

**FAANS Legislative Report Summary from Mar. 17, 2021 Meeting**  
*Respectfully Submitted for Website by James Herzog, Director of Legislative Services*

**Introduction:** This report includes updates for the top three goals set by FAANS prior to the 2021 session as described below:

- 1.) Restoring Dual Enrollment Program Access;
- 2.) Streamlining Add-On Endorsements; and,
- 3.) Removing the Prior-Public Attendance Requirement from the Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES) Program.

**Restoring Dual Enrollment Program Access** – Senate Bill 52 by Sen. Ray Rodrigues (R, Ft. Myers) and House Bill 281 by Rep. Wyman Duggan (R, Jacksonville) and Rep. Ardian Zika (R, Land O’Lakes) have been introduced this session. The bills would establish a \$28.5 million Dual Enrollment Scholarship Program to reimburse eligible colleges and universities for tuition and instructional material costs for private school and home education students.

Funding for these scholarships would be included in the General Appropriations Act (pending later work by the Legislature on the annual budget) and broken down into the following silos:

- \$16 million for all students (public, nonpublic and home) to access summer dual enrollment courses; and,
- \$12.5 million for home and nonpublic school students to access fall and spring courses.

James Herzog and other key stakeholders have testified and/or waived in support of SB 52 as it has advanced through its first two Committee hearings.

James and other stakeholders have been advocating for the proposal since last fall. The Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice at the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) helped to coordinate in-depth data on participation rates for the past ten years among public, nonpublic and home-education students (see position paper linked here:

- [https://faans.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Restoring-DE-Access\\_SB-52-HB-281.pdf](https://faans.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Restoring-DE-Access_SB-52-HB-281.pdf)).

Here are recent developments with HB 281:

- Representative Susan Valdes (D, Tampa) is once again co-sponsoring the bill.
- On Mar. 10, the bill was heard in House Secondary Education and Career Development Subcommittee. It passed with unanimous bipartisan support on a 17-0 vote.

**Streamlining Add-On Endorsements** – The following language was sent to legislative bill drafting staff in response to FAANS advocacy efforts:

Section 1012.575, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

1012.575 Alternative preparation programs for certified teachers to add additional coverage

A district school board, or an organization of private schools or a consortium of charter schools with an approved professional development system as described in s. 1012.98(6), may design alternative teacher preparation programs to enable persons already certificates to add an additional coverage to their certificates. Each alternative teacher preparation program shall be reviewed and approved by the Department of Education to assure that persons who complete the program are competent in the necessary areas of subject matter specialization. Two or more school districts may jointly participate in an alternative preparation program for teachers.

In late February, James worked with Sen. Tom Wright's staff to request an amendment for SB 934 regarding education. This amendment was considered by the Senate Education Committee on Mar. 2. Senator Wright explained that the amendment would allow certified teachers at nonpublic schools to obtain endorsements for academic areas such as reading, gifted and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) through private professional development programs.

**Removing the Prior-Public Attendance Requirement from the Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES) Program** – The COVID-19 pandemic raised awareness more than ever that parents benefit from having educational options widely available for their schoolchildren. Most preferred the proven benefits of traditional brick-and-mortar instruction whether in public or nonpublic schools.

The nearly total economic shutdown left many parents truly struggling to afford tuition, transportation and other costs of their desired mode of education as evidenced below:

- At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, overall enrollment in nonpublic schools for students in prekindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade dropped an estimated 5-10 percent statewide.
- Parents reeling from such pressures were very frustrated to find out that the FES Program has a requirement of prior public-school attendance for students in grades 1-12.
- Eying the 11,000 open FES seats currently available, some parents are switching children from nonpublic to public schools to gain future access to life-changing scholarships.
- Switching from sector to sector involves a de facto "gaming of the system" to the detriment of both public and nonpublic school classroom disruptions that occur.

For these reasons, FAANS has been advocating for the removal of the prior-public mandate from the FES Program.

**Senate Bill 48 and House Bill to Be Determined** – The Senate has "gotten out of the gates first" with its school choice proposal. Prior to this Session, Sen. Manny Diaz Jr. (R, Hialeah Gardens) served as Senate Education Committee Chair. He has a strong background working in the education field. He is currently employed as a college administrator and previously has served as a social studies teacher and an assistant principal at a public high school.

Here is a summary of the proposal by Sen. Diaz:

- Expands eligibility for K-12 scholarship programs serving students from low-income families or with special education needs.
- Consolidates the McKay and Gardiner Programs to create the McKay-Gardiner Scholarship Program.
- Consolidates the Florida Tax Credit and Hope Programs under the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program.
- Funds the two remaining consolidated scholarship programs through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP).
- Increases the scholarship award from 95 percent to 97.5 percent of the per-student funding. The calculation of per-child-scholarship amount is based upon a student's grade level and school district. For students with special needs, another funding factor is the level of services needed.
- Establishes each of the two types of scholarships as Education Savings Accounts. Under each type, there will be certain approved uses for families on behalf of students served.