

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2024 Legislative Session

January 19, 2024

A Brief Recap of the Week

Many Florida legislators were in Iowa at the start of this week where they joined Gov. DeSantis in putting presidential aspirations above the needs of everyday Floridians like you. Back home, Floridians continue to suffer the consequences of decisions made by leaders who remain focused on the next campaign stop.

Read on to learn more about:

- Rep. Andrade seeks to silence educators and slash their benefits
- Legislators again prioritize profits over people
- The latest on “deregulation”
- Another attempt at union busting
- Thanks!

Charter School Conversion

Rep. Alex Andrade (R-Pensacola) has come up with yet another way to undermine educators’ voices and their benefits. This time the attack comes in the form of [HB 109](#) which allows municipalities to convert public schools in their jurisdiction to a charter schools.

Once converted to a charter school, there would be no guarantee that the employees who remain at the school would remain in the Florida Retirement System. They would very likely end up with less health insurance benefits and could see lower pay as well. The ramifications of converting a public school to a charter school are far-reaching, which is why current law requires that 50% of teachers at the school must agree to the charter conversion or it can’t take place. However, HB 109 guts that provision meaning that a school could be converted to a charter even if the majority of teachers at a school oppose the idea. HB 109 does keep in place a provision that requires 50%

of parents at the school to vote in favor of the charter conversion.

In a somewhat unusual move, HB 109 did not get a vote in its committee meeting; for technical reasons it was temporarily postponed. It will likely be voted upon when the House Choice and Innovation Committee holds their next committee meeting on Thursday, January 25.

The Senate companion, SB 246 has yet to be put on an agenda and will not be heard in the Senate this coming week.

More Public Funds Headed to Private, For-Profit Corporations

While charter schools themselves are not for-profit entities, many charter schools in Florida are [run by for-profit corporations such as Academia](#). Hours before the House Choice and Innovation Committee was to hear HB 109, Rep. Andrade [filed an amendment](#) that would allow these for-profit entities to take even more public funds than they already do.

His amendment would allow the Florida Department of Education to declare vacant school district property as surplus under certain circumstances. Once the DOE declares the property vacant, the school district would be obligated to make the property “available to approved charter schools... without charging the charter school any rental, leasing or other usage fees.” As you can imagine, this amendment caused concern and prompted many questions from committee members. But these questions went unanswered, either because Rep. Andrade insisted a question was already answered or because of limits placed on how many questions could be asked by the committee chair, Rep. Alex Rizzo (R-Hialeah).

Chair Rizzo also put strict limits on public comment. In spite of these tired techniques, United Teachers of Dade Member Crystal Etienne pushed back and did a wonderful job of explaining just how damaging these changes would be to her students and to school communities. [You can watch her remarks here](#).

Ultimately, the amendment passed on a voice vote. Because the amendment changed the scope of the bill and required a title change it had to be temporarily postponed. Again, we anticipate the bill, as amended, will be back in the committee next week.

Self-Immolation in the House?

In last week’s Frontline, we mentioned the unwillingness to part from the Jeb Bush education agenda that was held by some House members and Gov. DeSantis. Not one to miss out, Speaker of the House Paul Renner made it very clear just how opposed he is to doing anything that would upset Bush when he [told a reporter](#), “I’ll light myself on fire, and so will many of the people standing behind me.” This was in response to a question as to whether or not he supported the portions of

[SB 7004](#), which would allow students to earn a high school diploma without having to first earn certain scores on high stakes tests.

Speaker Renner, of course, thinks it is perfectly fine for students at taxpayer supported private schools to earn a diploma without having to pass a standardized test. He also does not support a parent's right to view the standardized test that keeps their child from graduating. Renner continues the two-decade long policy in Florida of using standardized tests primarily as a tool for public school privatization. So, when Renner says he cares deeply about "accountability," his pants are already on fire.

The House deregulation bills – [HB 7025](#) and [HB 7039](#) – passed unanimously in their respective committees. Unlike their Senate companions, these will provide virtually no relief to students or educators. Monroe County School Board member Sue Woltanski put it this way when she spoke in committee on behalf of herself and said, "I think this deregulates the administration of our K-12 public schools. It won't affect what's happening in the classroom very much. There's very, very few things (in this bill) that would deregulate a student's experience."

What's Disgusting? Union Busting!

Imagine for a moment that the state government created a multi-page form filled with propaganda about the second amendment being outdated and the need for stricter regulations on firearms, ammunition and background checks. Now imagine that the same state government passed a law mandating that in order to be a member of the National Rifle Association, one must first sign their anti-gun propaganda.

Does it sound outrageous? Does it sound unconstitutional to limit who can join a private organization in such a manner? Does it sound too absurd to be real?

Well, to Sen. Blaise Ingoglia (R-Spring Hill) and Rep. Dean Black (R-Jacksonville) that kind of regulation over whether a Florida resident can join a private organization is a compelling state interest.

Ingoglia and Black have filed [SB 1746](#) and [HB 1471](#), respectively. These bills continue the work of last year's attempts to take away your freedom to join in union to fight for respect, better pay and the freedom to teach.

Last year's legislation required the Public Employee Relations Commission (PERC) to create a form that is full of anti-union propaganda. This year's version of the bills require 60% of union members to sign this government propaganda or their local union would be in jeopardy of decertification.

As you already know, unions representing police, firefighters and corrections officers would be exempt from this new requirement.

SB 1746 will have its first committee stop on Monday. The House companion hasn't yet been placed on its first committee agenda.

Thanks!

FEA members know that fighting for respect, better pay, and the freedom to teach means advocating for their profession in front of state leaders. We appreciate the members from Nassau Teachers Association, Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association and the United Teachers of Dade who made their voice heard in Tallahassee.

Click on the image below to watch our members in action as they testify against weakening child labor laws.



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.

