

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2022 Legislative Session

Week 5

February 11, 2022

We'll Never Let Them Take Our Freedom!

At the bright and early hour of 8 a.m. on Tuesday, more than 81 speakers, including more than 30 educators, spoke or waived in opposition to **HB 1197** by Reps. Scott Plakon (R-Longwood) and Cord Byrd (R-Jacksonville) in the State Administration & Technology Appropriations Subcommittee. As you may recall from previous Frontlines, this legislation would restrict members' freedoms to join with fellow educators to advocate for the needs of the students they serve, and does nothing to address the critical shortage of educators we are facing in Florida.

We thank everyone who traveled to Tallahassee, especially those who spoke at the podium. It is always a good day when bill sponsors have to defend against the message we delivered. We also thank Reps. Daryl Campbell (D-Fort Lauderdale), Joy Goff-Marcil (D-Maitland), Yvonne Hinson (D-Gainesville), Tray McCurdy (D-Orlando) and Felicia Robinson (D-Miami Gardens) for their questions and debate against the bill. Additionally, we'd like to thank Rep. Toby Overdorf (R-Stuart), who joined all the Democrats in voting NO. **The bill passed 9-6** and heads to its final committee stop, the State Affairs Committee.

More Tests for Florida's Students

On Sept. 14, Gov. Ron DeSantis declared, "Legislative proposals will reduce testing by 75 percent."

Five months later, on Feb. 9, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed **SB 1048**, which will increase the number of standardized tests students take and the amount of time students spend testing. Having passed each of its three committee stops in the Senate with a unanimous vote, the bill is now ready for a vote by the full Senate.

FEA, our locals and our members remain committed to ensuring that only a bill that actually reduces testing gets signed into law. **Email your senator today and tell them the importance of reducing testing in our schools!**

Our latest episodes of the Educating from the Heart podcast deal with these proposed testing changes. Be sure to listen to **Part I, which focuses on the tests themselves**, and the **Part II, which is more centered around the accountability system**.

Censorship Remains a Priority to Some Legislators

Instead of addressing the education issues that most Floridians care about, including the teacher and staff shortage, legislators again this week devoted significant time in committee to passing regulations to censor discussions in classrooms.

The Senate Education Committee passed the "Don't Say Gay" bill. Officially known as **SB 1834**, Parental Rights in Education, by Sen. Dennis Baxley (R-Lady Lake), the bill effectively criminalizes elementary school teachers from even acknowledging homosexuality exists. More than 100 people testified on the bill, with many of them speaking about the bill's dangers for LGBTQ+ students. Despite overwhelming opposition to the bill from the public, it **passed on a party-line vote of 6-3** and heads to its second (of three) committee stops, Appropriations.

Meanwhile in the House Education and Employment Committee, **HB 7** also passed on a party-line vote despite overwhelming public opposition among those who addressed the committee. HB 7 would have a chilling effect when it comes to conversations surrounding America's

historical and present-day struggles with racism and sexism, as the bill attempts to legislate students' emotional reactions to topics that by their very nature elicit an emotional response.

A Dark Day in the Florida Senate

Under current law, the names of people who apply for college and university presidencies are public record. This is important because it helps to ensure that the most qualified individual receives these prestigious jobs instead of allowing the presidencies to be given out as political favors.

Over the past decade, there have been numerous attempts to overturn the law and remove higher education presidential searches from the sunshine. Because bills that weaken Sunshine laws require a two-thirds threshold for passage instead of a simple majority, the bill had always been blocked in the Florida Senate. That changed this week as **SB 520** was **approved by a vote of 28-11**.

The House version of the bill (HB 703) has one committee stop left before it is ready for a vote on House floor.

Budget Time!

Not everything this week was doom and gloom. For the first time in a very long time, both chambers of the Legislature have proposed budgets that will make a significant investment in Florida's public schools. As importantly, by increasing the Base Student Allocation these proposals take a step toward providing the flexibility needed to ensure that all educators can receive a meaningful raise. These budget proposals are a direct result of the hard work FEA locals and members have been engaged in all session long. THANK YOU!

