

January 9, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: District School Superintendents

FROM: Joy Frank

RE: Interim Committee Meetings – January 5 - 8

The House and Senate held the first set of interim committee meetings for the 2015 Legislative Session this week. It is unusual, but many of the House and Senate Committee chairs impacting education have not changed. In addition, most of the staff have remained in place. Most of the meetings included introductions of members and staff and updates on previously enacted legislation. Below is a summary of pertinent information.

Senate Education PreK-12 Committee

Commissioner Stewart gave a presentation on assessment requirements. Senators peppered her with questions about the assessments, including length of time needed to take assessments; number of days needed for assessments, validity and reliability of assessments, and costs on both the state and local levels. Some members did acknowledge that much of the requirements were legislatively driven. Superintendents were given an opportunity to provide brief input including MaryEllen Elia, Hillsborough County Public Schools; Joe Joyner, St. John’s County Public Schools and Carlene Anderson, Walton County Public Schools.

Senate Higher Education Committee

OPPAGA presented a report to committee members on Postsecondary Options for Students with Disabilities. The report was comprehensive in informing the committee of federal initiatives, postsecondary options in other states, postsecondary options in Florida and input from parents. According to the report, 17 programs exist in postsecondary institutions for students with disabilities. Total fall enrollment for programs with students still in ESE was 71 students. Total fall enrollment for programs with students no longer in ESE was 201 students. There are a potential of 6,551 students who could be enrolling in a postsecondary program in the near future. However, not all of these students may wish to pursue postsecondary education.

In summary, there is not a statewide coordination of programs. Parents would like a centralized place for information. There are a range of options available for ESE students and students no longer in ESE, though parts of the state do not have any options. Programs provide a range of activities such as: auditing postsecondary courses, enrolling in vocational courses, and job training programs. No degrees are awarded; some options allow student to complete courses that can be applied towards a workforce credential. No Florida programs have the CTP designation; 1 program applied. Institutional accreditation is not an issue if institutions carefully document differences in student expectations and performance. No state financial aid programs are available for student attending a specialized postsecondary program. Students attending programs are not eligible for federal financial aid. The program must be CTP.

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education

The members heard a presentation from Commissioner Stewart similar to the one that was heard in the Senate PreK-12 Committee re to assessments. She was asked the total cost of administering the assessments. While costs for statewide assessments are available, the costs to school districts are not.

House K-12 Subcommittee

A panel of education stakeholders was asked by Chair Adkins to come provide information about their roles and responsibilities. Commissioner Stewart presented and outlined the roles of the Legislature, State Board, Commissioner, and DOE in formulating and executing state policy. She also reviewed the roles and responsibilities of school board members, superintendents and principals. Panel members included:

Patty Hightower, School Board Member
Escambia County School Board

Jerry Taylor, School Board Member
Suwannee County School Board

Dr. Mike Grego, Superintendent
Pinellas County School Board

Carlene Anderson, Superintendent
Walton County School District

Bethany Mitidieri, Principal
The Webster School
St. John's County School District

Billy May, Principal
Bay High School
Bay County School District

The panel responded to several questions about communication among stakeholders as well as with parent and the business community.

Then, Mary Jane Tappen from DOE gave an overview of the new instructional materials legislation. Kathy Green from Seminole County School District and Bill Purtell from Palm Beach County School District provided input on the implementation of the new legislation and policies relating to parent input and access to instructional materials.

House Choice & Innovation Subcommittee

The meeting featured a presentation from the Department of Education that provided an overview of the school choice options available to Florida students. The presentation provided data about the types, availability and participation rates in each program.

District managed choice programs were discussed. Choice options presented included magnet schools or programs, dual enrollment programs, advanced placement programs,

career and professional academies, and Advanced Certificate of Education and International Baccalaureate programs. The Department reported that about 230,000 students participated in 2013-2014.

Details of the McKay Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities were discussed. The details of the program, including the responsibilities of the Department of Education and the eligibility requirements were provided. The report indicated that about 28,370 students and 1,248 schools participated in the program in 2013-2014. Also discussed were home education programs, and private education and virtual education options. The report indicated that 325,502 students attended 2,309 private schools in 2013-2014.

Virtual education options enrolled 241,299 students in 2013-2014. Updates to the implementation of HB 7029 passed during the 2014 Legislative were provided.

Other scholarship programs were also discussed. The Opportunity Scholarship program and the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship programs were presented. In 2013-2014, 3,588 students participated in the Opportunity Scholarship Program. The operation of the Tax Credit Scholarship program was discussed in detail. Program responsibilities of students, parents, and the Department of Education were detailed. In 2013-2014, 59,822 students and 1,429 schools participated in the programs.

Details of the newly established Personal Learning Scholarship accounts were presented. By January 2015 scholarships for 1,222 students were issued.

Charter schools were also discussed in detail. The presentation explained the responsibilities of the Department of Education and the status of the standard charter school contract. The presentation indicated that the State Board of Education adopted rules for the standard contract in November 2014.

House Education Appropriations Subcommittee

Staff presented a detailed overview of the state budget process and education funding. The Department of Education then presented the agency legislative budget request.

In closing, the next interim committee week is the week of January 20th. Again, most of the committee meetings will consist of presentations. I have reached out to many of you for assistance in having yourself or district personnel come present before committees. I realize how busy each of you and your staff are, especially as the assessment season approaches. I want to thank you for your help and support.

I will also have two interns helping me this session. Alexandra "Allie" Akre is a second year law student at Florida State University. She is from Stuart, Florida. Courtney Larkin is a senior at Florida State University and she is from Marianna, Florida. Their assistance will be invaluable.