



2019 Legislative Update

Final Committee Week, February 22, 2019

Final Week before Session

This week was composed of mostly cancelled committee meetings and a jam-packed fundraising calendar for legislators as they hit the final fundraising period prior to session starting (state law prohibits legislators from receiving campaign contributions during the 60 days of session). A few committees met to hear House appropriations projects and the last of committee presentations. Your FEA PPA staff spent the week meeting with legislators and reviewing policy bills that are dropping at a rapid-fire pace.

Bills to watch

As is customary in Frontline, we wanted to flag a few bills that are on our radar and should be on yours as well.

SB 520: This bill would ensure that the seven counties hardest hit by Hurricane Michael would not lose their school funding due to students moving to neighboring counties because of storm damage. Currently the bill does not have a House companion. FEA SUPPORTS the bill.

SB 698: This bill would repeal the union decertification language, requiring at least 50 percent of potential union members to pay dues in order for the union to remain certified, which passed as part of HB 7055 last session. Currently the bill does not have a House companion. FEA SUPPORTS the bill.

HB 839: This bill would require a survey to “measure the intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity” of universities, and the Board of Governors would report the results of the survey. The bill would also change the performance metrics and scales used to award performance funding at the state universities. Currently there is no Senate companion. UFF OPPOSES the survey provision in the bill.

HB 6007: This bill would repeal the prohibition on campus carry at our colleges and universities. Currently the bill does not have a Senate companion. FEA and UFF OPPOSE the bill.

SB 7030: We’ve reported on this bill in previous Frontlines. If SB 7030 becomes law it would require local sheriff’s offices to provide the Guardian training if the school board votes to participate. It would also remove the prohibition on arming classroom teachers if they volunteer to participate in the Guardian program. Last year teachers were excluded from the Guardian program by the school safety bill. SB 7030 has two committee references: the committees on Infrastructure and Security, and Appropriations. There is not currently a House companion to SB

7030. FEA OPPOSES the inclusion of classroom teachers in the Guardian program but takes no position on other provisions of the bill.

More choice?

The [House Education Committee](#) has focused on at least three committee meetings in the past four weeks on vouchers, open enrollment, charter schools, etc. On Tuesday, the committee heard a presentation from Adam Miller, Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice within the Department of Education (That is a department at FDOE).

Miller began his presentation focused on the voucher programs in Florida, their history, rapid increase in participation and the number of students currently using a private school voucher. More than 370,000 students are receiving a voucher to attend private school, with the majority getting Florida Tax Credit vouchers — 108,098. Under the McKay program, 31,044 students are receiving a voucher, while the Gardiner voucher goes to 10,258. Two new vouchers were approved last session, the reading voucher and the Hope voucher for students who claim to be bullied. The Hope voucher program, which has collected more than \$8.9 million in auto sales tax revenue since July 1, had gotten only 127 applicants and issued 66 vouchers as of Jan. 9. The reading voucher, which provides \$500 vouchers for students with low reading scores, has awarded 4,500 of the 19,000 vouchers available based on funding appropriated from the Legislature.

Miller also reported that the number of students attending a charter school has risen now to 11 percent of the total school population. He also reports that there are 621 charter schools to 3,001 traditional public schools (yet let's also remember charter schools get three times the amount of capital outlay funding, which wasn't mentioned).

Lastly, Miller shared that more than 262,000 students have taken advantage of open enrollment, which means they are currently attending a public school that they are not zoned to attend.

Governor's Policy Proposals

Perhaps you've seen in the news or read in the past few *Frontlines* that the governor has proposed changes to public education that have us paying close attention, including tweaks to the "Best and Brightest" bonuses and his proposal for more students to receive vouchers. While his past announcements have been in the form of press conferences, last Friday the governor released his policy language proposal for these and other policy ideas. Here's a breakdown for you.

Best and Brightest Bonuses: The biggest complaint we receive from members across Florida is on the Best and Brightest bonus the Legislature put into place several sessions ago. As you are probably aware, some of our members like it because, hey, any money is better than no money at all, whereas other members hate it because they aren't eligible — they aren't a classroom teacher, didn't take the ACT or SAT, or simply didn't score high enough on those college entrance exams to qualify. The program is fraught with discrimination, so much so that FEA has a lawsuit pending against it.

The governor's proposal eliminates the ACT and SAT scores, and instead would provide a bonus for any teacher rated highly effective who works in a school where the school grade rose by at least 1 percentage point. Bonus awards would be up to \$10,000, depending on the Legislature's appropriation for that fiscal year. The catch is fewer teachers would be eligible.

Best and Brightest Teacher Talent Pipeline Student Loan Forgiveness and Tuition

Reimbursement Program: This program is supposed to help recruit and retain teachers by repaying student loans or reimbursing for the cost of undergraduate tuition and fees, including room and board, for four years of undergraduate education – both in an amount not to exceed \$25,000 – for any new teachers who teach in a critical shortage area and remain teaching for at least five school years. This is also based on an appropriation by the Legislature. But what about teachers currently in the classroom struggling to make payments on their student loans? So far, not a thing to help them is in this plan.

Equal Opportunity Scholarship (Voucher) Program: Creates another voucher in Florida, for eligible students who spent the previous school year in a Florida public school, or a student entering kindergarten, whose family household income level does not exceed 265 percent of the federal poverty level. Funding for this voucher, however, appears to come from an appropriation from the general treasury.

As with any proposals put forth by the governor, we all have to remember that they are just that, proposals. The governor can recommend a policy idea or budget, but it's up to the Legislature to pass and send bills to the governor to be signed into law.

Senate Releases Education Package Proposal

On Thursday, members of the Senate president's education team rolled out the Senate's education plan for consideration during the coming legislative session. The plan was presented by Sen. Manny Diaz, Jr. (R-Hialeah Gardens), Chair of the Senate Committee on Education; Sen. Kelli Stargel (R-Lakeland), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education; and Senate President Pro Tempore David Simmons (R-Altamonte Springs). Their proposal was short on specifics, but here is what we know:

Very similar to the governor's proposal for another voucher, the "Family Empowerment Scholarship" voucher is available to families with incomes up to 260 percent of the federal poverty level, for students who have previously attended a traditional public school or are eligible to enroll in kindergarten. The voucher will be funded through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) at 95 percent of the district average cost per student and capped at 15,000 students statewide for the first year. The voucher cap would then "grow as the overall public school student population grows."

The plan would restructure the current Best and Brightest bonus program, eliminating SAT/ACT requirements, and instead focusing on recruitment, retention and recognition of Florida's top teachers and principals. The legislation will create a new recruitment bonus, a one-time award for newly hired teachers who are content experts in mathematics, science, computer science, reading or civics; a retention bonus for effective or highly effective teachers at schools that have demonstrated academic improvement; and a recognition bonus for highly effective teachers selected by the school principal, based on performance criteria and policies adopted by the district school board. The legislation will also retool the principal bonus around performance of schools demonstrating academic improvement.

Legislation will promote the expansion of, and encourage funding for, new Community Schools. Additionally, the legislation will invest in the success of public schools in, or exiting, district-managed turnaround status through sustained support for wrap-around services such as after-school programs, extended school day or school year, counseling or other support services. Perhaps some of these components sound familiar? That's because FEA has championed issues such as community schools and wrap-around services for years. The Senate education leadership team made it clear their intent, while it will still be a massive logrolled bill, to allow the bill to be vetted through the committee process with Senate input along the way. As with any bills, FEA will be monitoring closely and working with senators and representatives when and if a House companion package emerges, and will be working hard to make changes to keep neighborhood public schools at the forefront of these conversations.