

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2024 Legislative Session

November 10, 2023

A Brief Recap of the Week

It was a busy week in Tallahassee as legislators held both a special session and an interim committee week. Education issues played a role in both, and we are starting to see dividends for the hard work and advocacy by educators and their unions.

Deregulation Update

As part of last year's universal voucher bill (HB 1) the legislature will be taking a close look this year at ways to decrease burdensome regulations on public schools.

The Department of Education and the [Senate PreK-12 Education Committee](#) both shared ideas on deregulation this week, and the two sets of ideas are quite far apart.

The Senate PreK-12 Education Committee is proposing three deregulation bills:

1. [SPB 7000](#) will focus on reducing regulations for personnel.
2. [SPB 7002](#) will focus on reducing regulations for finance, budgets, administration and oversight.
3. [SPB 7004](#) will focus on reducing regulations related to assessment and accountability.

The Committee is slated to take up each of the three bills at their next meeting on Wednesday, Nov. 15. The text of the bills are not yet available. They must be made public at least 48 hours before the meeting, and you'll find them on [our website](#) as soon as they are public.

However, the committee has released a [comprehensive list of topics](#) to be addressed in the bills. When looking at the list you'll see issues that FEA, our members and our local unions have been fighting for including:

- Allowing instructional personnel to earn long-term contracts,
- Eliminating restrictions on salary that have resulted in compression of salary schedules.
- Eliminating mandatory 3rd grade retention for students receiving a Level 1 in reading on FAST.

The [DOE's recommendations](#) meanwhile seem largely focused on reducing administrative paperwork with little concern for ideas to increase teacher retention and little focus on student learning. The DOE has signaled they will not be supportive of all the changes proposed by the Senate PreK-12 Education Committee.

Finally, in the [House Education Quality Subcommittee](#) meeting members of both parties pressed the DOE on why their proposed changes didn't do a better job of treating all publicly funded schools the same. In particular, there were many questions about why public schools are labeled with grades using an A-F scale while publicly-funded private schools receive no such grade. Adam Miller from the DOE had no coherent answer for these questions.

We will have much for information on this once we see the text of the bills. The devil, as always, is in the details. Stay tuned!

Special Session Update

The special session that took place this week is as notable for what wasn't discussed as for what was. Attempts to address concerns related to housing affordability, insurance and other issues that directly impact your pocketbook were rejected by the majority party.

As you likely know, the main focus of this special session was dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia as well as showing support for the state of Israel. The lone education issue that was discussed during the special session was expanding the number of private school vouchers available for special needs students. The bill, HB 3C, passed both chambers unanimously.

Clearing the waitlist for students with special needs to receive a voucher will cost an estimated \$90 million. No additional revenue was provided to fund this cost. Instead, these vouchers will be funded using a portion of the \$350 million that was set aside last legislative session in case more students enrolled in vouchers than anticipated.

Looking Ahead

There are three more interim committee weeks before session formally begins on January 9, 2024. Gov. DeSantis must present his proposed budget to the legislature no later than December 10. So, the upcoming weeks will be busy ones. You can stay up-to-date on all this and more by visiting [FEA's session webpage](#).

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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