

Florida Education Association

# *Frontline Report*

*2025 Legislative Session*

*March 14, 2025*

With two weeks gone by of the nine week legislative session, things are starting to heat up in Tallahassee. We are seeing continued progress on important issues such as multiyear contracts. At the same time, legislators continue to prioritize corporate charter schools. Our mission over the final seven weeks of session is to continue pushing a pro-public education agenda while fighting against attempts to undermine and defund our public schools.

Read on to learn more about

- Attacks on your right to join a union,
- Giveaways to corporate charter schools,
- Accountability for voucher schools,
- Rolling back unfunded mandates,
- Adding new unfunded mandates,
- Continued censorship of curriculum, and
- How you can help protect kids from attacks on the US Department of Education.

## **Which Side are you On?**

During a coal miners strike in Harlan County, Kentucky in 1931 labor activist Florence Reece wrote the lyrics to “Which Side are You On.” In the century since, the song has been covered by Pete Seeger, The Dropkick Murphys, Natalie Merchant and more.

The original lyrics lay out a stark choice, that coal miners must “either be a union man or a thug for J.H. Blair.” Blair was a sheriff, a strikebreaker, and a fierce loyalist to the owners of the mines.

While much has changed since the 1930s, today we still find ourselves in a battle between those who support working people and their ability for fair pay, respect on the job and a voice in the workplace and those who seek to consolidate wealth and power in a small handful of corporate interests.

The most recent saga in this battle is **SB 1328** a bill **supported by billionaires** who want to working people to have less power, less money, and less of an ability to take care of themselves and their families.

We need everyone in Florida who is on the side of the working people to raise their voice and tell legislators to put people over corporations and **reject SB 1328**.

## Take Action to Support Public Schools

In last week's **edition of Frontline** we wrote about HB **123**, a bill that would allow neighborhood public schools to be converted to charter schools against the will of the employees who work in the school and the community at-large. HB 123 would make it even easier for charter school corporations to swoop in, take over neighborhood public schools, rake in profits and then cut and run leaving the school community in ruins.

Tell the Senate PreK-12 Education Committee to Vote NO on HB 140!

Beyond simply allowing neighborhood schools to be converted to charter schools, this bill also authorizes the State Board of Education to create a definition of “surplus property” owned by school districts which must be made available to charter schools.

On Monday, March 17, the Senate PreK-12 Education Committee will take up **SB 140**, its version of the “conversion charter school” bill. It’s important that senators hear from as many people as possible before the committee meeting starts at 4:00 p.m. Monday. Emailing the senators is as simple as clicking this link and filling out a quick form. Don’t delay; take action today!

## Consumer Protection Against Predatory Voucher Schools

When a parent enrolls their child in a private school, they forfeit not only their right to a free and appropriate education they also give up the right to have accommodations for students with learning disabilities as well. Far too many parents don’t know the rights they give up when enrolling in a private school and they don’t find out until it is too late.

Legislation to make sure parents are informed of the rights they give up when leaving public schools passed in both chambers this week. SB 508 sponsored by Sen. Shevrin Jones (D-Miami Gardens) and HB 423 Sponsored by Rep. Robin Bartleman (D-Weston) each passed their first committee stop with a unanimous vote.

Hearing members of both parties talk about the need for voucher schools to be more transparent was a welcome change, and it only happened because of advocates like you who have been fighting tirelessly for increased transparency for publicly funded private schools. Thank you! We are especially thankful to Christina Gaskill, an ESE specialist in Broward County and member of Broward Teachers union who **testified in favor of HB 423 in committee**.

## Repealing Bad Legislation

2011 was a watershed moment for public education in Florida. That is the year Gov. Scott signed SB 736 into law and eliminated multiyear contracts for newly hired instructional personnel. The bill also mandated the Value-Added Model (VAM) be used as part of a teacher's evaluation and began the extreme salary compression we are seeing today by instituting so-called performance pay.

