

Committee on Education Pre-K -12

CS/SB 7002 — Deregulation of Public Schools

by Fiscal Policy Committee; Education Pre-K -12 Committee; and Senators Hutson, Osgood, and Calatayud

The bill enables increased efficiency and higher productivity for district school boards by providing flexibility from redundant requirements related to operations, reporting, personnel, facilities, and finances.

School District Operations

The bill authorizes the district school board to delegate to the superintendent the authority to establish a process for the review and approval of district-wide policies and procedures to improve efficiency.

The bill provides flexibility to district school boards in satisfying their statutory duties to provide public notices related to meetings, levying millage, and the adoption of budgets by authorizing the publication of such notices on their websites. The bill maintains the requirement for public notice to be provided at least two days prior to the noticed meeting.

The bill authorizes a district school board to adopt a policy that allows a parent to agree to a method of notification regarding a student's placement in a dropout prevention program or a suspension that is an alternative to U.S. or certified mail.

The bill clarifies district school board authority in setting policies regarding the transfer of electronic records.

School District Reports

The bill repeals several obsolete reporting requirements including the school district guidance report, school district report of the reduction of relocatable use, economic security report, school district educational plant survey, and the Florida College System employment equity accountability report.

The bill also reduces financial reporting requirements by specifying that only school districts identified in State Board of Education (SBE) rule as having a financial concern would be subject to monthly reporting, and all others may be subject to less frequent reporting.

School District Personnel

The bill supports school district efforts to recruit and retain personnel. The bill:

- Requires the SBE to develop strategies to address critical teacher shortages areas;
- Requires the SBE to waive initial subject area examination and certification fees for specified exceptional student education teachers and requires the Commissioner of

Education to make recommendations for the retention of exceptional student education teachers;

- Authorizes district school boards to develop and adopt their own policies relating to mentors and support for first-time teachers;
- Authorizes a newly-hired Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program instructor to complete required emergent literacy training within 45 days of employment.
- Authorizes a district school board to use advanced degrees for salary adjustments when setting salary schedules for instructional personnel or school administrators if the advanced degree is in the individual's area of certification;
- Authorizes certified educators to request that their certification be placed in inactive status;
- Authorizes the use of a passing score on the SAT, ACT, or Classical Learning Test to satisfy the mastery of general knowledge requirement for professional educator certification;
- Provides flexibility in the assignment of teachers by clarifying that regulations related the percentage of experienced teachers assigned in low-performing schools or schools with a high percentage of low-income families is based on a teacher having no less than 3 years of experience; and
- Authorizes the civil penalties collected pursuant to enforcement by a school bus infraction detection system to be used to provide financial awards to recruit or retain school bus drivers in the school district in which the civil penalties are assessed and collected, and removes a requirement that the signage on the buses be posted with high-visibility reflective signage.

The bill provides additional clarity for district school boards and teachers' unions regarding district school board duties that may not be precluded by collective bargaining, including but not limited to, the provision of incentives to effective and highly effective teachers, incentives to teachers assigned to low-performing schools, implementation of student intervention and support strategies, and the implementation of school safety plans and requirements. The bill also requires the president of a bargaining unit to appear with a district superintendent if called by the SBE to explain an impasse.

The bill expands the role of the Florida Institute for Charter School Innovation (Institute) by authorizing the Institute to develop a professional learning system and design an alternative teacher preparation program to enable certified teachers at charter schools to add coverages and endorsements to their certificates.

The bill also clarifies that a teacher candidate enrolled in a postsecondary educator preparation institute must meet basic screening and teacher eligibility requirements prior to participating in field experiences.

School District Facilities and Finances

The bill provides flexibility for district school boards in planning related to school facilities. The bill:

- Clarifies the authority of a district school board to adopt exceptions to the State Requirements for Educational Facilities.
- Adds discretion for local emergency management plans to determine requirements related to staffing emergency shelter facilities instead of requiring the district school board to staff the facilities.
- Broadens the scope of properties a district school board can lease or lease-purchase to include educational plants, ancillary plants, and auxiliary facilities instead of only educational facilities.
- Extends the exemption from cost per student station limitations for new construction projects until July 1, 2028.
- Increases from \$280,000 to \$600,000 the limit on day-labor contracts that a district school board may employ for the construction, renovation, remodeling, or maintenance of existing facilities.
- Removes the requirement to monitor and report the impact of change orders on the district school board educational facilities plan.

The bill also increases from \$175 to \$200 per unweighted full-time equivalent student the amount from a district's capital outlay millage levy that the district may expend on specified vehicles and the payment of the cost of insurance premiums for educational and ancillary plants.

The bill provides for school districts an exception to the prohibition on using funds to purchase transportation equipment and supplies at prices which exceed those determined by the Department of Education (DOE) to be the lowest which can be obtained. The bill specifies that a school district that is unable to purchase transportation equipment and supplies at the lowest determined price may request from the DOE assistance with purchasing at such prices and may exceed such prices if the DOE is unable to assist the school district with its purchase.

If approved by the Governor, or allowed to become law without the Governor's signature, these provisions take effect July 1, 2024.

Vote: Senate 38-0; House 115-0