

Florida Education Association

# *Frontline Report*

## *2025 Legislative Session*

*March 7, 2025*

The first week of session has wrapped up and things feel a little different in Tallahassee this year. Legislators have heard your voices and are giving initial signs they are listening. Much work remains to make sure they don't just listen, but take action to strengthen our public schools.

Read on to learn more about:

- A change of tone in opening day speeches,
- Efforts to restore local control,
- Charter school takeovers,
- A brief preview of next week, and
- Some words of appreciation.

### **Opening Day Speeches**

Session began on Tuesday with the normal pomp and circumstance. Senate President Ben Albritton (R-Bartow) and House Speaker Daniel Perez (R-Miami) gave their remarks to their respective chambers and Gov. DeSantis gave his annual State of the State address.

In some respects, these speeches were most notable for what they did not include. Neither Albritton nor Perez spoke about charter schools or voucher schools, a marked change from prior legislative leadership. Instead, they both spoke about the need to strengthen our public schools. Albritton went so far as to say, "Hear me clearly, our public school teachers deserve to be freed of needless bureaucracy. Let them teach, let them compete, so our children win!"

This is a welcome change in tone. Of course, this change didn't just happen on its own. Instead, the voices of relentless public education advocates like you have forced legislative leadership to put a greater focus on strengthening our public schools and supporting the educators who work for them.

For the next eight weeks, our mission is to hold elected officials accountable to their words and to follow through with meaningful policy changes. Words are nice, but what students, parents, educators and school communities need is action and a meaningful investment in our public schools.

## Restoring Local Control

Decisions about what happens in our public schools are best made by those who work in schools and know the names of the students who will be impacted by policy changes. For far too long, politicians have been imposing bad policy on schools without listening to the voices of those most impacted by the policies.

This week, two bills passed in committee that are a step in the right direction of restoring local control. SB 166, sponsored by Sen. Corey Simon (R-Tallahassee), places a focus on stabilizing the teacher workforce and teacher retention. The bill allows teachers to earn multi-year contracts and creates a ten-year teaching certificate. The bill is also good for students as it reduces some high-stakes consequences of standardized testing. If the bill becomes law, no student in Florida would again be denied their high school diploma based on the result of a single test score like happens now.

SB 166 [passed unanimously](#) and there was widespread support for the bill in the committee meeting from the following organizations:

- Florida School Boards Association,
- Florida Association of District School Superintendents,
- Florida Association of School Psychologists,
- Greater Consortium of Florida School Boards,
- Florida Association of School Board Administrators,
- Florida Association of Student Councils, and
- The school districts of Escambia, Lee, Leon, Martin, Orange, Santa Rosa, and Seminole Counties.

There was [one organization](#) that opposed the bill. If you're a long-time reader of Frontline you already know who it is: Jeb Bush's Foundation for Florida's Future. Opposing things that are good for public school students and educators remains the sole focus of Bush because his organization exists to divert as much money as possible from public schools to private schools. If you'd like to learn more about the private interests shaping public education in Florida, check out this [wonderful piece](#) from reporter Jason Garcia.

In 2023, Sen. Danny Burgess (R-Zephyrhills) filed SB 1112 which mandates statewide school start times starting in the 2025-26 school year. At the time, many organizations warned that this bill was a massive unfunded mandate and would be unworkable without significant additional money for transportation. To the surprise of nobody, legislators never allocated the funding necessary.

This week, Burgess [voted for SB 296](#) which would repeal his 2023 law. Once again, this is evidence that your hard work and advocacy is paying off. This bill also had widespread support in committee including from the Florida AFL-CIO and FEA.

Both SB 166 and SB 296 will have their second committee stop on Tuesday, March 11 when the Senate Education Appropriations Committee meets at 8:30 a.m.

## **It's not all Sunshine and Rainbows**

The House did not move any policy this week in support of public education. Instead, their focus continued to be on favoring corporate charter schools at the expense of public education. [HB 123](#) would be a big giveaway to corporate charter school organizations.

If passed, this bill would allow neighborhood public schools to be converted to charter schools against the will of the employees who work in the school. Teachers who remain at a “converted” charter school would lose their healthcare benefits, potentially see a reduction in salary and no longer be an active member of the Florida Retirement System.

It's not just the teachers who would suffer. When Angel Arnold, a member of the Gadsden County Teachers Association, [spoke against this bill](#) in committee she reminded legislators of what happened when the Somerset corporation took over the entire Jefferson County School District. After raking in millions in taxpayer dollars, [Somerset abandoned the students of Jefferson County](#) leaving the school district to clean up the mess.

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.

The bill, which is supported by Jeb Bush's Foundation and the billionaires behind Americans for Prosperity passed on a [party-line vote of 13-5](#). Joining Arnold in opposing the bill was FEA, the Southern Poverty Law Center, Orange County Public Schools, the Greater Florida Consortium of School Boards and several parents and teachers.

## **Looking Ahead**

It was nice to have a one-week reprieve from the culture wars in education, but the attacks on students' freedom to learn and teachers' freedom to teach resumes next week when the Senate PreK-12 Education Committee hears SB [1618](#).

SB 1618 contains a mishmash of unrelated policy. In fact, it's so broad that the bill's "brief summary" is four pages long.

Among the many items in the bill is a prohibition of school district funding that supports any "program or campus activity" that "advocates, promotes, or engages in political or social activism, as defined by the State Board of Education."

It is the last part of the sentence that is especially troubling. If this bill becomes law, the State Board of Education gets the authority to define advocacy and political and social activism. This could lead to the banning of groups such as Gay-Straight Alliances, Student Councils, the Student Alliance for Public Schools and more.

In recent years, it has become very common for there to be one "train" bill full of unrelated education policy to ultimately become law. Because it already looks very much like a train, we'll be watching closely SB 1618 to see what else gets added to this bill as it moves through the process.

## **Thanks!**

We appreciate all of you who took part in Tuesday's nationwide Day of Action to protect our kids and our public schools. Whether you wore red, wrote to your elected officials about the importance of the United States Department of Education, or took the time to learn more about the importance of the USDOE, your activism matters.

We also want to thank the following local unions who sent members up to Tallahassee this week to meet with lawmakers and engage in the legislative process: Clay County Education Association, Duval Teachers United, Gadsden County Teachers Association, Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association, Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association and the United Faculty of Florida.

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

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