Undoing the damage caused by SB 736 has been an FEA legislative priority ever since, and this year's **SB 166** would be a big step in accomplishing that goal. Highlights of the bill include the following:

- Allowing instructional personnel to earn multi-year contracts,
- Establishing a 10-year teaching certificate,
- Expanding eligibility for teachers to be paid for advanced degrees, and
- Reducing the reliance on VAM.

While all of this might sound too good to be true, the reality is SB 166 passed its second committee this week with a **unanimous vote**. Again, this is a testament to the hard work of public education advocates like you.

Meanwhile, the Senate is also working to repeal more recently passed legislation that resulted in a massive unfunded mandates. On a vote of 8-1, **SB 296** passed the Senate PreK-12 Appropriations Committee. This bill removes the statewide school start times that are slated to go into effect next school year. This is critical because if the current law is not repealed and there is no additional funding, school districts will be required to spend tens of millions of dollars on additional transportation costs—which is funding that wouldn't be available for things like salary raises or healthcare.

## Giving with One Hand while Taking with the Other

Even as legislators are looking at repealing an unfunded mandate for transportation costs related to school start times, they are looking at adding a new unfunded mandate for transportation. **HB 85** focuses on student safety getting to and from school and it expands which students must be provided transportation.

Specifically, the bill expands the definition of “hazardous walking conditions” to ensure more elementary students who live within two miles of a school will have the option to ride a school bus. This is, of course, a great policy idea. Everyone agrees in taking all steps necessary to ensure students arrive to school safely in the morning and get back home safely in the afternoon. But, good policy passed in Tallahassee without the funding to implement back home causes logistical nightmares and budget crunches back home.

School districts are already underfunded for their transportation needs. During the interim committee weeks, Putnam Superintendent Rick Surrency testified that his school district’s transportation funding only covered 40% of the transportation costs, meaning general revenue funds must be used to cover the remaining 60%. If HB 85 becomes law but there is not funding to go with it, school districts will be saddled with yet another unfunded mandate.

## Curriculum Censorship

**HB 549/SB 1058** require that all instructional materials and “library media center collections” adopted or acquitted after July 1, 2025 refer to the Gulf of Mexico as Gulf of America. Both bills advanced in committee this week.

While the issue might seem trivial it raises some significant concerns. Ultimately, the State Board of Education approves which textbooks school districts are allowed to adopt. In recent years our state has rejected **math books**, **social studies books**, and outright **banned the teaching of an AP course in African-American History**. Against that backdrop, it is fair to wonder what requirements the SBOE will impose on textbook publishers to comply with this bill should it become law.

- Will a history textbook be able to acknowledge that the body of water in question has been called the Gulf of Mexico for nearly five centuries and that the rest of the world still refers to it that way?
- Will our state government continue its years-long patterns of curriculum censorship and demand textbooks that use the term Gulf of America as if that is the sole correct term and has always been such?
- Since the law applies to “library media center collections” will school districts be forbidden from buying any new copies of classic books likes Patrick Smith’s “A Land Remembered” that teach children about Florida History?

These bills serve as a reminder that our work as public education advocates is a year-round process that does not stop when the legislative session is over. We must also pay attention to how the State Board of Education implements new laws and continue to demand the history taught in our schools is complete, honest, and allows students to reckon with the mistakes of our past so they can work to create a better future.

## Federal Update

We typically keep Frontline focused on state legislative issues, but we know that many of you are rightfully concerned about the attacks on the United States Department of Education (USDOE). FEA's **Protect our Kids** webpage contains information about the vital work the USDOE does, graphics you can share on social media in support of protecting kids and public education as well as a **form you can use to** email federal lawmakers to demand they keep the USDOE open and fully funded.

## Thanks!

Again this week, educators from around the state were in Tallahassee to talk with lawmakers and advocate for public education. Thank you to the Flagler Educational Support Personnel Association, Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association, Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association, Putnam Federation of Teachers United, Seminole Education Association, Teachers Association of Lee County, and University of South Florida Graduate Assistants United for sending members to Tallahassee this week!

*Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078.*

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