

Florida Education Association

# *Frontline Report*

## *2022 Legislative Session*

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### *4th Committee Week*

*November 5, 2021*

As the fourth committee week ends, we found out there will be one less committee week this year than normal. Nov. 15-19 was scheduled to be the fifth committee week, but instead Gov. DeSantis has called the Legislature into a special session that week to address Covid vaccine requirements. When committee weeks resume on Nov. 29, we expect the committees will be in the full swing of hearing bills as the time for presentations has been depleted.

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### *What does redistricting mean for county and school board races?*

As we have previously reported, legislators are drawing new boundary lines for legislative and congressional districts. There also are new lines being drawn at the county level throughout the state. Most counties have a **web portal** available that is dedicated to this process. These websites include meeting dates, proposed maps and other related information.

Some counties have seen population growth as high as 40 percent, so this work will have a lasting impact on local communities. We encourage you to see if your county has a website available for you to review any map submissions and provide the opportunity for public input. If you need help finding your county's website, please reach out to **[yale.olenick@floridaea.org](mailto:yale.olenick@floridaea.org)** for assistance.

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## *Senate education hears first bills*

This week the Senate Education Committee heard their first batch of bills, including **SB 236**, Children with Developmental Delays by Sen. Shevrin Jones (D-Miami Gardens), and **SB 270**, Funds for Students Transportation by Sen. Travis Hutson (R-Palm Coast).

SB 236 would extend the age limit for students who receive exceptional student education (ESE) benefits under the developmental delay classification. The bill would allow students with developmental delays to continue receiving services up to age 9 or until the student completes the second grade, whichever comes first in accordance with federal law. Florida law currently ends these services at age 5. FEA stood in support of this great bill in committee, and it passed the committee unanimously.

The committee also considered SB 270, which would expand bus routes to include students living within a one-mile radius of a school. Currently, districts can only provide transportation to students who live 2 or more miles away from the school. The bill passed by a vote of 8-0.

In public testimony it was pointed out that currently 17.5 percent of all school bus driver positions in the state are vacant. If there aren't enough bus drivers now, forcing school districts to add even more routes would be an unfunded mandate that could cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

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## *Greater scrutiny and more government overreach coming?*

The House Early Learning and Elementary Education Subcommittee heard a **presentation on financial and curriculum transparency requirements for school districts**. As the presentation made clear, most school districts meet or exceed state requirements for transparency. Yet, some members of the committee asked pointed questions and made it clear they'd like to see every single lesson and all instructional materials publicly posted on school district websites. It should go without saying these same committee members do not share a desire for charter or voucher schools to be transparent.

We will closely monitor and fight back against any bills this session that create even more administrative burdens and paperwork for educators.

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## *House chair beats same drum on student enrollment*

The House PreK-12 Education Appropriation Committee heard two reports in committee this week, **one on our state voucher programs** as well as **a report on student enrollment trends**.

Last year's legislative changes again expanded eligibility for tax-funded voucher programs that go to unaccountable private schools or to education savings accounts. Even with these changes, the private schools are under-enrolled. For instance, in the past three years, almost \$200 million in tax revenue has been allocated to the Hope voucher even though the voucher has paid out just over \$5 million. If invested in public schools, the additional \$195 million could have gone a long way toward ensuring fair salaries for all employees.

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## *Reading on the horizon?*

On Tuesday, the members of the Education and Employment Committee heard a **presentation regarding the New Worlds Reading Initiative**, the program created by passage of HB 3 by Rep. Dana Trabulsy (R-Fort Pierce) last session. The program, which is intended for struggling readers in K-5, has partnered with Scholastic as the book vendor and will send one book a month directly to the home of each student enrolled in the program.

Committee members shared lots of positive comments about the initiative and asked an assortment of questions on topics including: how to guarantee the selection of age-appropriate books, books in multiple languages, range of topics and plans to expand selections, marketing plans and additional venues to increase enrollment, community partnerships, staffing, funding, and comprehensive reporting by district, school and targeted subgroups provided to the legislature for lawmakers to know how the program is working in their districts.

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## *Truancy impacts on student learning*

The Secondary Education and Career Development Subcommittee heard presentations from the Florida Department of Education (DOE) and Pinellas County Schools (PSC) **regarding student attendance and truancy**. DOE concentrated on the rules regarding habitual truancy and habitual absences and the procedures for curbing these behaviors. PSC focused on the implementation of the regulations and statutes. PCS specifically focused on their multi-agency committee that works to curb truancy and chronic absenteeism throughout the county.

In sessions past, the Legislature floated the idea that student truancy should be tied to teacher and school evaluations. While this was not discussed in committee this week, we will be monitoring the state's attention to truancy rates as a potential way to evaluate educators.

*Thanks to Yale Olenick for the redistricting content, Alexis Montalvo for the Senate education and truancy content, Cathy Boehme for the House appropriations content, and Chad Leonard and Tina Dunbar for the New Worlds Reading Initiative content.*

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