

January 23, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: District School Superintendents

FROM: Joy Frank
Allie Akre, Intern
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RE: Legislative Update – Week of January 20, 2015

General Information

The House and Senate held interim committee meetings this week. As with the first set of meeting, most of the committee work consisted of presentations. For many of the meetings, superintendents and district personnel traveled to Tallahassee to present before committees. I want to thank those who came. I know it is a busy time, but hearing from those on the local level is critical. In fact, Chair O’Toole of the House Education Committee has requested input from both superintendents and school board members on assessments at a future meeting.

House Education Committee

Commissioner Pam Stewart gave a presentation on the status of education in Florida. Commissioner Stewart highlighted Florida’s success in narrowing the achievement gap between students, improving academic performance amongst all students, and increasing the graduation rate to an all-time high. Specifically, the Commissioner pointed to the achievements in Hillsborough and Miami-Dade Counties on their low-income general education students’ success.

Commissioner Stewart also discussed Florida’s ESEA flexibility waiver, which is only applicable through the end of the 2014-15 school year. In order to receive a renewal Florida will need to update its ESEA Waiver application, seek stakeholder input, and make assurances to the USDOE regarding actions it will take through 2017-18.

The Commissioner highlighted the “next steps” in furthering Florida’s academic success, and discussed the Keep Florida Learning Committee that is being established. The Committee will review further deregulation opportunities for school districts; review instructional material review processes used by school boards; identify strategies to increase parental involvement; and review the implementation of the Florida Standards and the Florida Standards Assessment. The Committee will be comprised of 11 members, including the Commissioner of Education, legislators, teachers, superintendents, school board members, higher education representatives, and members of the public. Over 2600 applications have been received thus far, and interested Floridians have until January 31, 2015, to submit their applications.

Finally the Commissioner notified the committee of the assessment investigation being conducted by the department. The department will summarize the results, which the districts will be expected to confirm, and publish a final report before Session begins.

Members of the Committee expressed concerns over the number of assessments students are required to take and the technology readiness of each district. With respect to the number of assessments, concerns about the psychological effect of testing on students and confusion about the number of tests required by the state were expressed. The Commissioner responded by pointing to the flexibility afforded to local districts in determining how to assess students. Issues of technology, district readiness, and efficiency were also a concern for members, with one member asking about the feasibility of returning to the paper-pencil option. Commissioner Stewart pointed to the fact that superintendents have to certify that their districts are computer ready, and said the paper-pencil option is a possibility – although the computer based assessments offer many unique benefits.

At the end of the Commissioner’s presentation, Chair O’Toole asked the committee members if they would like for superintendents and school board members to come and speak on these issues from a district perspective. Therefore, I expect I will be contacting some of you to come and present. At the conclusion of the meeting, Chair O’Toole gave committee members “homework” and asked members to talk to coaches, parents, etc. in their communities about their experiences with and responsibilities of the Florida High School Athletic Association.

House Choice & Innovation Subcommittee

Adam Miller, Executive Director of the Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice, presented an overview of the charter school sector including data about growth, performance, and the application and contracting process. Members asked questions about how much funding students enrolled in charter schools receive compared to traditional public school students.

Then, committee members heard presentations on the principles and standards for charter school authorizers. The national perspective was presented by Alex Medler from NACSA or the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. Representatives from school districts were Jenna Hodgens, Hillsborough County School District and Tiffany Pauline, Miami-Dade Public Schools. Charter school representatives were Doug Rodriguez, Principal, Doral Performing Arts & Entertainment Academy; Tim Kitts, Bay Haven, Panama City, Florida; and Jon Hage, Charter School USA.

Some of the issues that emerged from the charter school representatives was the inconsistency among school districts with the charter application and approval process. They asserted that while district staff might recommend approval of a charter application, school boards, for political reasons, would not approve the application. Also, it was asserted that an application might be approved in one district, but that same application would be denied in another district.

House K-12 Education Subcommittee

The committee had a panel presentation from district representatives on the following issues:

- Overview of attendance laws (monitoring and enforcement),
- How monitoring works with the early warning systems in middle and high schools (or doesn’t; explain the response from school districts)
- Academic options available to students at risk of dropping out and for those that have dropped out (16 years old and above who are overage and under-credit), including, but not limited to:

- High school equivalency diploma program and the extraordinary circumstances that would allow a student between the ages of 16 and 18 to take the examination. 1003.435, F.S.
- Performance-based exit option (GED exit option) identified in 6A-6.0212, Florida Administrative Code (which may be the same as above. The rule indicates that a student who passes the GED, but does not pass the FCAT may only be awarded a High School Diploma (GED), but I could not find such a diploma in the diploma rule.

