

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2023 Legislative Session

March 17, 2023

A Brief Recap of the Week

Certain legislators are doing all they can to stifle debate. This week we saw public testimony limited to only 30 seconds on several important bills, House and Senate versions of bills being heard at the same time so people could only speak on one of them, and many substantive bills with only two committees of reference instead of the customary three. Despite their best attempts, however, nothing will keep FEA and our members from showing up and speaking out!

- Defending Students' Freedom to Read
- Attacks on Educator Freedoms Continue
- Universal Vouchers Passes the House
- Higher Education Is Under Assault
- Sex Ed Overhaul and Don't Say They
- But Wait, There's More

Read below to find out more.

Defending Students' Freedom to Read

Earlier this week, at the same time legislators were hearing bills that would lead to even more books being ripped from school library and classroom shelves, FEA was [giving away 25,000 books](#) to members of the Tallahassee community. Award-winning authors Sharon Draper and Alicia Williams spoke at the event and signed books. They were joined by FEA President Andrew Spar, AFT Secretary-Treasurer Fedrick Ingram and NEA Secretary-Treasurer Noel Candelaria, who all spoke about the importance of students having rich, diverse books that allow them to see themselves in what they read.

FEA is also protecting students' freedom to read by challenging the DeSantis administration's unlawful censorship agenda. Along with the Florida Freedom to Read Project and Families for Strong Public Schools, [we are challenging](#) the Florida Department of Education's implementation of legislation passed last year. You can [read the full challenge here](#).



Attacks on Educator Freedoms Continue

If we are to believe the Republicans who support [SB 256/HB 1445](#), they want to make it harder for people to join unions in order to strengthen those unions. They claim they are burdening local unions with bureaucracy and costly financial audits in order to help educators, nurses, bus drivers, sanitation workers, electricians and other public workers. They are taking away folks' ability to pay their union dues however they like in order to protect them.

Since SB 256 and HB 1445 were heard at the same time, more than 100 union members were split between the two committees to testify when these bills were heard. Many of those members have relayed to us how insulting and frustrating it was to hear Sen. Blaise Ingoglia (R-Spring Hill) and Rep. Dean Black (R-Jacksonville) misrepresent the intent of their bills while presenting them in committee.

[HB 1445](#) passed on a [party line vote](#) and has one more committee stop before it will be ready to be heard on the House floor. In the Senate, Corey Simon (R-Tallahassee) joined with all the Democrats on the Fiscal Policy Committee [to oppose the bill](#). Having passed its last committee, SB 256 is ready for the Senate floor.

You can use [this link to email](#) the legislators who have voted in favor of these bills and let them know you're paying attention, and you are disappointed they are voting to take away your freedom.

Universal Vouchers Pass the House

Tiger Woods, Donald Trump and every other multi-millionaire and billionaire in Florida are one step closer to getting an \$8,000 coupon for their children's private school tuition. If you've read previous versions of the Frontline this session, you know the coupon will be paid for by taking money away from public schools. [HB 1](#) passed along [largely party lines](#) with Reps. Lisa Dunkley (D-Lauderhill), Kimberly Daniels (D-Jacksonville), Franklin Gallop (D-Tallahassee) and Susan Valdes (D-Tampa) joining with all the Republicans to support the bill.

Meanwhile in the Senate, [SB 202](#) was amended to mirror the House version of the bill. As a result, provisions related to relaxing regulations on teacher pay have been stripped. SB 202 passed its

final committee stop this week and is now ready for the Senate floor. [Click here to email](#) your senator and ask them to oppose this bill.

Higher Education is Under Assault

This week a federal judge again [blocked implementation](#) of last year's Stop WOKE Act in Florida's colleges and universities. However, certain legislators and Gov. DeSantis are working feverishly to pass yet another set of unconstitutional restrictions on higher education.

Both HB 999 and SB 266 advanced in committees this week. These bills would target diversity, equity and inclusion efforts at Florida's colleges and universities, allow for a post-tenure review of faculty at any time, and revise hiring practices so that a university president is required to make all new hires.

HB 999 goes much further than SB 266 in that it also would forbid majors or minors in basically all of the social sciences. It also would jeopardize funding for the "Divine 9" historically Black fraternities and sororities.

As has been the case with many bills this session, the public testimony was overwhelmingly in opposition to the bills. Of the 176 appearance cards on HB 999, 173 opposed the bill and only three were in support. Regardless, the bill [passed along a party line vote](#). The story was similar with SB 266, where it was passed along a [party line vote](#) despite public comments being 86-1 against the bill.

Sex Ed Overhaul and Don't Say They

There are three bills that double down on legislation from last year that has led to books being ripped from school library and classroom shelves, depriving students of the rich literature they deserve to read. These bills — HB 1069, HB 1223 and SB 1320 — will lead to more books being ripped out of school and classroom libraries. They contain a definition of pornography that is so vague it could easily lead to classics such as "Ulysses," "Dracula," "Gone with the Wind" and even the Holy Bible from being available to students. Both HB 1069 and HB 1223 have passed their first committee stops. SB 1320 has its first committee stop on Monday, March 20. [You can click here to tell the committee members to oppose the bill.](#)

Beyond book banning, these bills all also ban teachers from using the correct pronouns for transgender and/or non-binary students. The bill's sponsor was clear that even if a parent wants their transgender child to be referred to with their correct pronouns, [educators will be forbidden from doing so.](#)

HB 1069 goes a step further than the other two bills and regulates sex and health education. The bill goes so far that it does not even allow elementary school teachers or nurses to discuss menstruation. It is beyond cruel to attempt to prevent children from receiving necessary information about their own bodies, [but the bill's sponsor was very clear that is exactly what his bill does.](#)

HB 1069 and HB 1223 both will have their next committee stop in the [House Education and Employment Committee](#). We'll know on the afternoon of Tuesday, March 21 which of them, if either, are on the agenda for Thursday, March 23. To see the most up-to-date information on which bills have been placed on agendas, [be sure to visit our website.](#)

But Wait, There's More

Other education-related bills that advanced this week include:

- [HJR 31](#), which would place a constitutional amendment on the ballot making school board races partisan, has passed all its committee stops. The Senate version, SJR 94, has two committee stops left. [Click here to tell senators to oppose this resolution](#).
- [SB 1110](#) would limit school board members to serving two four-year terms. It will have its first committee hearing March 21. The House version was passed this week on a [79-29 vote](#).

Thanks!

Finally, we want to give a shout out to all the locals that sent members up to Tallahassee this week: Alachua CEA, Association of Bay County Educators, Bay ESPA, Brevard Federation of Teachers, Escambia EA, Highlands EA, Leon CTA, Marion EA, Okaloosa ESPA, Orange CTA, Orange ESPA, Osceola CEA, Pinellas CTA, Polk EA, Seminole EA, St. Johns EA, United Faculty of Florida, United School Employees of Pasco, United Teachers of Suwannee and Volusia United Educators.

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.

If this email was forwarded to you, [click here to subscribe to the FEA Frontline](#) so you can receive these update regularly.

[Unsubscribe](#) - [Unsubscribe Preferences](#)