



## 2019 Legislative Session Update

Week 2 Day 11

March 15, 2019

### ***Rolling through the Week:***

We expected the big Senate education packages — [SB 7070](#) and [SB 7030](#) — to be on agenda this second week of the Legislative session, but they were not. On Tuesday night, however, the new voucher proposal in the House was dropped, then heard on Thursday. That's how it often goes in a 60-day session.

### ***Vouchers, Vouchers and More Vouchers:***

On Tuesday the [House Education Committee](#) introduced a proposed committee bill — [PCB EDC 1](#) — that creates a new voucher in Florida, the seventh one in recent years. **The “Family Empowerment” voucher proposed in EDC 1 varies from previous vouchers in that, instead of being paid for through corporate sales tax or taxes collected on the purchase of a motor vehicle, this voucher would be paid for by taxpayers through general revenue. This voucher appears to be in direct violation of the Florida Supreme Court’s 2006 Bush v. Holmes decision in that public dollars from the general treasury are being diverted to separate, private systems that are parallel to, and in competition with, free public schools.**

**The Family Empowerment voucher also raises the threshold for who would be eligible.** Unlike the Florida Tax Credit voucher (currently available for students from families with a household income that does not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$47,638 for a family of four), the Family Empowerment voucher would be available for students who have a household income of 300 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$77,250 for a family of four beginning in the 2019-2020 school year. However, within four years, this voucher would be available for students with a family whose household income is 375 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$96,572 for a family of four.

Thank you to Aimee Smith of Hardee County, who testified passionately in opposition to the bill in committee, urging committee members to focus on the expected 10,000 teacher vacancies for the coming school year, rather than diverting precious resources to private schools. The FEA, along with the League of Women Voters, the Florida PTA, parent groups such as Common Ground and Fund Education Now, and the AFL-CIO testified or waved in opposition to the bill. **The bill passed 15-2, with bipartisan support.** We thank Reps. Bruce Antone (D-Orlando), and Delores Hogan Johnson (D-Fort Pierce), who debated and voted against the bill, while Rep. Patricia Williams (D-Fort Lauderdale) did not vote. Reps. James Bush (D-Opa Locka), Kimberly Daniels (D-Jacksonville) and Susan Valdes (D-Tampa) joined all Republicans in support.

### ***Senate Education Committee:***

Tuesday the [Senate Education Committee](#) had a full agenda of bills, and all but one passed unanimously. Included were bills to change regulations for apprenticeship programs ([SB 522](#) by Sen. Manny Diaz); naming buildings on college campuses ([SB 7076](#), the only bill to pass 6-1) and renaming college campuses ([SB 720](#) by Sen. Anitere Flores); fiscal transparency for school boards ([SB 1198](#) by Sen. Kelli Stargel); preventing the future repeal of the Florida Endowment for

Vocational Rehabilitation ([SB 172](#) by Sen. Aaron Bean); creating a uniform system for awarding postsecondary college credit to military service members and veterans ([SB 442](#) by Sen. Tom Lee); Excess Credit Hour Surcharges in universities ([SB 680](#) by Sen. Keith Perry); mastery-based education (SB 226); and students with disabilities (SB 62).

[SB 226](#) by Sen. Jeff Brandes (R-St. Petersburg), regarding mastery-based education, was heard in committee and passed unanimously, 8-0. Much of the debate on this bill revolved around the expansion of another pilot project before data on the success of the project is provided or evaluated. Parents spoke in opposition primarily because of a lack of transparency and concerns that a great idea for creative student instruction has devolved into computer-managed lab assignments.

Also on the agenda was [SB 62](#) — seclusion and restraint for students with disabilities by Sen. Lauren Book (D-Plantation). This bill is designed to ensure students with disabilities are protected from physical restraint and excessive disciplinary practices, however as currently drafted it has serious issues. FEA remains concerned about the timing of the reporting requirements for both serious and minor disciplinary infractions and the provision for adequate professional teacher development. The senators on the committee raised a lot of questions and pressed Sen. Book on the need to minimize red tape for teachers so that they can spend their time instructing students and not filing detailed reports for using minor classroom management techniques. However, the bill passed unanimously, 8-0.

Your FEA lobbyists and Secretary-Treasurer Carol Gauronskas (an ESE paraprofessional) continue to work with the sponsor to ensure students are receiving the best educational opportunities, and teachers and staff are supported by training, while reporting requirements are kept manageable.

### ***[Who's Coming to Tallahassee?](#)***

Big thanks to representatives from Clay, Duval, Hardee, Island Coast, Orange, Pasco and Pinellas counties/unions who came to Tallahassee to meet with legislators regarding education issues.

As a reminder, we are working closely with the AFL-CIO Working Families Lobby Corps to lobby legislators in Tallahassee on pro-public education issues and against anti-union legislation. If you haven't already, be sure to let us know via the [AFL-CIO Working Families Lobby Corps](#) when to expect you, and book your hotels ASAP.

If you have any questions about coming to Tallahassee, please don't hesitate to contact Tina Dunbar at [Tina.Dunbar@floridaea.org](mailto:Tina.Dunbar@floridaea.org). Remember that your visit to Tallahassee should include proper Capitol attire — suits, slacks, button up shirts and/or ties for the men; dresses or slacks and blouses for the women; and especially comfortable dress shoes for everyone. We also recommend you bring a light jacket or sweater, and an umbrella. Tallahassee weather is notoriously unpredictable for spring, not to mention committee room temperatures!

**Questions? Call: 850-224-2078**