

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2023 Legislative Session

Feb. 20-24, 2023

A Brief Recap of the Week

The last week of interim committee meetings has wrapped up, and there will be a one-week break before session officially starts on March 7. So, there will be no Frontline email next week.

While the attacks on public education keep on coming, educators continue to stand up and speak out for themselves and their students.

- The Senate PreK-12 Education Committee Hears a Universal Voucher Bill
- So Did the House PreK-12 Appropriations Committee
- Keep Reaching out to Legislators
- Clay County Education Association Hosts a Town Hall
- FEA's Republican Cadre Got Busy Lobbying in Tallahassee

Read below to find out more.

The Senate PreK-12 Education Committee Hears a Universal Voucher Bill

SB 202 passed its first committee stop on a [party line vote of 9-3](#). If you read [last week's Frontline](#), you know this bill will [rip \\$4 billion from public schools](#) in the first year alone to fund voucher schools. [You can read more about the bill here.](#)

One of the many concerns we have with this legislation is the complete lack of accountability with the funding. Voucher schools have a history of discrimination based on [students' abilities](#), [sexual orientation](#) and [even hairstyle](#), refusing to admit Black students with natural hair. Previous attempts to ban these discriminatory practices have been voted down largely along party lines.

Because of the history of discrimination associated with vouchers and because SB 202 opens up voucher funding to homeschool students, Sen. Lori Berman (D-Boynton Beach) [voiced her concern](#) that this bill could unintentionally wind up funding homeschool programs with extremist ideologies. In case you missed it, an [Ohio homeschool group has recently gained much media attention for its promotion of neo-nazi ideology](#). Currently, there are no safeguards in this bill to provide any kind of oversight to homeschool curricula despite homeschool students now being eligible for vouchers.

When it came time to vote on the bill, Sen. Erin Grall (R-Fort Pierce) raised many of the same concerns we have expressed with SB 202. She spoke of the lack of accountability with regards to voucher funding, voucher school test scores and a lack of transparency in general. After listing all

the ways the bill would fleece Florida's taxpayers, Grall voted in favor of the bill, indicating that she supports the bill at this time, but wants to see it improved.

Meanwhile in the House PreK-12 Appropriations Committee

House Bill 1 is the House version of the universal voucher bill. Much of the policy regarding vouchers is identical to SB 202.

HB 1 passed its second committee stop on a 11-3 vote, with Reps. Kimberly Daniels (D-Jacksonville) and Lisa Dunkley (D-Lauderhill) joining all the Republicans to support the bill. With only one committee stop left in the House, HB 1 is poised to be ready for a vote on the House floor within the first few weeks of the legislative session, which officially begins March 7.

Since the bill was being heard in an appropriations committee, the state has finally released an estimate of the cost of universal vouchers. That being said, their estimated cost of \$209.6 million is nonsensical. Among its many flaws is that it assumes many families who already send their children to private school will simply turn down a voucher from the state next year. The Florida Policy Institute stands by their \$4 billion estimate, which you can [read here](#).

In expressing her opposition to the bill, Rep. Lavon Bracy Davis (D-Fort Lauderdale) made both a financial and a moral case for opposing the bill: "Why should billionaires be eligible for vouchers ... are our LGBTQ+ students going to be unconditionally accepted and welcomed in these private schools? I am of the belief if you are going to get state of Florida money, you need to follow state of Florida standards."

Keep Reaching out to Legislators!

Last week, we asked you to reach out to lawmakers and share your concerns on SB 202/HB1, and you responded in a big way! Within the past week, FEA advocates have sent 10,578 e-mails on the issue of vouchers alone! Make no mistake about it, your voice is being heard. As important as it is for us to push back on bad policy like vouchers, we know that we must also push forward with a positive agenda of what will create the schools Florida's children deserve and need. It is because of your advocacy that we are seeing progress on issues such as fixing the teacher salary allocation to allow for increases for all teachers and removing the prohibition on paying teachers hired after 2011 for advanced degrees as part of their salary. [Keep reaching out to your lawmakers!](#)

Clay County Education Association Hosts a Community Discussion

The St. James AME Church in Orange Park was packed earlier this week as parents, students and educators [gathered to discuss the removal of books from school libraries](#) as a result of legislation passed last session and how to make sure all students have the freedom to read. This community discussion, hosted by the Clay County Education Association, is a great example of how our local unions are uniting communities to address the issues impacting students and educators.

FEA's Republican Cadre Gets Busy Lobbying in Tallahassee

It was a week full of training and lobbying for the 23 members of FEA's Republican Cadre who came up to Tallahassee. These teachers and education staff professionals who came from all over the state had meetings with their legislators and testified in committee meetings. Most importantly, they helped spread the message that regardless of party affiliation, most parents in Florida believe in the importance of our public schools and want to see more funding dedicated to their neighborhood schools instead of being siphoned off to unaccountable voucher schools.

If you'd like to come up to Tallahassee during the legislative session to lobby, talk to your local president about joining the AFL-CIO Working Family Lobby Corps.



How You Can Take Action Today

Visit the [FEA website](#) to learn more about session and sign up for FEA Action Alert texts by texting "**edactivist**" to 22394.

Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078.

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