Of course, there is always room for improvement. Legislators need to relax percentage-based formulas regarding how raises are determined. **[Click here to email your legislators to ask for flexibility in school funding.](#)**

HB 1467, on the House Floor

The closely watched “school board” bill **HB 1467, K-12 Education**, by Rep. Sam Garrison (R-Orange Park), was heard on the House Floor this week. Originally, the bill would have eliminated salaries for all school board members, but after a round of horse-trading it now creates term limits for school board members and lets them keep their salaries. If this version of the bill passes both chambers, school board members will have a maximum term of eight consecutive years – much like the legislature. Several members of the House asked questions about the legality of this move, but those concerns did not stop the bill from being passed (78-40). As a reminder, the bill also would require school districts to post all the materials available to students inside school libraries online and give the public an option to review the books, leading to concerns about increased censorship. Additionally, librarians would have to undergo training regarding age-appropriate materials.

The Senate companion, **SB 1300** by Sen. Joe Gruters (R-Sarasota), has one more committee stop before the full Senate considers it. The two bills have several differences, so the House and Senate will likely negotiate over which way to proceed, so these are bills to keep an eye on.

Cameras in Classrooms Bill Stalled

Many of you have asked about a bill that would place cameras in classrooms. **HB 1055, Video Cameras in Public School Classrooms**, by Rep. Bob Rommel (R-Naples), has yet to get a hearing, and we have just completed the fifth week of the two-month legislative session. The bill doesn't have a Senate companion and has been assigned to four committees, so the bill's likelihood of passing this year is extremely low.

The “Rate Bill”

The annual "Rate Bill," which addresses the liabilities of the Florida Retirement System, included a provision to increase the employer-paid contribution for those participating in the

Defined Contribution plan, or the investment plan, from 3 percent to 6 percent, which results in a 9 percent contribution to the plan. This change should help bring the retirement benefits paid out from the Defined Contribution plan more in line with the Defined Benefit plan, the traditional pension option. With that being said, the Defined Benefit will still be the better option for most people, but this is a step in the right direction for the Legislature. These bills are still moving through the process, so additional changes may still be in the works.

Staff Shortages? What Shortages?

Schools across the state and the country are experiencing staffing shortages, and no one understands that more than you. This week, the State Board of Education met in Tallahassee and approved their annual Critical Teacher Shortage Area Report. While representatives from the Florida Association of School Superintendents and the State College System both talked about the impact of teacher shortages, a representative of the state Department of Education attempted to minimize the issue. He stated that this report is not an assertion that we have a teacher shortage; instead, it identifies the most critical shortages eligible for district incentives. Despite this attitude, the report shows how critical our state's staffing shortages are and why this is an FEA priority.

For the past seven years, we have seen the widening gap between teacher preparation program completions and our need for more teachers. Our state's teacher preparation programs produce only one-third of the anticipated vacancies for the next school year. The recent focus on salary increases is welcome. Still, we know that teachers need support in schools and that prepared and supported teachers are less likely to leave the profession.

The Legislature, too, is focused on stopgap measures. This year there are two such measures. **HB 573** by Rep. John Snyder (R-Palm City) and **SB 896** by Sen. Danny Burgess (R-Zephyrhills), would allow military veterans with four years of experience and 60 hours of college credit to obtain a five-year temporary certificate as long as they pass the subject area exam and a school district is willing to hire them. The bills differ slightly, but both are pretty clear indications that the Legislature does not understand the need for teachers to know their subject and be professionally trained to teach.

Joining us for lobby visits?

- Register with the **Florida AFL-CIO Working Family Lobby Corps** prior to your trip.
(Please note you will need to be vaccinated to join the Working Family Lobby Corps.)
- Register and **join FEA for a Lobby Visit Briefing**. Lobby Visit Briefings are held Monday at 6:00 pm.

How You Can Take Action Today

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



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