



Capital Office for Administrative & Legislative Services

April 18, 2017

TO: All FACCS Administrators
FROM: Dr. Howard G. Burke, FACCS Executive Director
RE: Capital Update

As we approach the final 14 days of the 2017 Legislative Session both the House and Senate have passed their respective budget bills and appointed Conference Committees to reconcile a mutual budget for the State of approximately \$83 billion. While there are differences in each of the budgets the fact remains this session has been focused on tightening the fiscal situation of the State to keep from significantly raising taxes.

At the beginning of the session there were 50+ legislative bills that merited scrutiny as they could pose major problems and some valuable benefits to the Christian and private school sector. However, at this juncture with time running out a variety of initiatives did not achieve more than committee referrals and one or two of the assigned committee hearings. Even at that point, committees in taking up large numbers of bills allowed "1" minute or less in various cases for a sponsor and their guests to introduce or speak (pro or con) to the bills before the committee. In the recent Senate Appropriations meeting scheduled for 4 hours, the Committee adjourned after one hour leaving in peril the balance of the bills on the agenda.

With the above understood there are several issues that should bring perspective to the present situation. First, the negative legislation related to "sexual orientation, gender discrimination, prohibiting the review of criminal history for employment, and like bills have run out of time to go through all the required committees with 14 legislative days left.

Next, bills expanding CHOICE initiatives are still being modified. There is an expected expansion of the cap on corporate tax credit scholarships. Funding for the expansion of the Gardiner Act of \$200 million was pulled although the categories of service may be expanded. (*NOTE of Interest: The Legislature has set aside \$200 million referred to as **Schools of Hope**...building more charter schools that will open servicing districts with failing public schools*). The McKay early entry without a student spending the prior year in the district school was amended out thus leaving the law as currently exists.

There was a major concern raised by FACCS and other FAANS members as to the sneaky approach by Step-Up for Students seeking to become a recognized Professional Development Provider on the same footing with associations that have accredited member schools. This would have set a horrible precedent and a conflict of interest by Step-Up. The Scholarship Funding Agency (SFO) like Step-Up operates by corporate tax credit dollars to fund scholarships for students and does not have an association of member schools which the current law requires. Thus they were asking for State recognition through a special approach that did not require member schools. Further Step-Up was asking for additional accountability in fiscal areas over those schools receiving scholarship students.

Step-Up currently has about 550 schools and they informed the Legislature that 490 schools had sent them a letter in favor of their becoming a PD Provider for State Teacher Certification & Master In-Service training. That means a lot of Christian schools responded in favor of the Step-Up plan that apparently did not know their PD Program is based on the Common-Core and Florida's Next Generation of Standards which is Common-Core on steroids. Step-Up leadership is from the public district school sectors. All it

takes is a little research like looking into the documents published by Step-Up on the PD offerings; the fact that the Foundation for Florida's Future (Jeb Bush) endorsement of Common-Core, and the following to expose where this was heading:

"The Common Core: Why Some Private Schools Are Signing On By Carol Thomas August 6, 2013

*If Big Brother were behind the new academic standards for public school students in 46 states, you would expect private schools these days to be reveling in their independence. But as I work in Florida to build parent engagement in the nation's largest tax-credit-scholarship program for economically disadvantaged students, private educators in the state are tugging at my sleeve with a remarkable request: Let us use the **Common Core State Standards**.*

*These are not idle musings. Our nonprofit, **Step Up For Students**, oversees the scholarship program, which will serve more than 60,000 low-income students this fall in more than 1,400 private schools in the state. Three-fourths of those schools are faith-based, and all of them covet their educational independence.*

As part of our outreach to scholarship parents and schools, we are conducting a pilot project to find ways to promote stronger relationships between parents and teachers. To help educators chart the progress of each student, we have built an online tool that ties their conversations to the benchmarks described in the common core. We have no relationship with the common-core developers or the consortia that are preparing the related tests, and, frankly, we have kept our distance from the political developments in Florida public schools. Our main motivation is practical. We wanted a rigorous set of standards that could be shared across these schools.

