

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2022 Legislative Session

Week 7

February 25, 2022

We are nearing the finish line of the 2022 legislative session! Things will undoubtedly start to heat up with only two weeks left to go.

A few important dates to mark on your session calendar:

- Starting Saturday, Feb. 24, due to the 45th Day Rule, the House will release committee agendas at 4:30 p.m. the day before the scheduled committee meeting.
- Tuesday, March 1, the 50th day of session, is the last day for the Senate to hold regularly scheduled meetings.

Classroom Censorship Bills Pass the House

This week the House held two marathon sessions which included two hot-button issues, **HB 1557** and **HB 7**.

HB 1557, or the "Don't Say Gay" bill by Rep. Joe Harding (R-Ocala), would prohibit younger students from receiving "classroom instruction" about sexual orientation or gender identity "in a manner that is not age-appropriate." The bill **passed the House by 69-47**, with seven Republicans (Reps. Aloupis, Busatta-Cabrera, LaMarca, Mariano, Mooney, Plasencia and W. Robinson) voting against the bill and one Democrat (Rep. Bush) voting in favor of the bill.

HB 7, or the "Stop WOKE Act," would ban the school curriculum or workplace training that teaches members of a group of people are guilty or at fault for any action of that group in the past. The bill would have a chilling effect on conversations surrounding America's historical and present-day struggles with racism and sexism. The bill attempts to legislate students' emotional reactions to topics that elicit an emotional response by their very nature. The bill **passed on a party-line vote, 74-41.**

The Senate companions to these bills have been moving slowly through the process, and now it has become clear why. The Senate is simply planning on adopting the House versions. HB 1557 has been placed on the agenda for the Senate Appropriations Committee on Monday, Feb. 28. HB 7 will be heard in the Senate Rules Committee on Tuesday, March 1. If these bills pass in their respective committees, they will be ready for full Senate to consider later in the week.

College and University Accreditation Changes

On Wednesday, the House Education and Employment Committee was set to hear **HB 7051, Postsecondary Education** by Rep. Amber Mariano (R-Hudson). As a reminder, this bill would change the accreditation process for our colleges and universities by forcing these institutions to switch accreditors at the end of every accreditation cycle. Thankfully, the bill was temporarily postponed; however, we expect this bill to return on Monday, Feb. 28, when the committee meets for the last time this session.

Then on Thursday, the Senate took its turn with its version of the bill, **SB 7044**, by the Education Committee and Sen. Manny Diaz (R-Hialeah Lakes). There was an amendment by Sen. Jeff Brandes (R-St. Petersburg), which would strip the accreditation portion from the bill. Andrew Gothard, president of United Faculty of Florida, testified in support of the amendment and outlined the dangers to Florida's college and university students should the bill stay in its current form. Unfortunately, the amendment to the bill did not pass. Still, the concerns highlighted by President Gothard and other committee members certainly got the attention of several members of the committee, including Sen. Diaz, who said, "I will acknowledge that this part of the bill may need some work." The bill passed by a vote of 11-9, with Sens. Jeff Brandes and Ed Hooper (R-Clearwater) joining the Democrats in opposition. The bill will now head for consideration by the full Senate.

Assessments Bill Draws Ire of Teachers

On Wednesday, 19 educators waived or spoke in opposition to **HB 1193, K-12 Assessments and Accountability** by Rep. Rene Plascencia (R-Titusville), during the House Education and Employment Committee meeting. HB 1193 is the testing and accountability bill that FEA has been working to improve this session. Educators focused on two core components that are lacking in this bill. First, teachers need dedicated planning time to collaborate and develop lesson plans tailored to individual student instruction, using the data from the statewide assessments. And secondly, this bill, as drafted, would result in MORE testing, not less.

We thank Chair Chris Latvala (R-Clearwater), who gave our educators ample time at the podium to speak on the bill. Emily Gorentz, a member from Osceola, shared that her fifth-grade students have already taken 57 progress monitoring tests, and we haven't even hit testing season. Scott Mazur, the president of Leon CTA, made the point "learning is not testing." And April Isaacs passionately shared with the committee her day and all that our educators go through. Ultimately the bill passed 13-5, with Reps. James Bush (D-Opa Locka) and Christine Hunschofsky (D-Coconut Creek) joining the Republicans in support. We thank Rep. Fred Hawkins (R-St. Cloud) in his debate for committing to working on reducing the testing amount moving forward.

ESE Extension Bill Moves Forward

Additionally, the Education and Employment committee heard **HB 15** by Rep. Allison Tant (D-Tallahassee), which passed the committee unanimously. This bill would extend the eligibility for exceptional student education (ESE) services to age 9 or completion of second grade. Its companion, **SB 236** by Sen. Shevrin Jones (D-Miami Gardens), will be heard on the Senate floor on Tuesday, March 1.

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.

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