

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2026 Legislative Session

October 17, 2025

The second interim committee week of October has wrapped up. The legislature will now take a couple of weeks off before coming back to Tallahassee the first full week in November. While legislators are home the next few weeks, it is a great time to schedule in-person meetings. The best opportunity to influence the legislative session is always before session officially gets underway.

Like last committee week, no bills were heard in any of the education committees. Instead, the committees were full of presentations and discussions. Of course, discussion of the 2026-27 budget was at the center of many of the meetings.

Major Surplus or Looming Deficit? Or Both?

While speaking to the Form Club of West Palm Beach on Wednesday afternoon, [Gov. DeSantis repeated](#) what has become a common refrain in his stump speeches: “Florida’s rainy day fund is maxed out and we have surplus revenue over and above that.”

At the same time DeSantis was boasting about the tremendous amount of excess revenue Florida is just sitting on, the Senate Higher Education Appropriations Committee was meeting and shared a very different tune.

“We have limited resources this year,” [said Sen. Gayle Harrell, chair of the committee](#), in response to the State University System’s legislative budget request. “With limited resources, we will make very tough decisions moving forward.”

At first glance, these two different assertions about Florida’s budget might seem incompatible with one another. Fortunately, any confusion was quickly cleared up later in the afternoon when the House PreK-12 Budget Committee met.

As you might recall, last week this committee looked into the tens of millions of dollars owed to school districts for students who received voucher funding despite being enrolled in public schools. That conversation continued this week. Rep. Jenna Persons-Mulicka asked a representative of Florida's largest voucher funding organization how much money they had received in just the first quarter of the 2025-26 school year for students who are enrolled in public schools. His answer is something you'll want to watch and hear for yourself:



It is unconscionable that Florida remains #50 in the nation in average teacher pay and that all across the state educators leave their worksite to head to their second job. To make matters worse, the Florida Department of Education has simply taken \$44 million away from public schools in the first quarter of the year and given that funding to a voucher organization for students who have subsequently been determined “not to be voucher students.”

Gov. DeSantis is right, Florida has tremendous unspent financial resources. Sen Harrell is also right—legislators will make tough choices this session. They must choose if they will continue to rake in campaign donations by doing the bidding of the corporate interests who want to profit from a fully-privatized system of education or if they put the interests of people over the interests of corporate profits by fully-funding our public schools.

Throughout this session, we will repeatedly hear lawmakers bemoan that there simply isn't enough money for them to provide our public schools, colleges and universities with the funding they need to ensure students and educators thrive. Let this week serve as a reminder that our state doesn't actually have an issue finding funds for our students and public schools. Florida's largest deficit is one of meaningful action where far too many legislators are able to make the consequence free choice to place corporate profits over the needs of our students and communities. As you have meeting with legislators when they are back in their home towns, make sure you share the real triumphs and challenges of being in our public schools.

Educator Certification

The [House Student Academic Success Committee](#) met this week to discuss teacher certification. Dr. Paul Burns, Senior Chancellor for the Florida Department of Education, explained to committee members that there are really two essential elements to certification. First, Florida's certification process for teachers ensures that the teacher is a subject-area expert in what they are certified to teach. Secondly, the process ensures that the teacher understands pedagogy and can effectively use their knowledge to teach.

Most parents would rightfully want their child's teacher to meet those two benchmarks. This is one reason why voucher schools and "classical" charter schools should come with warning labels as teachers at those schools are neither required to demonstrate subject-area knowledge nor expertise in pedagogy. This is one of the many issues that wasn't addressed in a meeting that is most notable for the lack of answers provided.

Committee members had great questions for Dr. Burns, that ultimately went unanswered:

- How many teacher vacancies are there currently?
- How many teachers currently are teaching on a temporary certificate?
- What is the turnover rate for teachers on a temporary certificate?
- How many teachers have earned their certificate through the "Heroes in the Classroom" program which seeks to recruit military veterans to be classroom teachers?

When Dr. Burns did answer direct questions, we guarantee they would not be accepted in any of your classrooms as adequate. In response to a question about the massive decline in first-year full time classroom teachers with a professional certificate seen in the below image (which can also be found on page 4 [of his presentation](#)) Dr. Burns replied: "I just want to be clear, those numbers don't represent a drop-off..."



How do educators earn their first certificates?

Pathways to Professional Certification	First-Year Full-Time Classroom Teachers with a Professional Certification			3-Year Average	
	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25		
Florida Traditional Programs	3,201	3,703	2,589	3,164	41%
Florida Alternative Programs	718	883	544	715	9%
Reciprocity	2,451	2,260	1,628	2,113	28%
Other Pathways	1,500	2,280	1,159	1,646	22%
Total	7,870	9,126	5,920	7,639	100%

These data represent Full-Time K-12 Classroom Teachers (EEO Codes 22-33 - excluding substitutes) reported on Survey 2 who were in their first-year teaching based on their reported Years of Experience and had a State Issued Professional Certification by the end of the School Year.

The value of interim committee weeks is this is the time for legislators to dive deeply into issue and to hear from alleged experts on issues of importance before the regular session begins. When state experts won't or can't provide those points of reference, it falls to us to ensure that legislators are asked the right questions. Add the questions above to your list of delegate meeting questions and see what your local legislators have to say about certificates.

Artificial Intelligence

The main theme from this week's [Senate PreK-12 Education Committee](#) meeting is that it's not a matter of if AI will be integrated into classrooms but a matter of how that implementation will occur.

To that end, the committee heard from Maya Isreal, director of Computer Science Education at the University of Florida and from the superintendents of Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties about their efforts to implement AI in the classroom while balancing concerns around privacy, ethics and student learning.

All of the speakers talked about the ongoing work of [Florida's K-12 AI Task Force](#). Throughout the school year, the task force will be holding free webinars on a range of topics related to AI in education. To see the list of list of upcoming webinars and for registration information, [visit this link](#).

For more information on the use of AI in education, check out these resources from [AFT](#) and [NEA](#).

Higher Education Committees Meet (Finally)

After taking the first committee week off, both the [Senate Postsecondary Education Committee](#) and the [House Higher Education Budget Subcommittee](#) met this week with a focus on outcomes for students who graduate from a college, university, or career and technical program.

Median wages one year after graduation is one of the performance-based metrics that is used to determine funding for the state university system. In the Senate there was a lengthy discussion about the [MyFloridaFuture portal](#) which allows individuals to look at average salaries for graduates based on the degree they earned and the institution they earned the degree from.

One particularly shameful datapoint to come out of that discussion is that Florida's low pay for teachers means graduates with an education degree earn considerably less than other university graduates in Florida. Five years after their university graduation, the median salary for all Florida graduates regardless of major is \$65,600. For education majors, of course, the story is very different. Their average salary does not even reach \$65,600 ten years after graduation according to the MyFloridaFuture portal.

This brings us right back to where we started. Florida is a state with incredible wealth that is concentrated in too few hands.

Looking Ahead

The next two committee weeks are November 3-7 and 17-21. Between now and then, we can anticipate seeing a slew of education bills filed, While committee meetings will continue to have presentations and roundtable discussions, we can also anticipate bills will start to be heard in committee. Now is the time to [reach out to your legislators](#) and let them know what issues you want them to address. One great way to do that is by showing up at your county's delegation meeting. Together, we have the power to create a better future, and that power starts with us coming together, raising our voices and demanding better from our lawmakers.

How You Can Take Action Today

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