*For example, the 3rd grade literature standard is: "Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author about the same or similar characters." In our "student learning compact," the teacher selects the teaching methodology and the specific parent and student responsibilities that are related to mastery of the standard. **"[P]rivate educators in [Florida] are tugging at my sleeve with a remarkable request: Let us use the Common Core State Standards."***

Our target for the state pilot was to find 100 scholarship schools that would volunteer to participate. We already have more than 140, and my phone is still ringing. These principals aren't calling to lecture me on state sovereignty or intrusive regulation. They are calling because they think the common standards will help them guide the learning plans in their schools.

We call our pilot the "Success Partners" and have toured the state to spread the word to schools. In a recent meeting with principals of Seventh-day Adventist schools, 13 of the 15 attendees had decided to enroll their schools in the program before I could even finish the presentation. Catholic diocesan schools throughout the state are moving forward with the standards, and many of the teachers are also signing up for state-run workshops that were intended primarily for public school teachers. In one Christian school, after learning about the common core, the headmaster purchased a laptop computer for every teacher to use for his or her own research about learning and implementing the standards.

Suzette Dean is the principal at Bible Truth Ministries Academy, a small mission-driven school in Tampa that serves mostly African-American students. Of the common core, she emailed me with her reaction: "Finally, we are all on the same page [with the standards], our teachers know what to teach, and the parents know what their children should be

doing in school. Sure, it is a change, but it is real change that is needed if we are going to prepare our students for college and a successful future."

The teachers with whom I now work, like the teachers in public schools with whom I used to work, really do just want what is best for the students. They recognize the standards are more complex and will require work to implement. But they say they want the challenge in order to motivate students and to keep their schools competitive with other private schools. They also tell me they are reassured by seeing the standards tell them what to teach, not how to teach.

At a recent meeting in an inner-city Catholic school, teachers were eager with their questions and left me with encouraging comments. "Boy," one wrote, "I could have used these standards in my parent conference." Another, "Why don't we just use the standards profile as our report card? It certainly lets us know more about what the students are learning than a single grade." And a third, "Wow, I can focus on helping my students understand, not just memorize!"

I'm no newcomer to the standards debate. Before joining Step Up two years ago, I spent 30 years in Florida's Pinellas County public schools—the nation's 26th-largest district—where I was everything from a classroom teacher to an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction to an area superintendent. So I've seen more than my share of fads and state and federal edicts. But the common core is a bipartisan effort, led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers and imbued with genuine academic research. It mostly tries to ensure that students are held to high standards, and that they won't get lost in the maze if they move from one school or one state to another.

If there is anywhere I would expect to experience pushback on what is being described in some quarters as a federal government mandate, it would be within the private school sector. But what I'm finding is quite the contrary. The common-core contrarians would do well to pay these schools a visit.

*Carol Thomas is the vice president of the office of student learning at Step Up For Students, a nonprofit organization based in Tampa, Fla., that oversees the **Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program.**"*

To make a long story short FACCS and FAANS (with the exception of the Florida Catholic Conference) objected. Step-Up then came back with two proposals. After looking at each proposal, FACCS suggested at a minimum two guarantees that must be added to either proposal. First insert the word "*voluntary*," and second insert the appropriate language that "*no single or state assessment would be required for schools accepting scholarship students.*"

Here is the point, if Step-Up provides their current and future desired professional development and in-service hours for State certification; validates and audits your finances, colludes as done previously with allowing initially the private sector to take the FCAT, the only thing left is develop an accreditation criteria and they become a super State-funded accreditor that could easily require all schools that participate in receiving a scholarship student to meet their criteria (quality or not) for their ultimate existence.

Look at the above and ask how many Step-Up students are placed in FACCS or another accredited school that if the student funding ceased they could continue to exist as a school? I trust you see the dilemma.

Now here is the good news. After the conference last Thursday Amy Grant and Sara Clements from Step-Up agreed to pull the proposed language that had initially been removed from the companion bill and retain the expansion of the cap achievement instead of jeopardizing the bills. Thus HB 15 was taken up on Special Order today and will move forward toward ultimate passage.

