

# Florida Education Association

# *Frontline Report*

## *2022 Legislative Session*

*2nd Committee Week*

*Oct. 15, 2021*

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### *Week Two*

For the second week of committees, legislators and lobbyists were greeted in Tallahassee with some cooler temps in the air. This week was filled mostly with presentations and opportunities to meet with lawmakers between committee meetings. We hope to see you in Orlando if you are attending the Delegate Assembly! Stop by the PAC booth and say hi to your Public Policy Advocacy team!

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### *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*

This session is a redistricting year for Florida, as it is for the rest of the country as well. The previous redistricting cycle has become notorious in Florida, as it was heavily litigated. It became known that the Florida Senate was circumventing the transparent process by using consultants to draw partisan-tilted maps, creating a “shadow process.” As a result, the Florida Supreme Court intervened to ensure that the maps were compliant with the state’s 2010 constitutional amendments requiring a fair process when the Legislature had proven to be unreliable implementers of the legislation.

The chair of the Senate Reapportionment Committee, Sen. Ray Rodrigues (R-Fort Myers) stated during the opening session of the committee that public input places the Legislature in jeopardy of lawsuits over the redistricting process and that he is inclined to restrict public input into the process. He has proposed rules that remove public hearings around the state, limit public comment and do not permit a citizen to submit a map for a legislator’s consideration unless the legislator requests the map in writing.

Fair voting districts are the most important aspect of our democratic republic. The integrity of our entire system is in the lines on the map that is now in the hands of the Legislature. Consequently, this year we will need to be heavily engaged and focused on this process as it determines the political environment we will be navigating for the next 10 years.

If you’re interested in following the process, or even creating your own map, you can access that information [here](#). Your Public Policy Advocacy team in Tallahassee will continue to monitor this closely, and we will keep you updated of any opportunities to provide input on this very important process.

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### *House Addressing IEPs*

Tuesday’s meeting of the House Education and Employment Committee was a deep dive into the individualized education plan (IEP) and the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). The

presentation was given by two Florida Department of Education staffers, Melissa Ramsey, vice chancellor of Strategic Improvement, and Victoria Gaitanis, bureau chief of Exceptional Student Education. The presentation described the process of 405,000 students who are currently in special education and 45,000 teachers and staff who support them.

Much of the committee's presentation addressed the way the MTSS is designed to identify and provide increasing levels of support for students in one or more areas. The first few weeks of committee presentations are often a prelude to upcoming legislative proposals, so the questions asked by legislators give us some idea of potential areas for change. This meeting, the presentations took up most of the committee time, so questions were limited. The questions that were asked centered around concerns about the timeline and process for identifying students who are having learning difficulties. For those who work directly with IEPs, we are too familiar with the common complaints that the MTSS timeline requirements unnecessarily delay student assistance, and the extensive legal paperwork and process required to develop and review a student's IEP may be daunting for parents or inaccessible for working families.

A second line of questions related to the availability of alternative assessments for students in special education, and the current practice of labeling student diplomas in a way that precludes students from obtaining employment and joining the military despite completing high school. Legislative changes several years ago modified the requirements for the special diploma and expanded the standard diploma options, but the student transcripts still identify students who met graduation requirements through the alternative assessments.

We don't yet know what the legislators on the education committee are thinking but expect changes relating to these two areas to be part of a legislative package. If you have ideas for how to address these issues, please be sure to share with your Public Policy Advocacy team.

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### *Senate Takes Up Higher Education*

The Florida Senate Education Committee heard from the Kathy Hebda, chancellor of the Florida College System (FCS), and Marshall Criser, chancellor of the State University System (SUS).

Hebda provided an update on the FCS schools, including the cost of tuition and the number of degrees being awarded, dual enrollment numbers, as well as the new programs at the FCS Schools in the state. The committee also heard from leadership at Polk State College, Miami Dade College, Northwest Florida State College and St. Petersburg College.

Criser provided the Senate with an update similar to the one he provided the House Post-Secondary Education and Lifelong Learning Subcommittee last week, regarding how Florida has been named the best state for higher education for the fourth year, and tuition remains one of the lowest in the country.

The state's three preeminent universities (University of Florida, Florida State University and the University of South Florida) now rank in the top 50 universities in the nation. The committee also had the opportunity to hear from the leadership at Florida Polytechnic University, University of Central Florida, University of North Florida and Florida Gulf Coast University.

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### *Next, Week Three*

Legislative committee meetings continue next week. Please see FEA's [legislative page](#) to keep up with what's when. We'll sum it all up in Frontline on Friday, Oct. 22.

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### *How You Can Take Action Today*

Visit the FEA website to learn more about session and sign up for FEA Action Alert texts.

Thanks to Yale Olenick for the redistricting content, Cathy Boehme and Chad Leonard for the House IEP content, and Alexis Montalvo for the higher education content.



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