

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2023 Legislative Session

March 31, 2023

A Brief Recap of the Week

Legislators have a short week next week, ending early Wednesday afternoon in advance of Passover and Easter holidays. In preparation for that time off, they crammed a lot into this week.

- DeSantis is Not Fooling Us!
- Anti-Freedom Bill Passes the Senate and Remains Stalled in the House
- Certification Changes
- Education Bills Flying Through the House
- Thanks!

Read below to find out more.

DeSantis is Not Fooling Us!

The sponsors of SB 256 along with Gov. DeSantis have been trying to sell these anti-freedom bills as a positive thing for teachers, education staff professionals and other public workers. But we know this is a bill built on lies. SB 256 is nothing more than a direct attack on educators, and it is retribution because we have stood up for students' freedom to read and learn and teachers' freedom to teach full and honest history.

On April 1, we are coming together in Miami to show DeSantis we are united, and he is #NotFoolingUs! If you are in the Miami area, you can [RSVP here](#) for the event, which starts at 10 a.m. at the Miami-Dade Government Center, 111 NW 1st St. in Miami. Can't make it to Miami but still want to attend? [You can sign up here to get a reminder to watch a livestream of the event.](#)

Anti-Freedom Bill Passes the Senate and Remains Stalled in the House

No matter what school or grade level they work in, every educator in Florida deserves to have a voice in their workplace, be supported and have the resources they need to provide meaningful lessons, and be paid a professional salary that allows them to live in the community where they work. More than 150,000 teachers, staff and professors in Florida have found their voice by joining their local, state and national union.

On a [23-17 vote](#), the Florida Senate passed [SB 256](#), which seeks to silence the collective voice of educators and other public workers. Except for the bill's sponsor, Sen. Blaise Ingoglia (R-Spring Hill), none of the senators who voted in favor of the bill had the courage to debate it on the floor. In private many of these senators have admitted they do not like the bill, but they don't want to be seen as opposing Gov. DeSantis' agenda.

Republican Sens. Jennifer Bradley (R-Fleming Island), Ileana Garcia (R-Miami), Joe Gruters (R-Sarasota), Ed Hooper (R-Palm Harbor) and Corey Simon (R-Tallahassee) showed courage by doing the right thing and joining with every Democrat in opposing this bill. [Please take a moment and email these 17 senators and thank them for their standing with educators and all public workers.](#)

That five Republican senators broke rank with party leadership and Gov. DeSantis to oppose SB 256 is a testament to the hard work activists like you have done this session. Thank you for your efforts, and let's keep pushing forward for the remaining five weeks of session and beyond!

For the second week in a row, the House companion, [HB 1445](#), was not placed on the agenda for the State Affairs Committee. While it is always good when there is a delay, we shouldn't read too much into this. We still have more than half of session left to go, and we must remain vigilant both in fighting back against this bill and fighting for the things we want to see.



Certification Changes

We lobbied for and got changes to law that will help teachers on temporary certificates, and those changes are now law. Although they were buried deep in the bad voucher expansion bill, these are small but meaningful steps to help keep teachers in the classroom.

As of Monday, when the bill was signed into law, temporary certificates are now good for five years. At the very least, this will help minimize some of the stress new teachers are under to complete requirements for certification.

The new law also requires DOE to write new rules to exempt some teachers from having to pass certain tests:

- Teachers on a temporary certificate with three years of effective or highly effective evaluations are exempt from passing the General Knowledge Test.
- Teachers on a temporary certificate with three years of effective or highly effective evaluations who have done their professional preparation courses and competency programs

- are exempt from passing the Professional Knowledge Test.
- Teachers with a master's degree in the field of certification are exempt from the subject area test.

