

DTU

2019 Legislative Session Report

Third Committee Week

January 25, 2019

Shortened weeks still make for busy weeks

This week the Legislature was out Monday in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. They were jam-packed the rest of the week with presentations.

Arming Teachers?

Those of you who continuously read our Frontline reports last session (THANK YOU!) will remember that the Legislature passed SB 7026, which was hastily put together in response to the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. One of the more controversial components of the legislation was whether to arm school personnel, namely classroom teachers. Despite opposition from FEA, parent groups and even the education commissioner and governor, the legislation created the “Guardian” program. This program allows voluntary **non-instructional** school personnel to be trained to carry a concealed weapon in order to protect against an active shooter situation.

The House Education Committee and Senate Education Committee this week heard presentations from Bob Gualtieri, Pinellas County Sheriff and head of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission, regarding the 482-page report on the findings on the school shooting. This included 99 recommendations from the commission on ways to improve school safety and mitigate future mass shootings. **One of these recommendations was to expand the “Guardian” program to include teachers who wish to volunteer to concealed carry.**

As we have said in the past, FEA's position remains that only trained law enforcement personnel should carry weapons on campus, and we will continue to advocate for that position this coming session as well.

School Choice, the Focus of PreK-12 Innovation Subcommittee

On Wednesday the PreK-12 Innovation Subcommittee heard presentations on public school choice options. Appearing before the committee were representatives of Citrus, Osceola, Seminole and Miami-Dade County school boards. The committee also heard from DOE's Office of School Choice.

Legislators on the committee were informed that traditional public school students fared better than their counterparts who attend privately operated charter schools. Also, the graduation rate of students completing traditional public schools was higher than the graduation percentages of students attending privately operated charter schools.

Chair Massullo (R-Beverly Hills) asked the panel if there were concerns about the current school choice policy. **The panel all agreed that charter schools' unrestricted right to build a school at any location is a serious problem on multiple levels for school districts.**

"We don't build a school where there isn't a need. Charter schools, on the other hand, build wherever they like, and that makes things very difficult. Sometimes right across the street from a traditional public school," said Dr. Sylvia Diaz, assistant superintendent of Miami-Dade Public Schools. She went on to say, "We can absolutely compete with charter schools, as long as there is an even playing field."

What we know: Florida parents are already saturated with school choice options. Selecting the right school for a child is one of the most important decisions that a parent will make. Florida school districts provide parents with various options, including public, private and charter schools. The panel informed legislators that Florida parents were

urged to explore these options by visiting school campuses and asking similar questions at each site.

What remains to be seen is whether this panel presentation will sway legislators from passing more “school choice” legislation that further gives charter schools and private schools who accept vouchers an advantage, while making it harder for public schools to operate in Florida.