

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2023 Legislative Session

March 24, 2023

A Brief Recap of the Week

We are one-third of the way through the 60-day legislative session. Bills are quickly advancing out of committee and being voted on by the House and Senate, and we have an initial glance at the proposed budgets for next school year.

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- Voucher Expansion Headed to the Governor
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Read below to find out more.

We Won't Back Down

As we end the third week of session, FEA members and activists have taken an incredible amount of communication with their legislators. Almost 11,000 individuals have contacted legislators more than 136,000 times through email and phone calls. Together, we are making sure that our voices are being heard as we advocate for children, educators and public education.

In addition to the online actions, we appreciate all the FEA members who came up to Tallahassee this week. The following locals sent members: Association of Bay County Educators, Alachua County EA, Bradford EA, Broward Teachers Union, Union of Escambia ESP, Flagler ESPA, Florida School for the Deaf and Blind EA, Jackson County EA, Jackson County ESPA, Teachers Association of Lee County, Support Professionals Association of Lee County, Levy CEA, Marion EA, Nassau ESPA, Nassau TA, Orange County CTA, Osceola County EA, Palm Beach County CTA, Putnam Federation of Teachers, Polk EA, Seminole EA, United Faculty of Florida, United Teachers of Dade, Volusia United Educators and Walton County Support Professionals.

We wanted to start this week with a big thank you to everyone who is fighting for Florida's future!

Voucher Expansion Headed to the Governor

House Bill 1 was [approved along party lines](#) in the Senate this week and is headed to Gov. DeSantis' desk. DeSantis is fulfilling the dream Jeb Bush had more than 20 years ago of allowing every child in the state to receive a voucher.

In case you missed it, here's the statement FEA President Andrew Spar made on Thursday after the passage of the bill, "Florida's families overwhelmingly count on their neighborhood public schools as the best place for their children to get the education they deserve and need. HB 1 will

siphon billions away from the schools where nearly 90 percent of Florida's students learn and grow. This bill will leave children with fewer resources in their already underfunded classrooms and fewer teachers and staff to meet their needs. Sending tax dollars to unaccountable, corporate-run private schools is just wrong. This bill is a political priority of a governor who puts his political ambition ahead of Florida's families."

Budget Time

You can expect to hear the usual line from Gov. DeSantis and the GOP that this year's education budget contains "historic funding." It is true that the Senate proposes a \$1.3 billion increase in public school funding, though it remains unclear how much of that money will actually be available for public schools and how much will be siphoned off to private schools with vouchers. Both the House and Senate are still taking the inexplicable position that families who currently send their children to private school will simply decide not to take the \$8,000 voucher next school year. Where the two chambers differ is on the transparency of how much money is being given to private schools and on how categoricals are funded.

Every year the budget includes the Base Student Allocation (BSA), which is generally flexible funds that school districts can use for salary increases and funding health insurance contributions. The budget also includes categoricals, such as Transportation, Mental Health Assistance, Safe Schools and Instructional Materials. These funds are not nearly as flexible and can only be used for their specific category. The current school year's budget includes 16 categoricals.

The [House's proposal](#) removes nine categoricals and places all the funding associated with them in the BSA. This makes it appear that school districts are getting a very large increase in flexible funding. However, there are few significant changes to the policies attached to those categoricals. So, this provides only an illusion of giving school districts flexibility in funding. Additionally, this collapse of categoricals could have a disproportionately negative impact on smaller, rural school districts. The House also continues to keep private school students using vouchers inside the FEFP, which makes it harder to see exactly how much funding vouchers are diverting from public schools.

The Senate largely keeps the categoricals the same, collapsing only two of them into the BSA. The good news in the [Senate proposal](#) is that it provides significantly more transparency than the House version by separating out private school students using vouchers from the FEFP. The bad news is this proposal still falls far short of what will likely be needed to fund the cost of vouchers.

The bottom line is both the House and Senate budget proposals released this week will keep Florida's per-student funding near the bottom in the nation, meaning Florida's educators will remain among the worst paid in the nation. To put it another way, when adjusted for inflation, the proposed Base Student Allocation (BSA) in the Senate's budget is less than the BSA in the first budget Gov. DeSantis signed into law as governor.

SB 256/HB 1445 Update

Time is running out to [contact your senator and ask them to oppose SB 256](#). The bill will likely be up for a final vote on Wednesday, March 29. This bill takes away your right to pay union dues through payroll deduction and makes it harder for educators and other public workers to remain part of their union. SB 256 was heard on second reading in the Senate this week. Second reading is the time when bills can be amended on the floor and senators can ask questions of the sponsor. One amendment was added to the bill. With this amendment, SB 256 [would require each membership form to include the names and salaries of the local union's top five highest paid officers and employees](#).

Meanwhile in the House, the companion to SB256, [HB 1445](#), was not heard in committee this week. Its next opportunity to be heard will be in the [House State Affairs Committee](#) on Friday,

March 31. We'll know on the afternoon of March 29 if HB 1445 is placed on the agenda. State Affairs is the last committee stop for HB 1445, so once it passes committee, it will be ready for the House floor.

Book Banning on Steroids

As educators, we know how important it is for books to serve both as mirrors — where students can see themselves and their lived experiences — and as windows — where students can see a larger world outside of themselves. [SB 1320](#) and [HB 1069](#) continue the pattern of shattering mirrors and windows by making it even easier for any resident of a county to challenge a book. It's been widely reported that these book challenges are overwhelmingly targeting books with characters that are LGBTQ and/or racial and ethnic minorities.

[House Bill 1069](#) has been placed on the Special Order Calendar for this upcoming Thursday, which means the bill will likely have its final floor vote on Friday. Don't delay; [let your representative know today that you oppose HB 1069](#).

The Senate companion, SB 1320, has one committee stop left, the Fiscal Policy Committee. Fortunately, it was not placed on the committee agenda for the week of March 27. Regardless, with just a few clicks, you can [let the members of the committee know you oppose the bill](#).

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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