

View this email in your browser

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2025 Legislative Session

March 21, 2025

Week three of session was a little Dickensian. Several policies that would greatly benefit our schools, colleges and universities advanced in committee, but so did bills to further erode public education. Your advocacy paid off and kept a really bad anti-union bill from being voted on in committee, but SB 1328 will be back on the agenda next week. This week we saw the best of times and the worst of times.

The Spring of Hope

When we put out a call last week for you to reach out to legislators and tell them to oppose the anti-union bill SB 1328, you responded by the thousands! As a result of your advocacy, SB 1328 was temporarily postponed meaning it was not heard in committee this week. SB 1328 will be back on the agenda when the Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee meets on Tuesday. With your help, we can once again keep it from passing in the committee.

Tell legislators to oppose SB 1328!

We know it might be difficult for some to muster hope right now with everything going on, but we must always remember that when we join together and take action, we make the future. Together, we are building a movement to stand up for ourselves, our students, and our public schools.

The Winter of Despair

Supporting our most vulnerable students has long been the mission of the United States Department of Education. From helping students in poverty, to supporting before and after school programs, to guaranteeing students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education, the positive impact of the USDOE is felt in every community in Florida.

So, the shuttering and dismantling of the department naturally brings many questions and concerns. Our mission, however, remains constant: providing every child with a world-class education that inspires them and allows them to grow and succeed.

Be sure to check out [our full statement](#) on the USDOE executive order and then go ahead and [write your congressperson and demand they protect our kids!](#)

The Age of Wisdom

When legislators voted to remove transparency and public input from the selection of university presidents a few years back the results were inevitable. These positions have become handouts to unqualified friends and political allies who have benefited from their positions too often at the sake of our students.

This week, a bill that rights this wrong (HB 1321) and places presidential searches back in the public view passed its first committee [unanimously](#). There is still work to be done to make sure this bill becomes law, and we will keep you updated on how you can assist in those efforts.

One bill that is well on its way to becoming a law is SB 296/HB 291. This is the bill that repeals the mandatory statewide start times for middle schools and high schools. Patrick Lewicki, a high school economics teacher from Tampa and member of the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association, did a wonderful job of [explaining to legislators](#) why they should support this legislation and also champion other legislation that would return local control to school districts.

With a state as large and diverse as Florida, decisions about how schools run, how employees are paid, and much more simply cannot be made in Tallahassee. They need to be made locally with input from the folk who know the names of kids who will be impacted by the policies.

Lewicki was one of several FEA members who was in Tallahassee to testify to lawmakers this week about the need to listen to educators when making laws about education. You can see [more clips of testimony from this week here](#).

The Age of Foolishness

Parents love and support public education. As was evident in the November elections, voters love and support public education. In areas all across the state voters chose to raise their own property taxes to better fund their schools. Support for public education crosses party lines, urban and rural divides, and every other imaginable category that politicians use to pit us against one another.

It is, therefore, the height of foolishness for politicians to attack, undermine, and defund our public schools. But, three bills that do just that made their way through committee this week. These seemingly disparate bills all serve the same purpose, and it's helpful to view them as part of one coordinated attack against public education instead of as three distinct issues.

HB 140 continues the trend of favoring corporate charter schools over neighborhood public schools. This bill creates a new category of charter school, so-called “job-creation charters.” To hear Sen. Don Gaetz (R-Pensacola), the sponsor of the bill tell it, if a community opens one of these schools (which he couldn’t adequately define) businesses will come running to the municipality that opens the school.

In the real world, business owners want communities where every school is well-funded, and where all students are prepared for success. In short, business owners, like the rest of us, want strong neighborhood public schools. They also want legislators to tackle the affordability crisis, the homeowners insurance crisis, and the ever-rising cost of rent and utilities.

If legislators would focus on making Florida a place where everyone can thrive by supporting basic public services, that would attract a lot more business than further fracturing our education system will.

Sen. Gaetz was not alone in his foolishness this week; we saw two more legislators push policies that punish our public schools while favoring fly-by-night voucher schools that are often located in strip malls and close after a year or two.

SB 1692 sponsored by Sen. Stan McClain (R-Ocala) and HB 549 sponsored by Rep. Juan Carlos Porras (R-Miami) each place limitations on what books and instructional materials can be used in public schools while refusing to hold publicly-funded private schools to that same standard.

Sen. McClain’s bill is so broad that it could be used to ban Anne Frank’s Diary. In her diary, Frank writes about the changes her body underwent during puberty. When looked at in isolation and taken out of context, these passages have been [incorrectly labeled as “pornographic”](#) by ‘parents rights’ activists for over a decade. SB 1692 forbids school districts from looking at the overall literary merit of a work and forces them to remove books or face hefty fines if any portion of the book is deemed to be obscene. For a comprehensive rundown of the bill, check out [this analysis](#) by the Florida Freedom to Read Project.

Meanwhile, Rep. Porras’ HB 549 would prohibit public schools from obtaining new copies of classic literature such as Patrick D. Smith’s “A Land Remembered” and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’ “Cross Creek” unless their publishers release new editions of those books with all mentions of “Gulf of Mexico” renamed to “Gulf of America.” Of course, private schools would not be held to this same standard.

It matters that Rep. Porras represents Miami-Dade County. There are nearly 200 more private schools in Miami than there are public schools. If Rep. Porras were interested in good policy that benefited students, he’d focus on the nearly 700 private schools in his county.

But, if he were to place the same burdens on those private schools as he does on public schools, his corporate donations would dry up overnight. That’s the common denominator between these bills, they were filed as favors to the wealthy few who benefit when public schools are attacked, defunded and shuttered.

If these men listened to their voters instead of their corporate donors, these bills would have never been filed in the first place. Our job is to continue to raise our voices, call out this bad behavior, and demand politicians that put people above corporations.

Thanks!

Again this week, we were thrilled to have FEA members from around the state up in Tallahassee to speak truth to power. Thanks to the following locals for sending members to the Capital: Broward Teachers Union, Charlotte FEA, Columbia Teachers Association, Duval Teachers United, Escambia Education Association, Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association, Orange County Classroom Teachers Association, Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association, United Faculty of Florida, and Volusia United Educators.

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.

[Unsubscribe - Unsubscribe Preferences](#)