


MEMORANDUM

January 26, 2016

TO: The Honorable Chair and Members of The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida

FROM: Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent of Schools 

SUBJECT: 2016 LEGISLATIVE SESSION – WEEK #1 JANUARY 12, 2016 - JANUARY 18, 2016

The Florida Legislature began its 60-day 2016 regular legislative session on Tuesday, January 12, 2016. Usually, a legislative session starts out slowly because it is mainly ceremonial in nature, but because of, or perhaps to make up for the tumultuous 2015 session, the 2016 session's first week was different. House and Senate leaders' priorities are usually held up until the session's last week, when they can be more useful as part of budget negotiations and other aspects of the final "deal" between the two chambers. However, top priorities identified by Senate President Gardiner and House Speaker Crisafulli have passed both chambers and are already headed to the Governor's desk for action.

SB 672, one of Senate President's priorities, relating to developmental disabilities legislation passed both the House and Senate. The bill provides an expansion of a program known as the Florida Personal Learning Scholarship Accounts Program. This program provides money to parents of children with disabilities to help meet educational needs, such as buying instructional materials and receiving specialized services. The bill also includes another initiative aimed at increasing access to college and university programs for students with disabilities. HB 7003, dealing with job opportunities and financial independence for people with disabilities, passed the House and Senate unanimously, and it also heads to the Governor for his signature or veto.

In Speaker Crisafulli's opening day session speech, he sought as a priority to eliminate a five-year waiting period for children of legal immigrants to be eligible for the state's KidCare health insurance program. KidCare is a subsidized program that serves children from low and moderate-income families. Children of lawfully-residing immigrants currently have to wait five years before they are eligible for KidCare. The proposed bills lift the waiting period, but would not apply to undocumented immigrants. Legislation has been filed in the process; HB 89 sponsored by Representative Jose Felix Diaz and SB 248 sponsored by Senator Garcia.

For his part, the Governor prioritized tax cuts and job creation in his State of the State speech to the Florida Legislature and spent the week touting \$1 billion in tax cuts and other policies he believes will enhance the state's continued growth and provide more jobs. The Governor also wants to set aside \$250 million for a "Florida Enterprise Fund" that would be used to lure companies to settle in the Sunshine State.

SUMMARY OF BILLS PASSED

HB 7003, related to Individuals with Disabilities, addresses the employment and economic independence of individuals with disabilities. Specifically, the bill:

- ✓ Creates the Financial Literacy Program for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities within the Department of Financial Services (DFS) to provide information and outreach to individuals and employers;
- ✓ Modifies the state's equal employment policy to provide enhanced executive agency employment opportunities for individuals who have a disability;
- ✓ Creates the Employment First Act requiring an interagency cooperative agreement among specified state agencies and organizations to ensure a long-term commitment to improve employment for individuals who have a disability; and,
- ✓ Creates the Florida Unique Abilities Partner program to recognize businesses that employ or support the independence of individuals who have a disability.

SB 672 establishes mechanisms for the approval of unique postsecondary education programs tailored to the needs of students with intellectual disabilities and emphasizes statewide coordination of information about programs for students with disabilities. Specifically, the bill includes two key components: a process through which postsecondary institutions in Florida can voluntarily seek approval to offer a Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program (FPCTP) for students with intellectual disabilities; and a Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities for statewide coordination of information regarding programs and services for students with disabilities and their parents. This is an issue that our School Board has supported in its 2016 legislative platform.

The bill also awards incentive payments to school districts and charter schools that implement District-wide or school-wide standard student attire policies applicable to students in kindergarten through 8th grade. Each school district or charter school qualifies for a minimum award of \$10 per student if it implements a uniform policy.

BOARD PRIORITIES

The Board's priority bills have been filed as follows:

SB 766, sponsored by Senator Flores, and HB 499, sponsored by Representative Avila related to the Board's top legislative priority of modifying the Value Adjustment Board (VAB) proceedings. SB 766 was heard in Community Affairs and passed unanimously this past week. As you may recall, HB 499 was heard in House Finance and Tax and passed unanimously (12-0). This bill also includes the hold-harmless provision that the District needs to minimize the impact of the tax shortfall associated with the VAB.

HB 119, sponsored by Representative Bileca, related to providing school districts some flexibility related to the implementation of standards for constructing and maintaining educational facilities, State Required Education Facilities (SREF), passed its last committee of reference and has been placed on the House calendar on a second reading.

HB 639, sponsored by Representative Fresen, related to the creation of a seal of biliteracy for students proficient in another language as well as English, is scheduled for a hearing during the second week of session, in House Education K-12 Committee.

UPCOMING EVENTS

The Florida School Boards Association is holding its legislative days February 3-4, 2016. The Greater Florida Consortium of School Boards will have its business meeting the evening of Wednesday, February 3, 2016, and its legislative visits on Thursday, February 4, 2016.

If you have any questions or need additional information please contact Ms. Iraida R. Mendez-Cartaya, Associate Superintendent, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, Grants Administration, and Community Engagement, at 305 995-1497.

AMC:ajo
M658

cc: School Board Attorney
Superintendent's Cabinet