

Florida Education Association *Frontline Report*

2026 Legislative Session

November 21, 2025

As with the first three interim committee weeks, this week's legislative meetings were heavily focused on vouchers. Battle lines were drawn between the House and the Senate on funding accountability for vouchers. A bill to require more testing for students sailed through its first committee, and property tax discussions are heating up. Read on to learn about all of that and more.

Voucher Battle: Part I

Just over two weeks ago on November 6, the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) released nearly \$50 million to school districts that they should have received back in July.

Why the discrepancy and delay? The Florida Finance Education Program (FEFP), Florida's main funding source for public education, ran out of money. Voucher payments were significantly more than the legislature budgeted for, and to ensure all voucher recipients received their full funding, public school fundings was prorated.

This was just one of many findings in the Florida Auditor General's recent [audit on voucher funding issues](#). It's worth reading the audit for yourself, but the report was summed up well in one of the audit's findings that reads,

"The absence of clear accountability mechanisms over education funding undermines the Legislature's intent to ensure equitable and effective use of public resources, *potentially exacerbates educational inequities* and hinders school choice, *and undermines public trust that every dollar is best used to support student success.*" (emphasis added).

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Both House and Senate committees had pointed questions for the auditor and for the FLDOE. The FLDOE was short on answers, however, as you can see by clicking on the image below to watch FLDOE Director of School Choice spectacularly fail to answer the simple question of how much Florida's voucher system costs taxpayers.



It really is worth taking the time to watch the entire meetings of the [Senate PreK-12 Appropriations Committee](#) and the [House PreK-12 Budget Committee](#) to gain a more complete understanding of the issues raised by the auditor general.

Email the Budget committees TODAY!

It is one thing to identify issues and to publicly interrogate those accountable for the failure that led to public school funding being short-changed, it is something else entirely to take the necessary steps to fix the issue.

Voucher Battle: Part II

While both chambers in the Florida legislature are finally acknowledging the mess they created with universal vouchers, they are worlds apart when it comes to solving the issue.

The Auditor General's report lays out a [series of recommendations](#) to address the funding issues. Chief among these recommendations is a policy change FEA has long advocated for, separating out voucher funding and public school funding in the FEFP.

The Senate seems to be on board with this proposal. Sen. Don Gaetz (R-Pensacola) [has filed legislation](#) to separate public school funding and private school funding in the budget. Similar

legislation sailed through the Senate last year but was blocked by the House.

Sen. Jenna Persons-Mulicka (R-Ft. Myers) chairs the House PreK-12 Education Budget Committee, so she has a lot of power and influence in determining how many, if any, of the Auditor General recommendations are implemented through legislation. At the end of her committee's meeting on Wednesday, Persons-Mulicka took a very different tone than Sen. Gaetz. She signaled that again this year the House will block any attempt to separate voucher funding from public school funding. Again, the reason this matters is that the way the program is currently structured, vouchers have essentially no budget cap.

If vouchers require more funding than the legislature provides, the excess funding comes by taking even more money away from public schools. This isn't a hypothetical. The FLDOE shorted public schools by \$47 million in their July 2025 payment as seen in [this chart](#) from the Auditor General's report.

Ignoring the recommendations of the independent office of the Auditor General would maintain a system that privileges voucher funding over public school funding. We urge members of the House to revisit the auditors' report.

Our job this session will be to raise our voices so loudly that the House has no choice but to do the right thing by Florida's students, educators and school communities and make our public schools a priority. [Click here](#) to email the budget committees and let them know that you support accountability in voucher funding.

Voucher Battle: Part III

While policy fixes like separating voucher funding and public school funding in the FEFP is a good start, policy fixes alone are not sufficient. As the Auditor General pointed out, more funding is needed as well. The second recommendation from the audit is that the "Legislature ensure that sufficient financial support is available to avoid disruptions in scholarship and public school funding."

We'd go a step further. It's not just that there needs to be enough funding to "avoid disruption" in public school funding; there needs to be enough funding so that all educators can live comfortably and support themselves and their families with only one job.

There needs to be enough funding so that all educators can see a doctor without fear of how they will be able to afford their medical costs.

There needs to be enough funding so that all educators can retire with dignity.

Even as we celebrate the welcome news that the ugly truth of vouchers and their role in defunding public education is finally getting the public scrutiny it deserves, we are mindful that talk is cheap. We demand action, and we demand better funding for public schools.

Any legislator who proposes to address the policy issues without also addressing the funding issues is only solving a small part of the larger issue that our students have to live with each day. In communities everywhere, educators are having to work two or three jobs just to make ends meet. Parents in communities across the state are grappling with an affordability crisis and workers everywhere are faced with wages that don't keep up with inflation. We cannot ignore the fact that policy shifts alone will do nothing to move Florida from being #50 in the nation in average teacher pay. When we fund public education and salaries fairly, we can ensure that our communities can thrive.

