

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2023 Legislative Session

April 5, 2023

A Brief Recap of the Week

We have reached the midpoint of session; April 5 is the 30th day of the 60-day legislative session. This was a short week for legislators, who completed their work early Wednesday afternoon due to the Passover and Easter holidays. As such, this was a relatively light week for discussion of education-related issues.

- A Rising Tide of Activism
- Safe, Secure Retirement
- Keeping our Students and Educators Safe
- Looking Ahead to Next Week
- Thanks!

Read below to find out more.

A Rising Tide of Activism

Every child in Florida deserves to be happy, healthy and free. Free to learn, free to read and free to be themselves. Together, we are making Florida a place where every child can thrive. In the face of unyielding attacks from Gov. DeSantis and his corporate donors, parents, students, educators and community members are pushing back.

Activism is spreading all over the state. Here are just a few examples:

- At a recent [Sarasota school board meeting](#), almost 200 people were in attendance to speak against Gov. DeSantis' agenda.
- Brave folk in Tallahassee were arrested while engaging in [peaceful protests](#) for abortion rights.
- Hundreds of FEA members from around the state participated in #NotFoolingUs events on April 1.
- 13,313 FEA members have had 163,237 contacts (either email or phone call) with legislators since session began on March 7.

While the cards might be stacked against us this legislative session, we will never give up. When we join together across race, class, religion and gender to demand more from our elected leaders, Florida will become a place of love, joy and prosperity for all.

Safe and Secure Retirement

Whether you are a teacher, paraprofessional, cafeteria worker, bus driver or play some other role in the education of Florida's children, everyone who works in our public schools should be able to retire with dignity.

In 2011, then-Gov. Rick Scott used the Great Recession as an excuse to slash benefits from the Florida Retirement System (FRS). Florida's budget was balanced on the backs of dedicated educators and other public workers. Since that time, FEA and our members have been fighting to strengthen FRS so that educators can have the retirement they deserve. Legislation [passed unanimously](#) by the House this week gets us one step closer to that goal.

The House amended the Senate's Retirement bill, [SB 7024](#), to include the following:

- Restores the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) that was eliminated in 2011.
- Extends DROP from a maximum of five years to a maximum of eight years and increases the percentage of interest accrued while in DROP from 1.3 to 4 percent.
- Increases the employer contribution by 1 percent for those in the investment plan.

These changes would go a long way toward the goal of making sure all educators are able to have a safe, secure retirement. The House and Senate must now work out their differences, as the above provisions were not included in the bill the Senate passed. Please take a moment and [let your senator know](#) that you want them to support the changes made by the House to help provide a safe, secure retirement.

Keeping our Students and Educators Safe

Like any building, it is important for schools to have regular maintenance and upgrades to ensure they are structurally sound. We know far too many children and educators learn and work in buildings that are moldy, lack adequate air conditioning and are in a general state of disrepair. In part, this is because for years now the Legislature has diverted capital outlay funding (the money school districts can use for maintenance and repair) from neighborhood public schools to charter schools.

[SB 1328](#) would make this issue significantly worse by ripping even more funding from neighborhood public schools to give to charter schools. While the bill's fiscal analysis states the cost to public schools would have a "significant negative" but "indeterminate" impact, testimony given to the committee pointed out that in Miami-Dade County alone, this bill would drain \$812 million over the next five years from public schools. Despite that loss of funding (or because of it?), [SB 1328](#) passed on a [party-line vote](#).

[SB 1328](#) and its House companion, [HB 1259](#), each have two committee stops left. We will be monitoring them closely in these final few weeks of session

Looking Ahead to Next Week

Things will pick back up next week as legislators will once again be in town for all five days. As of the writing of this Frontline, committee meeting agendas have not yet been published. You can visit our [website for the latest information](#) on which bills have been calendared. Below is a list of bills that **could** be heard in committee along with the possible date:

- [HB 1445](#), which attacks your right to be a part of your union, could next be heard in the [House State Affairs Committee](#) on Tuesday, April 11. The agenda will be released by 4:30 p.m. April 7.

- [HB 999](#), which attacks Florida's colleges and universities and doubles down on last year's STOP Woke Act, could next be heard in the [House Education and Employment Committee](#) on Tuesday, April 11. The agenda will be released by 4:30 p.m. April 7.
- [SB 266](#), the Senate companion to HB 999, could next be heard in the [Senate Education Appropriations Committee](#) on Wednesday, April 12. The agenda will be released by 2:30 p.m. April 7.
- [SB 1320](#), which makes it even easier for anyone to challenge and ban books as well as expands the provisions on last year's Don't Say Gay bill, could next be heard in the [Senate Fiscal Policy Committee](#) on Thursday, April 13. The committee's agenda will be released by 2:30 p.m. April 10.

Thanks!

Even though it was a short week, we still had advocates show up, meet with their legislators and sit in on committee meetings. Thank you to the following locals who sent members to Tallahassee this week: Broward Teachers Union, Clay County CEA, Hillsborough CTA, Orange County CTA, United Faculty of Florida and the United School Employees of Pasco.

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.

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