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Senate Passes Learn Local: Cuts Red Tape, Supports Neighborhood Public Schools

Maintains high standards and safety, enhances parental involvement, empowers teachers

Tallahassee—The Florida Senate today passed a comprehensive package of education legislation entitled “Learn Local,” designed to reduce onerous and excessive regulations on public schools, empower parents, teachers, and local school districts and preserve strong accountability, transparency, and safety measures at neighborhood public schools.

“Every year, more and more regulations are put on our school districts. Telling districts what to do and how to do it was supposed to ensure quality and demand accountability, but it can also stifle innovation,” **said Senate President Kathleen Passidomo (R-Naples)**, who has prioritized efforts to reduce outdated regulations on public schools. “Reducing bureaucratic red tape will give public schools that have served our communities for generations a meaningful chance to compete right alongside other school choice options that are now available to every child, in every family across our state.”

SB 7000, Deregulation of Public Schools/Instructional, Administrative, and Support Personnel, led by Senator Alexis Calatayud (R-Miami) reduces certain regulations related to public school personnel, providing local school districts more authority to meet the needs of their community, staff, and students. Specifically, the bill provides additional authority to school districts related to teacher certification and training, instructor contracts and salary schedules, personnel evaluations, and collective bargaining.

“Florida public school teachers are an invaluable resource for our state. We know that the impact of just one teacher can motivate and inspire a student, influencing their education, career path, and their whole life. This legislation demonstrates that we are listening. We are supporting our great teachers and other instructional personnel with needed flexibility and other key resources that will help keep our best teachers in the classroom, and assist professionals in other fields who want to pursue a career in teaching,” **said Senator Calatayud.**

SB 7000 does the following:

- Provides flexibility to districts in setting salaries for instructional personnel, in offering multiyear contracts, and in personnel evaluation systems. The bill maintains the long-standing expectation of fairness and transparency in this process to ensure Florida recognizes, retains, and promotes our most effective teachers, and ensures our local schools can retain their highest performing

teachers in a competitive job market.

- Specifies policies for which collective bargaining may not preclude or limit school district activities.
- Authorizes districts to issue temporary educator certificates based on criteria specified in law.
- Streamlines initial and renewal professional learning requirements for educator certification, including for VPK teachers.
- Provides fee waivers for educators seeking the second certification required to be an in-field elementary ESE teacher. (Currently, to be considered in-field, elementary ESE teachers have to be certified in both ESE K-12 and K-6).
- Establishes a 10-year renewable professional certificate for teachers, school administrators and other instructional personnel, who are high-performing.
- Provides additional opportunities for certified teachers at charter schools to add coverages to their certificate.
- Expands eligibility for the teacher apprenticeship program, a new pathway for individuals to work in education and ultimately become teachers.
- Provides flexibility to school districts in establishing criteria for non-degree career and technical education (CTE) teachers, making these programs more accessible to students by removing unnecessary red tape that creates hurdles for otherwise qualified and highly-skilled CTE instructors.

SB 7002, Deregulation of Public Schools/School District Finance and Budgets, Facilities, and Administration and Oversight, led by Senator Travis Hutson (R-St. Augustine), Dean of the Florida Senate, simplifies financial requirements, enhances facilities management, and advances efficient administrative processes, preserving requirements for transparency and accountability.

“As we reviewed the Education Code this summer, I was shocked by the number of onerous and outdated requirements in place for the general day-to-day administration of our school districts. I think most businesses would have a hard time focusing on customer service when facing such outdated financial and administrative requirements. Our teachers and school administrators should be able to focus on serving and educating our students, not outdated bureaucracy. This bill cuts the red tape from the administrative side of our school districts, while maintaining student safety, school security, and transparency,” **said Senator Hutson.**

SB 7002 does the following:

Simplifies financial requirements for school boards.

- Provides options to transition from newspapers to websites for budget notices.
- Provides flexibility in using federal funds for teacher recruitment in low-income areas and district support programs.
- Removes requirements for graphical budget presentations and for transportation supply costs.

Enhances the ability of school boards to plan for and manage their facilities.

