

# Florida Education Association

# *Frontline Report*

## *2023 Legislative Session*

### **A Brief Recap of the Week**

It was a busy week in Tallahassee:

The second-to-last week of interim committee meetings wrapped up this week, with educators continuing to stand up and speak out for themselves and their students.

- The voucher bills are moving quickly.
- Two bills which could cause even more instability in school boards passed their first committee.
- Educators in St. Johns County came out in force to advocate for themselves and their students.
- Activists from across the state gathered in Tallahassee to defend the freedom to learn.

Read below to find out more.

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### **Universal Vouchers**

[Senate Bill 202/HB1](#) opens the current voucher program to all children in Florida, and the bills are moving quickly. HB 1 has already passed its first committee stop and will be heard in its second committee next week. This means the bill is poised to be passed by the House within the first week or two of the 2023 session, which officially starts March 7.

These bills are a massive transfer of taxpayer funds to unaccountable, private and religious schools and corporations. If this bill becomes law, it could [rip up to \\$4 billion](#) away from public schools in the first year alone. The money taken from our public schools would be used to subsidize the private school tuition of millionaires and billionaires; meanwhile the public school where you work and that your child attends will have even fewer resources for students and less money for salaries and healthcare.

SB 202 will be heard in the Senate PreK-12 Education Committee on Tuesday, Feb. 21, and HB 1 will be heard in the House PreK-12 Appropriations Committee on Thursday, Feb. 23. [Click here to tell the members of the committees to keep public funds in public schools.](#)

Tell legislators public money belongs in public school!

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### **School Board Chaos**

On Tuesday, the [House Choice and Innovation Subcommittee](#) passed two bills related to school boards. The first bill, [HB 477](#), would place an eight-year term limit on school board members instead of the current 12-year limit. When asked why he was sponsoring a bill to impose an eight-

year limit, Rep. Alex Rizo (R-Hialeah) gave a surprisingly honest answer, “**Term limits will regularly sever relationships** that grow between special interests and incumbent board incumbents.”

If you subscribe to Frontline, you are savvy enough to know you are the “special interests” to which Rep. Rizo refers. Teachers and education staff professionals work hard to develop relationships with school board members so that we can work together to provide the best education possible for every child. It is disappointing to hear a lawmaker say he wants to sever those relationships. The bill [passed 14-4](#) with Rep. Kevin Chambliss (D-Homestead) joining all the Republicans on the committee to vote for the bill. As of the writing of this Frontline, there is no Senate companion to HB 477.

Next up, the committee heard a bill which could further politicize school board elections. [House Joint Resolution \(HJR\) 31](#) would propose an amendment to Florida’s Constitution requiring school board members be elected in partisan elections. Representatives from Florida PTA, Florida AFL-CIO, Fund Education Now, League of Women Voters and Pastors for Florida’s Children all spoke in opposition to the bill. They expressed concern that this would inject politics into our schools and that this bill is more about pushing a political agenda than about doing what is right for Florida’s children. The bill passed along a [party line vote of 13-5](#). The Senate companion to the bill, Senate Joint Resolution 94, has not been heard in its first committee.

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## Northeast Florida Education Shows What Solidarity Looks Like

Hundreds of educators, parents and students packed the St. Johns County School Board meeting on Valentine’s Day and asked the board to [show their teachers some love](#) by paying them a living wage. This is part of an ongoing campaign since the teachers voted down their proposed contract in November due to the paltry raises. In addition to packing School Board meetings, many teachers are showing their solidarity by [working to the contract](#).

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## Black History is American History

For the second time during interim committee weeks, Sen. Shevrin Jones (D-Miami Gardens) organized a [march and rally](#) at Florida’s Capitol to demand Gov. DeSantis stop his attacks on the accurate teaching of Black history. A common theme of the speakers was that it is not acceptable for Florida’s students to only learn the aspects of Black history that Gov. DeSantis approves of. Instead, curriculum decisions should be made by experts their fields. The rally attracted more than 1,000 [community members, including students from Leon County high schools](#). Speakers at the rally included Sen. Jones, Rep. Fentrice Driskell (D-Tampa), students from Florida A&M University, and members of the clergy, including National Action Network President Rev. Al Sharpton.



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