

Florida Education Association

# *Frontline Report*

## *2022 Legislative Session*

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*Week 4*

*February 4, 2022*

We are nearing the halfway mark of the 2022 Legislative Session!

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### *Assessments*

This week the House began its work on the new assessments and accountability system. **HB 1193, K-12 Assessments and Accountability**, by Rep. Rene Plasencia (R-Titusville), was considered by the Early Learning and Elementary Education subcommittee. The House and Senate versions of the bill have minor differences, but they are working to establish a statewide progress monitoring system.

Rep. Plasencia answered numerous questions posed by committee members, explaining the changes to the current assessment system and their impact on student performance and school grades. He also explained that there would be little change over the next two years.

During discussions of changes being made to the bill, an amendment that would change the way school grades are calculated starting in the 2023-2024 school year raised bipartisan concern. If this were to become law, it would likely lead to more schools being labeled as failing, resulting in more schools entering turnaround. In the end the amendment was adopted and the bill passed the committee by a vote of **12-4**; it heads to the Secondary Education and Career Development Subcommittee next.

Thank you to our members Matthew Tomko, Angel Frank, Eleana Valencia-Knight, and Cheyne Seleski for testifying in the committee.

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## *PreK Teachers are Teachers Too!*

Also on the Early Learning and Elementary Education subcommittee agenda was **HB 1219 – Instructional Personnel** by Rep. Robin Bartleman (D-Weston). This bill would add certified Pre-K teachers who are funded through the FEFP to the statutory definition of instructional personnel. In the last few years, Pre-K teachers under this definition have been added into proviso language in the budget, but that language only has a one year effect. This bill would make the inclusion of PreK teachers permanent in Florida law. **The proposal passed unanimously.**

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## *Censorship of American History Continues*

The House State Affairs Committee voted **16-8** Tuesday, along party lines, to advance **HB 7**, Individual Freedoms, by Rep. Bryan Avila (R-Miami). The legislation is an effort to censor classroom discussions on sensitive topics, including racism and sexism.

As Rep. Robin Bartleman (D-Weston) pointed out in committee, "history is not objective. Conversations are uncomfortable. I understand what the bill is trying to do, but the only way you don't repeat history is by discussing it. By having honest conversations. Not by stifling teachers."

The bill also extends the same bans to corporate human resource policies and training.

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## *Evaluations and Collective Bargaining*

The House Education and Employment Committee approved **HB 1203** that would remove the right to collectively bargain the teacher evaluation process. The bill passed the committee by a vote of **13-6** and will now head to the House floor for consideration.

Until Tuesday, the bill did not have a Senate companion; however, in the Senate Education Committee, SB 1386, School Personnel, by Sen. Manny Diaz (R-Hialeah Gardens) was amended in committee to mirror HB 1203. In both the House and Senate, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents and lobbyists for Orange, Pasco, and St. Johns school districts supported the bill, while FEA was the sole organization against it. SB 1386 passed its first committee stop with a unanimous vote.

For a little historical context: The right to negotiate the evaluation system was upheld by the Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC) in a recent ruling. The ruling directly resulted from a local fight in Orange County between the school district and OCCTA when the district tried to impose changes to the evaluation process and refused to bargain those changes. OCCTA filed an unfair labor practice (ULP), and the district lost – not once, but twice. The district is trying to circumvent that ruling by making a statutory change. If this bill were to become law, it would upend the evaluation process in Orange County as well as the other 66 counties.

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## *The Budget Process Begins!*

This week the House and Senate Education Appropriations committees released their initial budgets. While we are nearing the halfway point of session, we are very early in the budget process. Below are a couple of highlights of the initial budgets:

- House PreK-12 Budget
  - Total per pupil spending = \$8,080.98 (an increase of \$150 per student, or 3.5%)
  - Teacher Salary Increase Allocation (TSIA) increased to \$800 million along with more flexibility in how the TSIA funds are allocated
- Senate Education Budget
  - \$24.1 billion in total funding (an increase of \$1.5 billion, the largest increase in nearly 30 years)
    - “These historic FEFP increases are provided in an expectation that all school districts ensure that every employee is paid at a minimum wage of \$15 an hour, beginning in the 2022-2023 school year,” said Sen. Doug Broxson (R-Pensacola).
  - \$239 increase in the Base Student Allocation
  - TSIA increased to \$600 million

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## *Committee Bills Galore*

This week we got a little frustrated when several education committee bills were filed in the House. A committee bill is drafted by the committee rather than an individual legislator. We knew they were coming, but the problem with committee bills is that they are not released in advance, which gives the public and legislators very little time to read and understand the bills before the vote. Here's what these brand-new bills do:

- HB 5101, Education, by the PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee, will allow for the creation of virtual charter schools, makes changes to virtual school regulations, makes changes to voucher programs, and more. Currently, school districts can elect to have a franchise of Florida Virtual School to accommodate their students' graduation requirements; this bill would remove the district's ability to do so. According to Rep. Randy Fine (R-Palm Bay), this committee bill was created to shock and wake people up about virtual schools so that the discussion may flourish throughout the remainder of the session. The bill **passed unanimously**.
- HB 7051, Post-Secondary Education, by the Post-Secondary Education and Lifelong Learning subcommittee. This bill makes several changes, including how Florida's colleges and universities will be accredited. The bill states that the same accrediting agency may not accredit Florida's colleges and universities for consecutive accreditation cycles. Additionally, the colleges and universities can bring a lawsuit against their accrediting agency for any retaliatory action taken by the agency. These changes are likely a direct result of the recent involvement of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) in several issues at Florida's higher education institutions. Many committee members expressed concerns about the changes to the accreditation process, given that changes to these accreditors could harm the state's universities and colleges' rankings and standing—the bill passed by a **party-line vote of 11-6**.

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## *Joining Us for Lobby Visits?*

If you are planning to join us for a lobby visit, please make sure to do the following:

- Register with the [Florida AFL-CIO Working Family Lobby Corps](#) before 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 Mondays at 6 p.m.

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