

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2022 Legislative Session

Special Session

November 18, 2021

Week Five

This week legislators gathered in Tallahassee for the three-day special session to deliberate on several bills regarding limiting or banning mandates over vaccines and masking. This week was also American Education Week, and lawmakers came to visit the Florida Education Association as we celebrate Florida's public schools.

Special Session: What's In, What's Out

The special session kicked off Monday and Tuesday with the four bills being reviewed by each chamber's committees of reference. In the Senate during this review, Sen. Jason Pizzo (D-Miami) summed up the whole special session in one simple question: "Did you get a chance to review this bill before it was drafted by the governor's office?"

The House and Senate called their legislators into session on Tuesday and Wednesday to permit the amendatory process (shocker, all amendments offered failed to pass), and to allow lawmakers to ask questions and debate the merits of the bills. In the end, all four bills passed

each chamber and were signed quickly into law by the governor Thursday, in Brandon of all places. It shouldn't be lost on anyone that his chosen place to sign the bills coincides with the horrible "Let's go Brandon" cheer that he himself has repeated numerous times.

While the governor has previously held several press conferences that included rhetoric demanding and opposing certain provisions regarding masking and vaccines, ultimately the legislation drafted, passed and now signed into law bears little resemblance to his rhetoric. Here are the highlights of what is now law:

- For private businesses, employers cannot mandate a Covid-19 vaccine without providing employees the ability to opt out. Opt-out exemptions include medical, pregnancy, "anticipated pregnancy" (undefined), religious reasons, Covid-19 immunity, periodic testing (also undefined) or use of employer-provided personal protective equipment (PPE).
- For governmental entities including school districts, there is a blanket prohibition on Covid-19 vaccinations as a condition for employment that carries up to a \$5,000 fine for violation.
- Prohibits a school district from mandating a Covid-19 vaccine for students but maintains all other current vaccination requirements for entrance and continued education in public schools.
- Prohibits a school district from mandating students wear a face mask or other face covering, but parents are still permitted to send their child to school wearing a face mask or face covering.
- Prohibits a school district from quarantining asymptomatic, non-Covid-19 positive students from attending school or school-sponsored events, and employees from returning to work.
- All of these provisions expire on June 1, 2023.

Redistricting: Maps, Maps, Maps!

As mentioned previously, the current legislative session will mostly be focused on redrawing congressional, state Senate and state House boundaries as is required every decade due to the census and population growth and loss. The Florida Senate is the first out the gate, with their proposed 28 congressional seat maps and 40 state Senate maps (four each, eight maps in total). While we know that the Legislature will change all districts, some changes will have a much more significant impact.

The state has seen significant population growth and is now home to 21.5 million residents (an increase of 14.6 percent). Osceola, St. Johns, Sumter and Walton counties have seen the most considerable population growth. Conversely, 17 of Florida's counties experienced population decreases, with Gulf, Hardee, Lafayette and Calhoun counties seeing the most substantial reductions. These population changes play a huge role in the new maps.

While each draft map is unique, there are similarities across each iteration. Here are a couple of notable changes with regard to the proposed new state Senate maps:

- There are significant changes in the South Florida area. Districts in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach will look vastly different and will likely pit our friends against one another.
- SD 34 includes portions of Palm Beach and Broward counties.
- SD 38 has a large swath of eastern Broward County with a small portion of northeastern Miami-Dade County.

The Tampa Bay area remains relatively similar to the current boundary maps.

- The most notable change in this area is SD 20, which removes Polk and now only covers portions of Hillsborough and Pasco counties.

Most of the state's population decreases have occurred in the Panhandle, so we see some of the districts in this area shift east to capture additional constituents.

Significant changes also are coming to Central Florida. Much of the state's population growth has occurred in this area.

- Orange County splits into five districts (SD 15, SD 12, SD 11, SD 9, and SD 13).
- Polk County has two Senate districts (SD 22 and SD 26), where it previously had three.
- Lake County is kept wholly within SD 12.

These maps are just a glimpse of what is to come. But we know this much for sure: Whatever final map boundaries are passed and signed into law will very likely set up election battles that will pit one education champion against another in the same legislative district. And this is likely to occur in multiple places throughout Florida – not just in South Florida. It's crucial to our work – both legislative and electoral – that we are paying close attention to the map lines and, as much as possible, holding off from issuing local and state endorsements until all maps are finalized. As always, you can reach out to your Public Policy Advocacy team in Tallahassee to provide you with a complete snapshot of what your counties' districts look like as we progress through this redistricting session.

American Education Week Celebration: With Cake!

Happy American Education Week! This week we celebrate public education and honor the individuals working to ensure that every student receives a quality education. And what better way to bring awareness to public education than by opening our doors and inviting our state legislators to join us in celebration? We also took time to wish FEA President Andrew Spar a happy 50th birthday!

On Tuesday evening, nearly 40 lawmakers from both sides of the aisle as well as legislative aides and committee staff joined FEA union members, local presidents and staff, FEA staff and leadership on the third floor of the FEA building to eat, drink and talk about public education. It was truly a bipartisan evening, with even the commissioner of education stopping by!



Thanks to Alexis Montalvo for assisting with the redistricting content.

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