The concern stated above is also shared by the other major SFO "AAA." They likewise felt Step-Up was not wise. Granted Step-Up has accumulated some \$24 million in administrative fees and was seeking to benefit participating schools but the fact is it would be far better to take all that money and give more scholarships out since the waiting list continues to expand. Folks, take a step back and be careful that you do not for the sake of scholarship students and money forsake the purpose of having a Christian school and the privilege of using a Christian curriculum instead of one mandated by a SFO or the State.

The bills listed below are those deemed at this point in the session to be advancing. Previous bills being tracked in some cases still may be entertained by a "waiver of the rules" in the House or Senate as long as there is no fiscal impact. If there is a fiscal impact like that which would be required to allow for the return of dual enrollment options for the private sector prior to 2013, a point of order would take place and the legislation would be re-referred to an Appropriations Committee and thus cause the amended bill to die in Committee.

For those interested in the outcomes to date of any vehicle (bills) that may address dual enrollment, the sponsors in the House failed to insert the needed language and cannot amend the bill as it is on "Second Reading." The Senate sponsor is not willing to place the needed language to rectify the present situation, even after assuring the discriminatory situation would be addressed this session. Legislator after another agrees something must be done to benefit the tax paying parents of students seeking to dual enroll but the calculated cost for 74,200 students is approximately \$6 million and at this stage the budgets are in negotiation, so don't hold your breath that the solution is coming this session!

1. FL H 15

Author: [Sullivan \(R\)](#)

Title: Educational Options

Location: House Special Order Calendar

Summary: Relates to educational options; revises student eligibility criteria for the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program; requires the Department of Education to provide a letter of denial to participate in the program to a specified entity within a certain period; requires the department to provide a letter of acceptance or denial of specified actions related to a tax credit to a specified entity and include that entity on certain letters and correspondence.

Status: 04/13/2017 In HOUSE. Placed on Special Order Calendar 04/18/17.

2. FL H 67

Author: [Smith \(D\)](#)

Title: Public School Recess

Location: House PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee

Summary: Relates to public school recess; requires district school board to provide K-5 students with minimum number of minutes of free-play recess each week and minimum number of consecutive minutes of free-play recess per day.

Status: 04/04/2017 To HOUSE PRE-K-12 APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE.

3. FL H 79

Author: [Harrell \(R\)](#)
Title: Reading Instruction Strategies and Education
Location: House PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee
Summary: Relates to education; revises duties of Just Read, State Office relating to reading instruction, training, and research; revises data and monitoring requirements for school improvement plans and early warning systems; revises parent notification requirements relating to students with reading deficiencies; revises requirements and standards for teacher training and professional certificates and endorsements; requires Office of Early Learning to identify guidelines for reading instruction strategies.

Status: 03/17/2017 To HOUSE PRE-K-12 APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE.

4. FL H 127

Author: [Plasencia \(R\)](#)
Title: Public School Attendance Policies
Location: House Special Order Calendar
Summary: Relates to public school attendance policies; authorizes a parent to request and be granted permission for a student's absence from school for treatment of autism spectrum disorder by a licensed health care practitioner or certified behavior analyst; requires each district school board to adopt an attendance policy authorizing a student's absence for treatment of autism spectrum disorder.

Status: 04/13/2017 In HOUSE. Placed on Special Order Calendar 04/18/17.

5. FL H 303

Author: [Daniels \(D\)](#)
Title: Religious Expression in Public Schools
Location: Tabled
Summary: Relates to religious expression in public schools; prohibits penalty or reward for a student's religious expression in coursework, artwork, or other specified assignments; authorizes a student to wear jewelry displaying religious messages or symbols; authorizes a student to organize prayer groups, religious clubs, and other religious gatherings; authorizes religious groups to have equal access to school facilities.

Status: 04/04/2017 In HOUSE. Substituted on HOUSE floor by SB 436
04/04/2017 In HOUSE. Laid on table, refer to SB 436

6. FL H 1109

Author: [Antone \(D\)](#)
Title: Student Participation in Extracurricular Activities
Location: House Special Order Calendar
Summary: Relates to private school student participation in extracurricular activities; revises eligibility requirements for certain private school students to participate in interscholastic or intrascholastic sports at specified public schools.