The mission ahead this legislative session is clear: as we work to ensure transparency in voucher funding, we must also demand better funding for Florida's public schools.

Property Tax Reform on the Fast Track in the House

This week's committee meetings wrapped up on Thursday with a marathon meeting of the House Select Committee on Property Taxes. The committee [approved eight bills](#) all on a party-line vote. Seven of these eight bills would place constitutional amendments related to reducing property taxes on the ballot in November 2026.

Currently, each of the bills exempt schools from the proposed cuts to property taxes. Property taxes are essential to public school funding, making up nearly 50% of public school funding statewide.

Of course, property taxes fund much more than just public schools. They also fund public safety, public parks and recreation, and other aspects of public education including libraries, and much more.

The committee heard from many locally elected leaders about the devastating cuts they would have to make if these amendments passed and property taxes were slashed and how those cuts would have negative impacts on the quality of life in their communities.

The property tax bills have two more stops in House committees before they are ready for the House floor. It is conceivable that these bills could make it through each of their committees during the interim committee period and be poised for a vote of on the House floor the first week of session.

Meanwhile, the Seante has not yet taken up any bills related to reducing property taxes.

Even though Gov. DeSantis has been talking nonstop about property taxes for a year now, he has not yet released a plan with any level of detail. Earlier this week Lieutenant Governor Jay Collins acknowledged the lack of leadership from the executive office and [told reporters that DeSantis would release a plan at the "appropriate time"](#) which is another way of saying Gov. DeSantis plan does not currently exist.

Why would these measures that target Florida's municipalities be a topic of discussion? While we don't have all the answers, we know that local control is the best way for communities to come together and deliver the services that community members need. When voters ultimately decide on these property tax proposals, they should ask themselves two questions:

1. Am I willing to pay higher fees and/or sales taxes to help offset the loss in local funding?
2. Am I willing to allow decisions about my local community to be made in Tallahassee?

A New Test for Elementary School Students?

As elementary school teachers already know, cursive writing is currently included in the BEST Standards. But, several legislators have interacted with people who (allegedly) can't read cursive fluently and moral panic ensued.

The proposed solution by Rep. Toby Overdorf (R-Palm City) is HB 127 which creates new testing requirements for elementary school students to demonstrate their "proficiency" in reading and writing cursive by the end of fifth grade. The bill requires "each student" to demonstrate proficiency including by writing essays in cursive; however, it does not explicitly state a consequence if a student is unable to demonstrate proficiency.

Will Florida begin to mandate retention for students in fifth grade like it currently does in third grade? Is this bill just virtue signaling without any real enforcement mechanism? Or is it somewhere in-between? That there is no clear answer to these questions is an indictment of the bill.

There is room for a healthy debate on whether cursive writing should be required and to what extent it should be tested. There is no room, however, for half-baked policy ideas that attempt to solve problems that don't exist (again, cursive is already required), nor is there room for any additional education policies that come with more questions than answers.

Nonetheless, HB 127 passed its first committee on a [unanimous vote](#). Similar legislation made it all the way through the House last year on a series of unanimous votes and seems poised to do so again this year. The bill did not move at all in the Senate last year, and hopefully that will be the case again this year.

Missed Opportunity by Higher Education Appropriations Committees

While PreK-12 funding received some long overdue scrutiny from legislators, those same lawmakers are burying their heads in the sand when it comes to the grifting happening at New

College of Florida and its president Richard Corcoran.

The Senate Higher Education Appropriations Committee received a presentation from the State University System Board of Governors on the “efficiency” of universities. The presentation was full of examples of inefficiency at New College and provided senators opportunities to really dive in and scrutinize the funding. Unfortunately, there seemed to be no curiosity among the senators, no desire to look under the rug.

[In this column](#), Orlando Sentinel columnist Scott Maxwell did the job senators refused to do: examine the costs of cronyism at Florida universities.

Looking Ahead

Most school districts in the state are closed all next week for Thanksgiving break, and legislators will take the week off as well.

The final two interim committee weeks will take place the first two weeks in December with the regular session officially starting on Tuesday, Jan 13.

One thing we’ll be closely watching in the next interim committee week is the House Select Committee on Congressional Redistricting which meets on Thursday, Dec. 4.

Legislators are under a good deal of pressure from President Trump and Gov. DeSantis to redraw Florida’s congressional maps to make them even more gerrymandered. One proposed redistricting map that is making the rounds would draw lines in such a way that the GOP would likely win 90% of Florida’s seats in the US Congress even though Republicans make up only 41% of registered voters in the state.

We’ll have an update on that and much more in our next edition on Frontline. Until then, we hope you have a great Thanksgiving week surrounded by your friends and loved ones.

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