank not necessarily looking after the best interests of Florida's public workers.

If this presentation is any indication of what's ahead, it's likely that FRS will be a hot topic during the 2022 session. As always, your FEA Public Policy Advocacy team is working tirelessly to educate legislators and staff to the necessities of keeping the FRS defined benefit program healthy and open.

Early Learning

The most recent meeting of the Early Learning and Elementary Education Subcommittee started with a presentation on early learning governance, regulations and compliance structures. The presentation outlined upcoming changes due to the implementation of the Early Learning and Early Grade Success bill (HB 419) that passed during the 2021 legislative session.

The second half of the meeting contained a panel of early learning providers from around the state to discuss their current challenges, and policy recommendations that could help alleviate the burden of critical shortages due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The panel spoke passionately about the need for better support for hiring and onboarding methods, the need for updated technology for tracking and accounting for attendance, and other widespread challenges in the early learning sector.

The importance of social emotional learning was also brought to the forefront of the conversation due to questions from legislators about progress monitoring and program assessments. We will be hearing more about the implementation of this bill and how it will change each facet of education over time.

Looking Ahead

The next two committee weeks are scheduled for the week of Nov. 1 and the week of Nov. 15. At this time, it remains unclear if the special session called by Gov. DeSantis will occur during one of those weeks, between those two weeks or at another time. Check the FEA website (<http://www.feaweb.org/session>) for the latest information. If you haven't done so already, text "edactivist" to 22934 to be signed up for action alerts so you can be notified immediately about any actions we are asking members to take in relation to the special session.

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Thanks to Chad Leonard for the early learning content, Yale Olenick for the FRS content, and Alexis Montalvo for the higher education content.

Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078.

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