

February 6, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: District School Superintendents

FROM: Joy Frank

RE: Interim Committee Meetings - Week of February 2nd

Senate Education Appropriations Subcommittee

The committee first had a presentation from the Governor’s Office and Commissioner Stewart on the Governor’s Legislative Budget Request. Most of the questions focused on technology funding. The chair wanted to know what the landing zone for digital and technology funding is. He asked the Commissioner to illustrate what a digital classroom looks like. He directed the Commissioner to work with Senator Ring to prepare a presentation for the committee on technology including the cost

What is landing zone for digital and technology funding?

The Commissioner was then asked to comment on the latest correspondence to the chair relating to assessments. (see attached) In the course of those comments the Commissioner continued to emphasize that school superintendents have certified or are in the process of certifying that they are ready for the Spring 2015 AIR FSA and other assessments. Members were very frustrated with her response since they have heard from many of you that districts are not ready.

The certification to which she was referring is entitled “Computer-Based Assessment Certification Tool” and was distributed to you on January 9, 2015 in a memoranda. <http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-7253/dps-2015-04.pdf> Some of you have certified that you are ready to administer the assessment by signing this certificate and submitting it to the department. However, concerns remain about the lack of sufficient load testing and other technology issues. In addition, this tool focuses on readiness for computer-based assessments and not the overall impact on students, teachers and schools in administering the FSA and other computer-based assessments this year. While your district may be able to administer these assessments, many of you have indicated that the disruption to student learning/instruction will be significant. Neither students nor teachers may be ready. Students have not had the time to develop the skills necessary to take such a high-stakes assessment online; particularly the new “technology enhanced items.” Teachers have not had the time to teach the new standards and then instruct students on taking an assessment online.

This certification only paints part of the picture. If you have concerns about implementing assessments this spring, I would recommend that you annotate your responses and/or include an addendum that provides detailed information as to the overall impact of administering the FSA and other assessments this year. If you have already submitted the certification, I would still submit an addendum if concerns remain. If you have additional questions, please give me a call.

Senator Legg then outlined SB 616 and represented that the legislation addresses four key areas:

1. Local assessments
2. Percentage of teacher evaluation
3. Cumulative testing time
4. 2014/15 accountability

He indicated that he would have a workshop in the Senate PreK-12 Committee in the near future. He invited the Commissioner to review the bill and provide suggestions. He also indicated that action will be taken that will impact this assessment cycle.

Senate PreK-12 Committee

The committee did not meet this week.

House K-12 Education Subcommittee

Representatives from DOE gave a presentation on school climate. At the conclusion of that presentation, a panel representing several districts provided information on the experience of requiring school uniforms and dress codes. Representatives on the panel included: Superintendent Steve Benton, Jackson County School District, Sally J. Alayon, Miami-Dade Public Schools; Wendy Dodge, Polk County Public Schools and Scott Howat; Orange County Public Schools. The panel did an excellent job of providing information about the local process of determining whether a school or district will require school uniforms/dress code. After initial resistance, most parents like uniforms. Districts have experienced less discipline problems and bullying as a result of requiring uniforms.

House Choice & Innovation Subcommittee

The committee considered HB 153 by Rep. Lee, Jr. relating to Literacy Jump Start Pilot Project. The bill requires the Office of Early Learning to establish a 5-year Literacy Jump Start Pilot Project in St. Lucie County to provide emergency literacy instruction to low-income, at-risk children. The bill was amended to require background screening. The bill passed the subcommittee favorably as a committee substitute.

The meeting also included presentations on charter school authorizers from other states. Cindy Schumacher, the Executive Director of the Center for Charter Schools and Central Michigan University gave a presentation on Michigan's Charter School Program and a representative from Colorado spoke via Skype on their successes of having only one state authorizer. Chairman Diaz ended the meeting by giving committee members issues that will be discussed at the next meeting. Issues include: a discussion on quality authorizers and individual concerns from districts, access to quality schools, financial aspects of charter schools, and working towards quality of schools rather than quantity.

House Education Committee

The committee will be hearing an early learning bill soon and reviewed the Senate's version of the bill (SB 7006).

Committee members reported their conversations with local coaches, principals, superintendents, and parents regarding the Florida High School Athletics Association. The issues can be divided into two categories; the first relating to the organization itself and the second on student transfers, recruiting, etc.

Some members focused on the fact that playing a sport or athletics is not a right. Education should be the priority. They did not support students attending multiple schools just to follow a sport. Others support more choice for students and their parents in selecting a school that has a successful sport in order to have a better chance at obtaining a scholarship. The chair wants to have a thorough discussion of both issues in the future and will be requesting information from superintendents.

House Education Appropriations Subcommittee

The Governor's Legislative Budget Request was presented to the committee members.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any questions, please give me a call at 850.577.5784.