

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2022 Legislative Session

Week 1

January 14, 2022

The 2022 legislative session has officially begun! The 60-day session kicked off with the traditional pomp and circumstance, including speeches by the legislative leadership and governor, which set the tone for what is to come.

The Senate president's speech included an affirmation to ensure that "education funding increases are prioritized for bus drivers, maintenance workers, cafeteria workers and other true public servants in our public schools." When the speaker of the House was asked about the president's comments, he agreed that something should be done to assist our education staff professionals. Meanwhile, the governor continued to support increases to workforce education funding, ending FSA testing, and another round of \$1,000 bonuses for classroom teachers and principals.

Senate Education Committee

First up on the agenda was **SB 520, Presidential Searches**, by Sen. Jeff Brandes (R-St. Petersburg). Many of you may be feeling a sense of déjà vu about this bill — this is the eighth time the Legislature has considered it. The bill would eliminate the requirement that searches for college and university presidents be conducted in public. Each time the bill has been introduced, critics have opposed the bill because allowing these decisions to be made by political appointees behind closed doors shuts out stakeholders and hurts the university/college community. **United Faculty of Florida**, FEA, AFL-CIO, and others oppose

this bill. Unfortunately, the bill passed on a party-line vote (6-3) and now heads to the Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee.

The final bill on the agenda, **SB 1048, Student Assessments**, by Sen. Manny Diaz (R-Hialeah Gardens), is the Senate's first attempt to address our testing and accountability system. Since Sen. Diaz's assessments bill was released, our member activists have been providing suggestions to improve the bill. Members of the committee mirrored those suggestions and comments. Sen. Tina Polsky (D-Boca Raton) expressed concerns about the ability of our younger students to use computer-based assessments rather than the current paper and pencil tests. She stated in committee that "we wouldn't want their performance to be hampered by the fact that they are not so familiar with the computer." The bill is now headed to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Education after passing out of committee unanimously.

In its current form, the bill does not live up to the governor or commissioner's announcement of fewer and better tests. Instead, there are more tests and more time on testing, and no change in our state's flawed accountability system. As it moves through committees, we will work with legislators to create a bill that addresses our concerns.

We also want to thank each of the 400-plus members who shared suggestions with senators on the committee through our **SB 1048 action alert**. Please remember that your input matters and will be critical in the coming weeks as SB 1048 and its House counterpart, HB 1193, move through the process.

Appropriations

For our longtime Frontline readers, you know that the governor only proposes a budget – now it's up to lawmakers to craft and pass a budget. We'll need everyone pushing their legislators to fully fund the education budget so that students have what they need to succeed, and educators are fully supported.

The governor's staff presented his proposed budget recommendations this week to both the House and Senate Appropriations committees. Of note to our members is the \$50 million increase to the Teacher Salary Increase Allocation (TSIA) categorical, the increases in both transportation funding and mental health funding for public schools, as well as the continued

lack of Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) funding (again) for our traditional public schools.

For those of you who have been watching some of the governor's press conferences, you will note that he has proposed a law enforcement package that would incentivize law enforcement to come to Florida, as well as ways to address compression issues in law enforcement pay. This was also part of the governor's budget presentation in committee.

We thank Rep. Fentrice Driskell (D-Tampa), who spent a considerable time in questions on the governor's law enforcement salary compression issue, but his lack of a proposal to address the compression issues in veteran teachers and other instructional personnel pay. In her questioning, she was able to get the governor's staff on record saying that while our state has yet to reach the minimum teacher salary of \$47,500, "over time, the governor will continue to support addressing those compression issues."

We also thank Rep. Matt Willhite (D-Wellington), who questioned the pay inequities for our education staff professionals, as well as the impact on the Florida Retirement System.

Redistricting Status Update

The redistricting race continued this week. Of course, it's not really a race, but the speed at which the Legislature is moving the maps makes it feel like one. The Senate subcommittee considered four maps this week. Those maps were then voted on in the Reapportionment Committee on Thursday, setting up the Senate to consider the bill on the floor next week. The House process is a bit further behind, likely leading to a floor vote in two weeks.

The federal congressional maps being considered would give Republicans a 16-12 advantage over Democrats. They would additionally create a new Republican-leaning congressional district in the Central Florida area.

Looking at the proposed state House and Senate districts, the League of Woman Voters warned that the maps might not do enough to protect minority voting strength. Additionally, as many as four South Florida Democrats would be drawn into districts with another state senator.

The House State Legislative Redistricting Committee met for eight minutes on Tuesday with little fanfare. The House maps have made a mess of South Florida, and much like the Senate

maps, appear to be disadvantaging more Democrats and potentially undermining the constitutional requirements for compactness, among other variables. We are monitoring this closely and will continue to update you.

Keep contacting your legislators

As we saw last year, your calls and emails work! If you have not already, please take a few minutes to **contact your Senator and your representative** about the issues that are important to you and ask for 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 reaching out to committee chairs to place these essential bills on the next committee agenda.

Legislators need to hear from the people who they represent! Visit the **FEA Legislative Session Page** – which is **also available in Spanish** – 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.

If you want guidance and company while engaging with the Legislature, join us for **Power Hour every Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. EST!** Each week those joining us for Power Hour will take a unified action to help further our legislative priorities. **Register here to join us for Power Hour.**

Joining us for lobby visits?

- Register with the **Florida AFL-CIO Working Family Lobby Corps** prior to your trip.
(Please note: you will need your proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test taken 48 hours before your arrival in Tallahassee.)
 - Register and **join FEA for a Lobby Visit Briefing**. Lobby Visit Briefings are held Monday at 6:00 pm.
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