The panel consisted of:

Jacqueline Bowen
Chief Academic Officer, Associate Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction
Polk County Public Schools

Greg Bergamasco
Principal
St. John's County School District

Sonny Chancy
Assistant Principal/Curriculum
Wakulla High School

Carrie Morris
Senior Supervisor in Student Services Division
Office of Student Support Programs & Services
Polk County Public Schools

In addition to addressing the issues above, some of the questions focused on bullying and how districts address bullying. Members commented that the panel was one of the best that had been assembled and that the presentations were helpful and informative.

House Education Appropriations Subcommittee

Presentations on various education funding models were discussed including Workforce Education, Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) and the FEFP.

Senate K-12 Committee

SB 7006 was reported favorably as a committee bill. SB 7006 increases the health and safety standards and personnel requirements for Voluntary Prekindergarten Programs Education (VPK) programs and School Readiness programs. Specifically SB 7006 requires providers of child care and VPK instructional services to notify parents of and conspicuously post Class I violation citations and inspection reports that result in disciplinary action on the premises; requires the Office of Early Learning (OEL) to develop online training regarding School Readiness performance standards and provider personnel to complete the training; and Authorizes Early Learning Coalitions (ELCs) to allow private providers to accept applications and determine child eligibility for the VPK program. The bill also adds that each private VPK provider, public school, and School Readiness program provider must supply each child's parent with information regarding child development, parent engagement expectations, a daily schedule, and, procedures for contacting a parent if a child has been absent for two consecutive days without a known reason.

Deputy Commissioner of Innovation Ron Nieto gave a presentation on the status of the digital classrooms allocation. Under the Florida Digital Classrooms Allocation (s. 1011.62, F.S.) each district school board must submit to the department a Digital Classrooms Plan (DCP). At the time of the presentation 71 of 74 school districts/special districts had submitted their DCPs. Two school districts and one special district have not submitted their DCP. With respect to charter school involvement, 399 of 654 schools have participated. Mr. Nieto urged school districts to speak to charter schools and encourage greater participation. Mr. Nieto also discussed the planned expenditures (of the \$40 million categorical) by category: 53% of expenditures went to infrastructure, 31% to assessments, 10% to digital tools, and 6% to professional development.

Members of the committee focused their questions on the plan and school readiness for assessments. In terms of success, Mr. Nieto emphasized that success of digital learning in the classroom is to be defined by the school districts. He cited Flagler as a high-performing school district with their 1:1 program in middle and high schools. Mr. Nieto suggested that districts struggling with digital learning in the classroom are those who lack funding and staffing. With respect to school readiness, Mr. Nieto stated that school districts are ready now for assessments, pointing to the fact that the four million tests given last year went smoothly and that the additional one million tests to be given this year are expected to do the same. However, there is no real backup plan, as the paper and pencil option is only available to students with special needs. Members pointed out that while superintendents may be certifying readiness, many superintendents don't feel ready, or worry about the disruption in normal classroom proceedings.

Senate Higher Education Committee

During the Higher Education Committee meeting, a proposed committee substitute for SB 7004 was considered. This removes a statutory provision providing for repeal of exemptions for investigatory records and meetings relating to disciplinary proceedings conducted by the Commission for Independent Education.

Kevin Thompson, Executive Director of the Florida Prepaid College Board gave a presentation on the Florida Prepaid College Program and a discussion of policy options relating to Florida's implementation of comprehensive transition programs as postsecondary options for students with intellectual disabilities was held via webcast.

Senate K-12 Appropriations Subcommittee

Committee members heard from three superintendents whose districts receive federal impact aid – Brian Binggeli, Brevard School District; Tim Wyrosdick, Santa Rosa School District; and Scott Bass, Glades School District. Impact aid has decreased significantly over the last 20 years due to a new funding methodology.

Finally, the committee members heard from business leaders who have hired secondary students who have been granted industry certifications. It was a positive discussion.

Senate Appropriations Committee

Amy Baker, Coordinator from the Office of Economic and Demographic Research gave a presentation on the long range financial outlook for the state. Topics ranged from Florida's economic growth, Florida's

recovering job market, and the current employment conditions. A popular topic amongst the committee was the reduction in gas prices and how it has and will effect gas taxes.

Major issues of each committee were addressed, and Senator Gaetz spoke on the major points of the Education Committee. Senator Gaetz discussed the cost of assessments and time involved in administering the assessment. He indicated that he is working with Senator Montford and Senator Legg to address this problem. Senator Gaetz touched on increased performance funding for higher education.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any questions, please contact me at 850.577.5784. The next set of committee meetings is the week of February 2nd.

Have a great weekend!