Status: 04/13/2017 In HOUSE. Placed on Special Order Calendar 04/18/17.

7. FL H 1391

Author: [Eisnaugle \(R\)](#)
Title: Education
Location: House Second Reading
Summary: Relates to home education; revises the content requirements of a notice of enrollment of a student in a home education program; provides that the notice constitutes prima facie evidence of certain information; requires the district school superintendent to immediately register a home education program upon receipt of the notice; provides that registration of a home education program is a ministerial act by the district school superintendent.
Status: 03/30/2017 From HOUSE Committee on EDUCATION: Reported favorably. (15-0)
03/30/2017 In HOUSE. Placed on Calendar.

8. FL S 392

Author: [Hukill \(R\)](#)
Title: High School Graduation Requirements
Location: Senate Special Order Calendar
Summary: Relates to high school graduation requirements; revises the requirements for the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards to include financial literacy; revises the required credits for a standard high school diploma to include one-half credit of instruction in personal financial literacy and money management and seven and one-half, rather than eight, credits in electives.
Status: 04/17/2017 In SENATE. Placed on Special Order Calendar 04/19/17.

9. FL S 468

Author: [Stargel \(R\)](#)
Title: Voluntary Prekindergarten Education
Committee: Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Pre-K - 12 Education
Hearing: 04/18/2017 1:30 pm, 412 Knott Building
Summary: Relates to voluntary prekindergarten education; requires the Just Read, Florida Office to provide teachers, reading coaches, and principals in prekindergarten through grade 3 with specified training; requires voluntary prekindergarten providers to provide parents with pre and post assessment results within a specified timeframe.
Status: 04/13/2017 In SENATE. On Committee agenda 04/18/17.

10. FL S 902

Author: [Simmons \(R\)](#)
Title: Gardiner Scholarship Program
Location: SENATE
Summary: Relates to the Gardiner scholarship program; creates a cause of action relating to terrorism; specifies a measure of damages; prohibits claims by specified individuals.
Status: 04/17/2017 From SENATE Committee on EDUCATION: Reported favorably with substitute.

11. FL S 1302

Author: [Gibson A \(D\)](#)
Title: Private School Student Participation in Extracurricular
Committee: Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Pre-K - 12 Education
Hearing: 04/18/2017 1:30 pm, 412 Knott Building
Summary: Relates to private school student participation in extracurricular activities.
Status: 04/13/2017 In SENATE. On Committee agenda 04/18/17.

12. FL S 1314

Author: [Grimsley \(R\)](#)
Title: Educational Options
Location: Senate Appropriations Committee
Summary: Relates to educational options; specifies the Department of Education's duty to approve or deny an application for the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program within a specified time; specifies the department's duties regarding the carryforward tax credit; requires an eligible nonprofit scholarship-funding organization to allow certain dependent children to apply for a scholarship at any time; revises parent and student responsibilities for program participation.
Status: 04/06/2017 Withdrawn from SENATE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE on PRE-K - 12 EDUCATION.
04/06/2017 Referred to SENATE Committee on RULES.
04/06/2017 To SENATE Committee on APPROPRIATIONS.

13. FL S 1362

Author: [Broxson \(R\)](#)
Title: K-12 Education
Location: SENATE
Summary: Relates to K-12 education; removes a requirement that the Department of Education compare certain charter school student performance data to certain traditional public schools; authorizes certain entities to apply to the State Board of Education for designation as a High-Impact Charter Network.
Status: 04/17/2017 From SENATE Committee on EDUCATION: Reported favorably with substitute.

14. FL S 1556

Author: [Lee T \(R\)](#)
Title: Home Education Program
Location: Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Pre-K - 12 Education
Summary: Relates to education; prohibits a district school board from requiring any additional information or verification from a home education program parent under certain circumstances; provides an exception for certain children from the age verification requirements for school attendance.
Status: 03/22/2017 In SENATE. On Committee agenda 03/27/17.

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