

## **Miami Palmetto Senior High School PTSA Legislation Committee Chair Report for February 4, 2021**

1. Florida Legislative Committee weeks are underway, and the 60-day Legislative Session is slated to begin on March 2. In Washington, Congress is in session, but no education-related legislation is pending immediate action.
2. Bills are already being heard in Tallahassee, including SB 48 (Educational Scholarship Programs), which both MDCC PTA/PTSA and Florida PTA oppose based on long-standing, member-voted position statements. In brief, the bill consolidates and expands current education voucher programs, funds them through private contributions made to a state education trust fund, and gives parents access to funds through Education Savings Accounts which can be used to offset private school tuition or purchase a wide range of materials and services. Program accountability and transparency provisions are extremely limited.
3. Action Alerts regarding SB 48 were sent from both county and state PTAs, asking members to contact Education Committee members to request that they oppose the measure. At yesterday's hearing of the bill, it was approved by a 6-4 party line vote; amendments to increase the accountability and transparency of the voucher programs were defeated. The bill will now be considered by its next committee of reference, the Appropriations Subcommittee on Education, date TBA. There is no current companion bill in the Florida House.
4. Senator Ileana Garcia, the State Senator for District 37, which includes most of the Palmetto High feeder pattern, is a co-sponsor of SB 48. She should be contacted, informed of PTA's opposition to the bill, and asked to remove her name as co-sponsor. She can be reached locally at 305 442-6841, and her email is [garcia.ileana.web@flsenate.gov](mailto:garcia.ileana.web@flsenate.gov). Talking points: 1) private schools and providers accepting voucher recipients are not subject to the same academic and fiscal accountability requirements as public and charter schools; 2) data regarding student performance and fiscal soundness is publicly available for only a small portion of private schools accepting vouchers—lacking sufficient data, how are parents/caregivers supposed to make wise decisions? 3) Studies of voucher programs in other states as well as Florida indicate no significant or consistent degree of improvement in student academic performance; 4) Arizona's similar Education Savings Account program has been riddled with fraud and financial abuse; 5) Funding voucher programs out of the state budget puts Florida in conflict with the 2006 Bush v. Holmes Florida Supreme Court decision, which threw out an early voucher program on the grounds that it violated the Constitutional provision (Article IX, Section 1) for a "uniform" system of schools. That decision has not been overturned.
5. Many other education-related bills have been proposed, including a "Parental Rights" bill that is downright Orwellian. Yesterday a bill passed in committee allowing parents/caregivers of K-8 students to voluntarily hold them back one year due to COVID/quarantine learning losses. A complete bill list will be provided to the President before next week's General Meeting.
6. In budget news, Governor De Santis has proposed funding K-12 education at higher levels than last year, with a significant increase to the Base Student Allocation. The Florida House and Florida Senate will each submit their own budget proposals in the months to come, so funding for the 2021-2022 remains uncertain.
7. There is no current move to cancel statewide FSA and EOC testing this spring. This is a state-level decision over which our district can only make suggestions. National PTA has a position statement opposing "opt-out" movements, but each parent/caregiver must make the appropriate decision for their child(ren).