



## *2019 Legislative Update*

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***Week 8- Day 53***

***April 26, 2019***

### **7 Days to Sine Die:**

This week we are in a sprint to the finish. The budget needs to be wrapped up by Tuesday, April 30, to be considered for a timely end of session. The House and Senate have started backroom dealing to bring both policy and the budget in for a landing.

### **Budget:**

On Tuesday the Senate President and Speaker of the House announced agreed upon allocations and announced budget conferees. On Wednesday the first education budget conference meeting was held. Here's what we know: Our fight for increased funding in the budget is working. Keep up your message to legislators to Fund Our Future.

The Senate education budget Chair, Senator Kelli Stargel (R-Lakeland) offered, and the House education budget Chair, Rep. Chris Latvala (R-Clearwater), accepted an FEFP that totals \$12.46 billion. This equates to an increase of per student funding by \$248 but we still await a final Base Student Allocation amount (If you recall, the Senate increase was \$350/FTE and a BSA increase of \$149, while the House was at \$167/FTE and a BSA increase of \$38). After the first offers, a reporter asked Chair Latvala if this was done. His response "It's the Florida Legislature. Things can always change."

Unresolved issues will be "bumped" to budget Chairs Sen. Rob Bradley (R-Orange Park) and Rep. Travis Cummings (R-Winter Park). A final budget must be on members' desks by Tuesday, April 30, for Members to debate and vote on Friday, May 3, in order to adjourn a timely Sine Die.

What does that mean for us? It means, **KEEP CALLING** your Senator and Representative and tell them to **Fund Our Future**.

### **Bills that are Moving:**

Despite only seven days remaining (we hope!) in session, almost all of the finer details in Education policy are still to be decided. And those decisions will be made by leadership negotiations outside the public eye. The bills that are passed in the last week of session will be critical to our students' success. Be ready to let the Governor know how we feel about legislation that makes its way to his desk over the next weeks.

Outstanding issues include per pupil funding to school districts, categorical funding (money earmarked for specific purposes), voucher and charter school expansions, teacher certification, school safety measures, higher education funding, school board term limits, and tax policy changes. As you are well aware, good policy has long been dead for this session, but we hope they will be given a fair opportunity to be vetted next session.

Thanks to raised voices of our members, we were successful in getting a reduction in costs of teacher certification exams and an extension on the time teachers are given to pass their general knowledge tests and earn full licensure. And as stated in the aforementioned budget section, legislators are listening to

our members and leaders who are asking the legislature to invest in our students and neighborhood schools.

Unfortunately, we also anticipate an expansion of both private school voucher programs and funding for additional students in the existing programs. Charter schools continue to captivate the attention of legislators and receive preferential treatment for program funding and facilities. Career and technical education for both K-12 and Higher Education have also been a focus for bills that promote opportunities for students to learn more about career options and expanding incentives for schools to offer additional programs.

We are disappointed that the majority of legislators cite "local control" as their excuse to allow classroom teachers to voluntarily be armed in our schools instead of focusing on student safety, yet are more than happy to dictate to school boards how they run all other areas of their policy.

The school safety package, SB 7030 passed the Senate on Tuesday by a vote of 22-17. We thank all Democrats and Senator Anitere Flores (R-Miami) for voting in opposition to any bill that allows classroom teachers to be armed. It is currently in messages waiting for the House to take it up. As you may recall, the House version of this bill was temporarily postponed almost a month ago. The House must either take up the Senate's version of the bill or pass their version and bounce it back to the Senate before it heads to the Governor.

**On Thursday the Senate passed the omnibus education package, SB 7070. After floor amendments, the bill revises the Best and Brightest bonus program tying bonuses to an arbitrary school growth percentage (resulting in only about 35,000 teachers being eligible for a bonus rather than more than 145,000 who currently receive them). Further, SB 7070 expands vouchers by including an unconstitutional voucher that would directly take public education dollars and send them to religious private schools, and would allow "Schools of Hope" charter schools to set up shop anywhere in more than 420 new areas of the state regardless of whether the neighborhood public school is in turnaround.**

We again thank the Democrats who voted unanimously against this bad policy as the bill passed 23-17. Legislators got the message that the old bonus structure is flawed, but clearly are not getting the message that failed bonus programs do nothing to alleviate the teacher shortage crisis. Like SB 7030, SB 7070 is also in messages and the House must either take up the Senate's version or amend and send it back to the Senate.

Our PPA team has been diligently fighting the House's tax package – HB 7123. This issue impacts the many counties with voter approved millage referenda, or those counties considering a referendum in the future. As you have read in previous Frontlines, the House has been moving its tax package. **The bill would require that any voter approved millage referenda be shared with charter schools – even if that referenda was explicitly clear that funds would SOLELY be for traditional public schools, and even if the voters had already approved and the school board has already designated funds collected.** Currently, the charter school referendum language does not appear in the Senate version – and we are working to keep it that way.

Clearly, we still have work to do as educators, explaining how seriously we take the teacher shortage and how committed we are to the success of our students and our profession. In the next week, we will continue to work with legislators to make sure they know where our members stand on the issues that promote student success, demonstrate investment in education and help us recruit and retain great education staff. But our work does not end with Sine Die.

It will be crucial to meet with legislators in their districts at home when the session ends to continue building relationship; thanking them for their favorable votes where we can; and educating them on the needs of teachers and education staff professionals ahead of the 2020 legislative session. Most importantly, ask them to invest in public education by Funding Our Future. It's never too early to start talking with your local Government Relations committee and the FEA public policy staff about setting up meetings; who to take with you; and how your legislators did during the session.

### **Settled Policy:**

We're on track to have the fewest bills passed and signed by the Governor than ever before. That certainly happens when a Speaker wants that record, combined with bills that enroll multiple policy ideas into a log rolled omnibus package rather than separate bills. So far the following bills dealing with education and union issues have been sent to the Governor.

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#### **SB 212 Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, by Sen. TomWright (R).**

This measure extends the deadline for an educational program that address the issues that children of military families experience as the students transfer between various schools based on their parent's military assignment. The average military family moves three or more times more often than a non-military family. The compact guarantees uniform treatment to ensure the students graduate in a timely manner. The bill was signed by the Governor on April 8.

#### **CS/SB 7014 Government Accountability, by Community Affairs Committee and Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee**

This measure targets financial fraud, abuse, and waste in state agencies, including charter schools, school districts, Florida College System institutions, and state universities. It authorizes the Governor or Commissioner of Education, or designee, to notify the Joint Legislative Auditing Committee if an entity fails to comply with certain auditing and financial reporting requirements. The bill has been presented to the Governor, he has until April 29 to sign or veto.

#### **SB 7016 FRS Employer Rate Bill, by Government, Oversight and Accountability**

Each session, the Legislature sets the employer contribution rates to cover the cost of individual employees in the FRS. The public employers that will incur these additional costs are state agencies, state universities and colleges, school districts. The adjustment provides the FRS Trust Fund with roughly \$123.3 million more in revenue on an annual basis beginning July 1, 2019. Employees will maintain the current three percent FRS contribution. The bill was signed by the Governor April 15.

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### **Members in the Capital City:**

Shout out to the educators from Miami-Dade, Hillsborough, Lee, Palm Beach, Pinellas and St. Lucie along with our FEA retired members who came to Tallahassee this week to meet with legislators regarding education issues.

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