

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2023 Legislative Session

April 21, 2023

A Brief Recap of the Week

As we head into the final two weeks of session, much of the focus will turn toward the budget. In the meantime, a lot of policy decisions are being wrapped up.

- Union Dues Bill on the Agenda
- It's Time to Demand Positive Changes to the Florida Retirement System
- Don't Say Gay Expanded to PreK-12 by the State Board of Education
- Higher Education Attacks Advances
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Read below to find out more.

Union Dues Bill on the Agenda

[HB 1445](#) will be up on second reading in the House on Tuesday, April 25. This is the time where House members can ask questions of the bill's sponsor, Rep. Dean Black (R-Yulee). Second reading is also when any proposed amendments to a bill are proposed and debated. Once questioning and amendments are finished, the bill is "rolled over" for third reading the following day.

Barring any unforeseen circumstances, Wednesday, April 26, will be the day HB 1445 is up for debate and a final vote on the House floor. Before then, we must make one final push to tell representatives to stand up for educators and all public employees by voting no on HB 1445. You can [email your representative here](#) and [call them here](#). Do both. It's quick and easy! And after you've called and emailed, be sure to ask all your friends and colleagues to do the same.

It's Time to Demand Positive Changes to the Florida Retirement System

Florida's budget will be a big focus the last two weeks of session, and the retirement bill remains in play. Back in 2011 during the Great Recession, Florida's budget was balanced on the backs of educators and other public workers when Gov. Scott slashed retirement benefits.

Florida's budget is in a very different position today with a multi-billion dollar surplus. The Florida House unanimously passed a bill that would strengthen the Florida Retirement System by restoring the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), increasing the employer contribution to those in the investment plan, and extending DROP to eight years while also increasing the interest rate earned while in DROP. For these positive changes to become law, we need the Senate to adopt the

House's position on retirement. Please take a moment to [email your senator](#) and ask them to support Florida's educators by allowing them to retire with dignity and independence.

Don't Say Gay Expanded to PreK-12 by the State Board of Education

Last year when legislators were debating HB 1557, the Don't Say Gay bill, they rationalized their support by emphasizing the bill only impacted kindergarten through third grade. Any rational being knew these legislators were being disingenuous and that it would be just a matter of time until the provisions of the bill were applied in grades PreK-12.

Sure enough, earlier this week the Florida State Board of Education [amended the Principles of Professional Conduct](#) to include that educators "shall not intentionally provide classroom instruction to students in grades 4 through 12 on sexual orientation or gender identity"

As has been the case in many legislative meetings this year, public input on the rule change was largely in opposition. Almost three times as many people spoke to the board asking them to oppose this rule challenge than to support it. Joe Saunders of Equality Florida pointed out the absurdity of a rule that bans instruction on sexual orientation when he asked, "What legitimate harm does teaching students in an 11th-grade civics course about the landmark Supreme Court ruling on marriage equality cause?" Saunders continued, "The board has provided no definition on what instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity means, even as you stretch the impact of this terrible policy into every classroom in the state. This rule is by design a tool for curating fear, anxiety and the erasure of our LGBTQ community. ... Free states don't ban books, and free states don't ban history."

Have questions about how this will impact you? Now might be a good time for all educators in Florida to make sure they are familiar with the guidance [FEA's legal department published](#) last year when HB 1557 first passed.

Higher Education Attacks Advance

Both [HB 999](#) and [SB 266](#) passed their last committee stops this week, meaning they are now ready for final approval by their respective chambers. As you might recall from previous issues of Frontline, these bills expand last year's Stop WOKE Act and attack marginalized communities.

The vague language in the bills which bans teaching "identity politics" in general education courses could have very real impacts like eliminating Florida Atlantic University's "Global Jewish Communities" course, University of Florida's "Women Changing Society through Music," and many similar courses whose focus is on women, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, and members of the LGBTQ community.

The primary purpose of these bills seems to be providing Gov. Ron DeSantis a boost in his widely anticipated presidential campaign. Unfortunately, the damage these bills will do if they become law is very real.

Other Bills of Interest

Here's a brief update on some other bills we've been watching this session:

- [HB 733/SB 1112](#) prohibits middle schools from starting before 8 a.m. and high schools from starting before 8:30 a.m. starting in the 2026-27 school year. SB 1112 advanced out of its final committee this week and is ready for the Senate floor. The House version, HB 733, has already been approved by the House.

- [HB 1259/SB 1328](#) provides capital outlay funding to charter schools regardless of demonstrated need for such funding and does so at the expense of neighborhood public schools. Each bill passed its final committee stop this week and is now ready to be heard on the floor of its respective chamber.
- [HJR 31/SJR 94](#) places a constitutional amendment on the 2024 general election ballot that would make school board races partisan. The bill has been passed in both chambers and is ready for Gov. DeSantis' signature.

Thanks!

We want to thank the following locals for sending members up to Tallahassee this week to engage with legislators and the legislative process: Association of Bay County Educators, Brevard Federation of Teachers, Broward Teachers Union, Citrus County Education Association, Clay Retired, Escambia Education Association, Marion County Education Association, Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association, United Faculty of Florida and United School Employees of Pasco.

How You Can Take Action Today

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