Education Bills Flying Through the House

When [House Bill 1](#) was signed into law at the start of the week, Gov. DeSantis touted a provision of the bill that promises to reduce regulations on public schools in the next legislative session. In the meantime, the House is adding a whole bunch of new regulations this year. On March 31 alone, the House passed 10 bills that further regulate public schools. These bills are [HB 733](#), [HB 633](#), [HB 265](#), [HB 1069](#), [HB 379](#), [HB 7039](#), [HB 1035](#), [HB 411](#), [HJR 31](#) and [HB 19](#).

[HB 733](#) passed on a vote of [92-20](#). It mandates school start times for middle schools and high schools. Starting in the 2026-27 school year, middle schools would be able to start no earlier than 8 a.m., and high schools would be able to start no earlier than 8:30 a.m. The Senate companion, [SB 1112](#), has passed one committee and has two committees left.

[HB 633](#) passed on a vote of [110-3](#). It eliminates all class size penalties from schools/districts that are in violation of the class size amendment overwhelmingly approved by voters in 2002. The Senate companion, [SB 1236](#), has passed one committee and has two committees left.

[HB 265](#) passed [unanimously](#). It prohibits a school district from requiring students age 16 or older from taking any courses in order take the GED test unless the student does not earn a passing score on the GED practice test. The Senate companion, [SB 1004](#), has passed two committees and has one committee left.

[HB 1069](#) passed on a vote of [77-35](#). If you're a regular reader of Frontline, you know [HB 1069](#) is an expansion of Don't Say Gay. The bill would expand provisions of last year's bill to now include grades PreK-8, prohibit inclusive pronoun usage, and make it easier for any resident of a county to challenge and ban books from public schools. The Senate companion, [SB 1320](#), has passed one committee and has one committee stop left.

[HB 379](#) passed [unanimously](#). It adds social media safety to the list of required instruction; prohibits students from using cell phones during instructional time; sets regulations for internet safety for students using computers; and prohibits the use of TikTok on district-owned devices or for promoting school-sponsored clubs, extracurricular organizations or athletic teams. The Senate companion, [SB 52](#), has passed all of its committee stops and is ready for a vote in the Senate. Of note, [SB 52](#) does not contain the restrictions on TikTok and does allow student cell phone use for educational purposes as directed by teachers.

[HB 7039](#) passed [unanimously](#). It requires all reading literacy instruction to be grounded in the science of reading and that phonics instruction be the primary instructional strategy for word reading. The bill forbids the use of the three-cueing model for teaching word reading. The Senate companion, [SB 1424](#), has passed one committee and has two committees left.

[HB 1035](#) passed on a vote of [86-26](#). It requires the Department of Education to review all classroom teacher training requirements and eliminate any redundant trainings, allows teachers to seek legal recourse against a school district if they believe they have been directed to "take an action that would violate law or rule." [HB 1035](#) does not have a Senate companion.

[HB 411](#) passed on a vote of [83-28](#). It requires school board candidates to live in their district by the date they assume office. Currently, school board candidates are required to live in their district by the date they qualify for office. The Senate companion, [SB 444](#), has passed one committee and has two committees left.

[HJR 31](#) passed on a vote of [79-34](#). Would place a constitutional amendment on the ballot to make school board races partisan races. If approved by voters, this amendment would repeal the 1998 constitutional amendment that made school board races non-partisan. The Senate companion, [SJR 94](#), has passed two committees and has one committee stop left.

[HB 19](#) passed [unanimously](#). Requires school districts to provide students with an IEP and their parents information on self-determination and the legal rights and responsibilities relating to educational decisions that transfer to the student when they reach the age of 18. Such information must be provided to the student and their parents at least one year before the student turns 18. The Senate companion, [SB 636](#), has passed two committee stops and has one stop left.

Thanks!

Finally, we want to give a shout out to all the locals that sent members to Tallahassee this week: Association of Bay County Educators, Brevard Federation of Teachers, Education Association of St. Lucie, Flagler ESPA, Lake CEA, Hillsborough CTA, Hillsborough School Employees Federation, Palm Beach County CTA, Polk EA, St. Johns County EA, Student FEA, United Faculty of Florida, and Walton CEA.

How You Can Take Action Today

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