



2019 Legislative Update

Second Committee Week: January 11, 2019

Governor DeSantis Sworn in as Governor

Article 9, Section 1 of the Florida Constitution clearly states: “The education of children is a fundamental value of the people of the State of Florida. It is, therefore, a paramount duty of the state to make adequate provision for the education of all children residing within its borders. Adequate provision shall be made by law for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education and for the establishment, maintenance, and operation of institutions of higher learning and other public education programs that the needs of the people may require.

Ron DeSantis has been officially sworn in as the 46th governor of Florida. Governor DeSantis presented his stance on public education in his recent inauguration speech. The governor stated that he wants to “place a greater emphasis on vocational and technical training, as there is honor in jobs that require vocational skills and those who work hard in these trades make great contributions to our society and should have our admiration.”

Governor DeSantis then turned his attention to a re-emphasis on vouchers, charter schools and to education savings accounts. Everyone agrees that parents should be empowered to choose where their child attends school. Florida legislation has been passed over the past five years giving parents that opportunity with policies such as open enrollment across county and neighborhood school boundaries, not to mention the access to a wealth of charter schools and vouchers to attend private

schools. Unfortunately, some of these policies have redirected funds from the nearly 90 percent of children who attend neighborhood public schools to fund the nearly 10 percent of students who attend charters, or the ever-growing number of parents who are taking vouchers and the funding for public schools to send their children to private schools.

DeSantis also expressed the desire to, “rediscover the value of civics education.” Florida public school teachers currently teach Civics in school. As civics and government teachers in middle and high schools will attest, we teach the “foundational knowledge needed for properly discharging the duties of citizenship.”

Senate Education Committee Meeting

This week the Senate Education Committee met to hear presentations on the implementation of SB 7026, legislation passed in 2018 in response to the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. The committee is chaired by Senator Manny Diaz, whom you may remember is the former PreK-12 Education Appropriations Subcommittee chair and a staunch defender of charter schools and vouchers.

Suwannee and Polk County superintendents made presentations regarding SB 7026, and their implementation of the controversial Guardian Program, which trains volunteers in protecting a school in the event of an armed shooter. The Department of Education reports that 25 sheriffs have agreed to train guardians. Suwannee and Polk superintendents talked about their strict screening process for volunteers, which is done in conjunction with the local sheriff’s office.

The Department of Education presentation and Diaz made it clear that legislation is needed and will be coming in the near future to amend SB 7026, and that the Senate committee will consider some or all of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission’s recommendations. As you may know, one of those recommendations is to arm classroom teachers. The Florida Education Association’s (FEA) position remains that only trained law enforcement personnel should be carrying weapons on campus, and we will continue to advocate for that position this

coming session.

House Education Committee Meeting

The House Education Committee also met this week to discuss the framework for the committee. The Committee is chaired by Rep. Jennifer Sullivan.

For this first meeting, all three subcommittees met together for a very brief overview of the division of the policy areas in the Department of Education. Sullivan asked the committee to consider three very important questions when constituents and lobbyists come calling. The questions are important for us, as activists, to consider as well.

- What is the problem to solve or behavior to change?
- Who is responsible for solving the problem?
- Is this an issue that is confined to one school, a few schools or a few school districts?

Finally, she suggested that not every problem requires legislation, and that legislation can cause unintended consequences. Legislators may be getting the message that the state's educational mission might not be to micromanage local districts. Maybe with a little help from us, they will see that funding our future and our schools, is indeed a statewide issue, and one they are responsible for solving.

Are you coming to Tallahassee?

Now is the time to be thinking about a possible visit to Tallahassee for the legislative session. As any good teacher or professor will tell you, you have to do your homework first! Have you scheduled to meet or met with your legislator or legislative aides in-district yet? Building relationships at home makes your work and ours in Tallahassee that much better. Then pick a week to come to Tallahassee between now and May 3. Committee weeks happening through late February offer a great opportunity to come to Tallahassee to meet with legislators, as do the first

several weeks of session, which may be your county's spring break. Pick a week and then pick a hotel! Hotels in Tallahassee fill up fast, and you'll want to secure your rooms now. Once you've picked your week, be sure to fill out the "I'm coming" [tab here](#) to let us know when to expect you. If you have any questions about coming to Tallahassee, please don't hesitate to contact Tina Dunbar at Tina.Dunbar@floridaea.org. If you need assistance with scheduling in-district lobby visits or need general information about what to say to legislators and staff and how to say it, contact Stephanie Kunkel at Stephanie.Kunkel@floridaea.org.

Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078.

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