

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2026 Legislative Session

October 10, 2025

While the official start of the 2026 legislative session is not until Tuesday, January 13, the work of session got underway in earnest this week with the first interim committee week. There will be five more interim committee weeks in advance of session, and you can find the schedule for those weeks on [FEA's legislation session webpage](#).

It should come as no surprise that the big topic in the education committees this week was the budget.

Defunding Public Schools is a Feature, Not a Bug

The House [PreK-12 Budget Committee](#) hosted a panel discussion that included representatives from the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), Step up for Students (Florida's largest voucher organization) and school district Chief Financial Officers. This week's discussion was mainly focused on addressing funding issues from last school year. At the heart of the issue is 23,000 students who were in public schools last year but whose per-pupil funding was provided to voucher schools.

Scott Ward, CFO of the Lake County School District, testified that in the 2024-25 school year his district lost \$16 million due to voucher funding- a loss of funding came with virtually no notice. What does that mean for a mid-size district like Lake County? Ward testified **the district could have provided all teachers an additional 3.5% raise if they hadn't had to turn over \$16 million to fund private voucher schools in Lake County.**

Adam Emerson, FLDOE's director of school choice, told the committee that the mobility that results from the "freedom" Florida's families have to move between public schools, private schools and homeschooling throughout the year means some students will be double counted—both in public school rosters and on voucher rosters. He further told the committee that this is "a feature, not a bug" of Florida's educational landscape.

Emerson is correct that the systemic funding issues are a feature of the universal voucher bill, HB 1. Every single issue discussed in the committee today was foreseeable. Legislators were warned by parents, educators and concerned community members that the lack of guardrails on HB 1 was setting school districts up for the exact scenarios that the school district CFOs testified about in the meeting.

Nonetheless, some of the legislators who voted for universal vouchers seemed absolutely shocked to learn the damage their vote caused. Rep. Dana Trabulsy (R-Ft. Pierce) got visibly upset when she heard about the \$16 million loss in Lake County, and she told Ward his comments “hit a nerve.”

As the 2026 legislative session gets under way, legislators like Trabulsy have a choice to make: they can either continue passing bad legislation at the behest of their corporate donors without fully understanding the ramifications of their votes until it is too late or they can listen to the voices of professional educators who know best how to address the needs of Florida’s students.

This can be the legislative session where the tide begins to turn and the needs of public school students are placed above those of corporate interests. It is incumbent upon us to make sure we raise our voices loud enough that they cannot be ignored.

The [presentations from the meeting can be found here](#), and the [video of the meeting is here](#).

When the committee meets next Wednesday, October 15, they will discuss funding issues for the current school year.

Poor Higher Education Funding Hurts Us All

When the [Senate Higher Education Appropriations Committee](#) met this week, they took a look at Florida’s colleges—next week the Committee will examine universities.

In this year’s budget request, the Florida College System is asking for a 3% overall increase and a 10% increase in funding for career and adult education. The president of South Florida State College—which primarily serves Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto counties—explained to the committee that they have to [turn away hundreds of qualified students](#).

A lack of funding from the state means that South Florida State College, along with the rest of the Florida College System, simply can’t hire enough educators to keep up with the demand. The president specifically cited the lack of competitive pay for educators as the primary reason his college has had to turn away so many students.

It’s hard to overstate the ripple effect of this. It’s not just the potential students who are turned away from college that suffer, but their entire communities. When schools like South Florida State College have to turn away potential nurses, line workers, and automotive technicians, among other vital professions, the entire community is impacted by the lack of services.

It was refreshing to hear someone in a position of power speak honestly to legislators about the real-world impacts of their funding decisions. It is now up to us to organize so we have the power we need to ensure the funding Florida's colleges deserve. One thing we know for sure is that when our colleges are thriving, entire communities thrive.

The [presentations from the meeting can be found here](#), and the [video of the meeting is here](#).

Non-Budgetary Committees

Education budget committees weren't the only ones that met this week. In the House, the Student Academic Success Committee and Education Administration Committee met as well.

Student Academic Success Committee

This meeting was devoted to discussing progress monitoring/standardized testing. One notable moment is when the FLDOE staff were asked how much time students in kindergarten spent taking standardized tests, and the FLDOE staff either didn't know the answer—or more likely didn't want to share the honest answer with the committee.

We'd love to hear from you! Reply to this email and let us know how much time your students have already spent on standardized testing this school year and how long you estimate they will spend over the course of the year.

The [presentations the FLDOE provided here](#), and the [video of the meeting is here](#).

Education Administration Committee

The [Education Administration Committee](#) examined programs for students with intellectual disabilities to earn workforce credentials and certifications so they can earn gainful employment. A highlight (lowlight?) from the meeting is when Rep. Wallace Aristide (D-Miami) asked a question about success rates for students with disabilities in public schools compared to those in charter schools, voucher schools or home schools. Dr. Peggy Anue from the Florida Department of Education was unwilling to publicly answer the question. Instead, she offered to "follow up" after the meeting.

There are many problems with the \$4 billion in public funding that is annually given to voucher schools. The FLDOE's complete lack of transparency around student outcomes is one of the largest problems.

The [presentations provided in the meeting can be found here](#), and the video of the [full meeting is here](#).

Looking Ahead

Again next week, committees will be largely focused on presentations and round-table discussions. You can find the [full schedule of education committees for next week here](#).

When the third and fourth committee weeks roll around in November, committees will likely begin taking up legislation.

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