

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2026 Legislative Session

January 16, 2026

We have officially kicked off the 2026 Legislative Session. The 60-day session began with the usual fanfare, but this time, things felt different. Tensions between the House, Senate, and the Governor seem to be on full display.

During their speeches, the Senate President and the Speaker of the House outlined their legislative agendas for the year, but education was noticeably absent from both lists.

Read on to learn more about:

- The Governor's Trip Down Memory Lane
- Multi-Year Contracts Bill Heads to the Senate Floor
- Vouchers: An Incomplete Conversation
- A Look Ahead

The Governor's Trip Down Memory Lane

Typically, during the State of the State address, the Governor takes time to discuss his priorities and outline his vision for the upcoming year. However, in his final State of the State speech, he instead chose to reflect on the past. In a 30-minute address, he highlighted the "big results" of the DeSantis agenda.

The Governor proudly asserted that during his tenure, we have tripled the rainy-day fund and doubled the budget reserves, all while the legislature claims the budget will be tight. When discussing education, the Governor had much to say. He celebrated the growth of school choice and praised the implementation of universal school vouchers. However, his appointed [Auditor General has pointed out inefficiencies](#), a lack of transparency, and insufficient accountability within that program. The Governor claimed to have worked hard to raise teachers' salaries and emphasized that Florida offers the highest average minimum teacher salary in the Southeast.

Meanwhile, it is reported that nearly 40% of school teachers are working second jobs to make ends meet as Florida's teachers rank #50 in the nation in average pay for the second year in a row.

While the Governor believes he has achieved "big results," it is difficult to see those results reflected in reality.

Member Priorities Discussed

The first week of the legislative session progressed unusually slowly. Several education committees did not meet, and the House and Senate considered 20 education-related bills.

The House reviewed HB 561, titled Educator Certifications, introduced by Representative Anne Gerwig. This bill proposes a streamlined process for retirees to reinstate their teacher certification if they wish to return to the classroom. It passed unanimously out of the Careers and Workforce Subcommittee and is now set to move to its next stop, the PreK-12 Budget Subcommittee.

The Senate reviewed several priority topics for FEA members, including SB 320, which would reestablish multi-year contracts, create 10-year teaching certificates and expand the eligibility for advanced degree pay and SB 318, which would implement a small portion of the Auditor General recommendations for Florida's voucher system. Read on to learn more about these bills.

Multi-Year Contracts Head to the Senate Floor

Members of the Fiscal Policy Committee evaluated SB 320, introduced by Senator Corey Simon. This bill includes several provisions, such as multi-year contracts, ten-year teaching certificates, and more flexible salary supplements. During the discussion, Senator Simon emphasized that the bill removes unnecessary requirements, allowing districts to concentrate more on classrooms and staffing. He noted that over the years, Florida's Education Code has expanded significantly, highlighting the need to review public schools and "pull back some of the layers that we've placed on districts for so long." Following a brief debate, the bill passed unanimously and will proceed to the Senate floor for further consideration.

Vouchers: An Incomplete Conversation

On the Senate floor, members proposed amendments, raised questions, and voted on SB 318, introduced by Senator Don Gaetz. For the second consecutive year, Senator Gaetz aims to amend the State's Voucher Program. This year's bill is more comprehensive than last year's, following a critical report from the Auditor General regarding the Voucher Program. Among other provisions,

the bill establishes a stabilization fund for both public and voucher schools, creates a categorical program for the voucher system, requires monthly verification of student enrollment, and mandates that every student be assigned a Florida Student ID number. The bill was passed unanimously off the Senate floor. SB 318 does not go far enough for students and communities- it doesn't address the fundamental issues related to vouchers defunding public education and the lack of academic accountability for voucher schools and still upholds inequity in funding.

Voucher accountability measures have not made it to the house. Help us demand that members of the House stand for accountability and create real and sustainable measures that help strengthen, not abandon, our public schools.

Let's Bring Voucher Accountability to the House Today!

Looking Ahead

The Florida State Board of Education will meet on Wednesday the 21st to discuss several issues on their [agenda](#), among them the newest critical needs shortage report, which supports FEA's [recent vacancy release](#) showing our state is having a hard time not only filling vacancies in our schools, but retaining educators for the long term. The critical needs report shows that in the [2026-2027](#) school year there is a projected 29.54% vacancy for ESE certifications¹. Additionally, the total number of courses taught by teachers not certified in an appropriate field in [2024-2025](#) was 94,038² compared to 64,526³ in [2023-2024](#) — an increase of 29,512 out of field educators year over year.

Next week, the Senate will hear SB 1216, a salary bill that addresses many of the laws that have led to salary compression where experienced educators make the same or very similar salary to new teachers. Be sure to visit [FEAweb.org/session](#) for the updates you need this session.

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¹ Exhibit 5, Page 8 of the 2026-27 Report

² Exhibit 3, Page 5 of the 2026-27 Report

³ Exhibit 3, Page 5 of the 2025-26 Report

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