



THE FLORIDA SENATE
SENATOR KATHLEEN PASSIDOMO
President

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Senators
FROM: Kathleen Passidomo
SUBJECT: Learn Local – Cutting Red Tape, Supporting Neighborhood Public Schools
DATE: November 3, 2023

With the school year well underway, it is amazing to reflect back on what an exciting year 2023 has been for education in the Sunshine State. Just a few months ago, we passed historic school choice and parental empowerment legislation (HB 1), which is so popular that during special session next week we will increase the number of students with unique abilities served by our school choice programs.

As we consider myriad options now available to students across Florida, one of the most important is the opportunity to attend a neighborhood public school – the same legacy schools that have served communities and families for generations. Because traditional public schools should always be a strong option for Florida’s families, a huge component of implementing HB 1 is our effort to reduce outdated, unnecessary, and quite frankly, burdensome regulations public schools have to abide by.

Senator Simon is holding a workshop in the Senate Committee on Pre-K–12 Education on Tuesday, November 7, during which Senators will have the opportunity to hear many ideas and suggestions about this important work. However, because this is a personal priority for me, I wanted to explain the process we have undertaken this summer and address my view of the next steps.

Process Overview

As a reminder, incorporating recommendations from the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, led by former Senator Bill Montford, HB 1 took the first step towards reducing onerous and excessive regulations on public schools with several immediate revisions to Florida’s Education Code.

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HB 1 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 The bill repealed the requirement that a student take one online course in order to graduate from high school, which is not required in private schools. HB 1 also offers districts flexibility in facility costs for new construction, and offers student transportation flexibility to improve efficiency, while maintaining student safety. In my view, these initial deregulation provisions were a tremendous show of good faith, an indication of just how serious we are about this important work.

Since Session ended in May, our outstanding professional staff from the Committee on Education Pre-K–12 and the Appropriations Committee on Education, led by our accomplished Senior Policy Advisor on Education, Kathy Mizereck, have undertaken their own review of Florida Early Learning-20 Education Code and prepared a robust list of options for further discussion. This includes 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, staff reviewed more than 4,000 suggestions submitted online via the Department of Education's public portal.

I cannot tell you how grateful I am for this extensive, time-consuming effort. In fact, the project was so massive, that after my initial briefings with staff, I decided to divide the work into three sections. I asked Dean Hutson, Senator Calatayud and Senator Simon to each take the lead on a particular section and to use the following questions as their guide:

- Do private schools have to comply with this requirement? If not, then what is the rationale for imposing that requirement on public schools?
- Will removing or changing this requirement negatively impact student safety or school security? If so, maintain the requirement.
- Can the same level of accountability be effectively maintained at the local level? If state oversight is no longer necessary, ensure the same or a greater level of transparency and accountability is required locally.

In addition to the process I described above, earlier this week, after gathering input from teachers, superintendents, administrators, school boards, public and private postsecondary institutions, home educators, and other entities this summer, as required by HB 1, the Department of Education provided their list of recommendations for potential repeals and revisions to be considered during the 2024 Legislative Session. Those recommendations will be presented by the DOE during Tuesday's committee workshop.

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The meeting packet for Tuesday's workshop is posted to the Senate [website](#), and includes the materials Dean Hutson, Senator Simon, and Senator Calatayud worked on, as well as the recommendations from the DOE.

Next Steps

On Tuesday, Senators Simon, Hutson and Calatayud will explain their respective portions of the deregulation exercise they began with Senate staff over the summer. That spreadsheet is attached for your review, and I think you'll be pleased and surprised by how comprehensive it is! My goal is not to rubber stamp a perfunctory interim project. My goal is for the Senate to tackle this issue head on, and our staff and Senators Calatayud, Hutson and Simon have certainly risen to that challenge!

Some of the ideas on our spreadsheets are bold. Some are controversial. I am guessing some will not make it across the finish line, and I am absolutely positive there are many great ideas yet to come. We are going to make serious headway this year, and I hope you will all get involved.

For decades now we have rejected the idea that neighborhoods and zip codes alone should govern how and where a child is educated. We created and implemented rigorous standards across every aspect of the public school system as a way to make certain every child has access to a great education, regardless of where they live. As part of that effort, every year, more and more regulations are put on our school districts, which leads to more paperwork, and more tasks in an already packed school day and school year. Telling districts what to do and how to do it was supposed to ensure quality and demand accountability, but it can also stifle innovation.

As we move forward, I want to make certain we do not lose one inch of the accountability measures this Legislature has instituted over the last thirty years, which ensure every child has access to a high quality education. However, I think we also need to recognize with HB 1, our role is changing. 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. State regulation, metrics and measurements provide information to help parents make the best decisions for their children. Additionally, local voters, the same voters who elect us, have the right and the responsibility to pay attention to local elections and hold officials accountable for the performance of neighborhood schools.

Reducing this bureaucratic red tape will give public schools a meaningful chance to compete right alongside other school choice options. Here in the free state of Florida, we can all be proud to continue to lead the nation in options for parents to select the education environment best suited to their children's individual learning needs, unhindered by income or zip code. And, we can all play an important role in keeping the traditional, neighborhood public schools that have served our communities and families for generations a great option for Florida students.