- Expands revenue use for facilities.
- Provides autonomy in long-term facility planning and in managing property.
- Removes requirements for educational plant surveys.
- Provides support for districts in staffing emergency shelters while ensuring safety under local emergency plans.
- Provides additional flexibility in construction regarding cost per student station limits and in the State Requirements for Educational Facilities (SREF).

Advances efficiency for school board administration.

- Simplifies school board rulemaking with open meetings.
- Provides flexibility for school boards to delegate authority to superintendents for efficient district policies.
- Clarifies online service requirements for student data protection.
- Provides flexibility in making up days lost due to emergencies.
- Allows online meeting notices and electronic notifications for student issues.

SB 7004, Deregulation of Public Schools/Assessment and Accountability, Instruction, and Education Choice, led by Senator Simon, provides school districts greater authority over determining student progression, implementing school improvement programs, and providing instructional materials and early learning programs.

“Our state education code is contained in a book that is 3.5 inches thick. I think that’s big enough,” **said Senator Simon.** “There are so many areas regulated from Tallahassee that could be handled more efficiently at the local level, where parents have direct access to teachers, school administrators, and school board members. This bill eases the burden for our district schools and teachers, who just want to spend their time doing the job they love, focusing on our students. It also magnifies the voices of our parents, affirming their right to guide their child’s education.”

“With Learn Local we do not lose one inch of the accountability measures instituted over the last thirty years. These metrics and measurements provide information to help parents make the best decisions for their children. Parents are more involved than ever before. Parents are the ultimate arbiter of performance. Parents will hold neighborhood schools, charter schools, and private schools accountable with their voices and their feet,” **continued President Passidomo.**

SB 7004 does the following:

- Revises elementary school student progression planning to identify students in kindergarten through grade 2 with substantial deficiency in reading or math; requires parental notification and input if the student is retained; allows parents to request additional supports currently provided in statute and

any additional services offered by the school district.

- Requires a student's performance on the grade 10 English Language Arts assessment to be 30 percent of the student's final course grade. (Current law requires the performance on the Algebra 1 end of course exam to be 30 percent of the student's final course grade.)
- Eliminates the *separate* high-stakes exit exam score requirements in Algebra 1 and 10th grade ELA needed to earn a standard high school diploma.
- Provides additional time to implement a sustainable plan for low-performing schools and adding a community school as a turnaround option.
- Requires that changes made to the school grades model or scale may not go into effect until the following school year.
- Creates a streamlined process for districts to adopt state-required instructional materials, by creating timelines for DOE to adopt instructional materials.
- Allows flexibility in offering VPK summer programs and reporting requirements.
- Repeals a number of reports and programs (e.g., charter technical centers, competency-based program).

Background

Reducing regulations for public schools is a component of HB 1 (2023). HB 1 expands eligibility for Florida's School Choice Scholarships to all students who are residents of Florida and eligible to enroll in kindergarten through grade 12 in a public school. Under the bill, now law, parents receive an education savings account to take dollars the State of Florida has appropriated for their child in the public education system and choose among a variety of options to customize their child's education.

The bill made also several immediate revisions to Florida's Education Code, identified by the Florida Association of District School Superintendents. For example, the bill reduced hurdles to a 5-year temporary teacher certificate for anyone with a bachelor's degree and for those with three years of effective or highly effective service. The bill repealed the requirement that a student take one online course in order to graduate from high school, which is not currently required in private schools. The bill also offers districts flexibility in facility costs for new construction, and offers student transportation flexibility to improve efficiency, while maintaining student safety.

To further reduce additional regulation on public schools, HB 1 required the State Board of Education to develop for adoption during the 2024 Legislative Session recommendations to repeal and revise portions of the Early Learning-20 Education Code, Title XLVIII, Florida Statutes. Additionally, the Senate undertook an independent review of the Florida Early Learning-20 Education Code to prepare the legislation that passed today. This review included feedback provided from Senators, local school districts, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, the Florida School Boards Association, and the Florida Education Association, among others. In addition to meetings with these stakeholders, the Senate reviewed more than 4,000 suggestions submitted online via the Department of Education's public portal.

President Passidomo's Memorandum to Senators - 8.24.23

President Passidomo's Memorandum to Senators - 11.3.23

For more information, please visit www.FLSenate.gov.

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