



The Seton Sentinel

The Florida Catholic Conference Education Department Newsletter

McKay and Virtual Learning Expansion Top List of Bills Impacting K-12 Students (Public and Private Sectors)

By James Herzog, FCC Associate Director for Education

Despite the pressing need to overcome a budget shortfall of nearly \$4 billion, the Florida Legislature passed several education bills of significance to the private school sector during the 2011 Session. Among these, the expansion of the McKay Scholarship Program to include students on so called "Section 504 Accommodation Plans" as well as the passage of "The Digital Learning Now Act" top the following list of education bills that passed this year.

Major Bills That Passed and Were Signed Into Law:

1.) SB 1656 (Wise)/ HB 1329 (Bileca) Regarding the McKay Scholarship Program – This was the "flagship effort" or primary education bill advocated for by FCC staff in collaboration with other key stakeholders such as the Coalition for McKay Scholarship Schools and the Foundation for Florida's Future. The legislation expands the McKay Program for students with disabilities to include individuals on "504 plans" in addition to those on Individual Education Plans (IEPs). On a related note, I was pleased to be able to provide testimony in support of this proposal when it was considered at a House K-20 Innovation Subcommittee meeting last March. To read this testimony, please see:

<http://www.flacathconf.org/testimony/2011/110328HerzogMcKay.pdf>.

2.) SB 1620 (Flores)/ HB 7197 (Stargel) or "The Digital Learning Now Act" – This measure has broad impacts for public schools and will also have some "ripple effects" for private schools. In particular, the legislation expands public school choices to include the addition of statewide virtual learning providers and the creation of virtual charter schools. The virtual charter school would be required to contract with an approved statewide virtual provider.

3.) SJR 1218 (Altman)/ CS/ HJR 1471 (Plakon) Regarding the Proposed Religious Freedom Amendment – This joint resolution proposes an amendment to the State Constitution to provide that an individual may not be barred from participating in any public program because of choosing to use public benefits at a religious provider. This amendment if passed by the Florida voters in 2012 would also delete a prohibition against using public revenues in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or any sectarian institution. In other words, this resolution would remove the so-called "Blaine-like" language from the Florida Constitution.

Status – To be placed on the 2012 General Election ballot (a 60 percent favorable vote or better will be needed for passage).

4.) SB 1388 (Flores)/ HB 965 (Horner) Regarding the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program – This legislation revises provisions relating to amount of tax credit allowed for contributions made to eligible nonprofit scholarship-funding organizations (SFOs). The amount for eligible contributions was previously limited to 75 percent of tax liabilities for the taxable year. The bill increases the possible amount for contributions to 100 percent of the taxes owed

Bills That Made Some Progress this Year and Are Likely to Resurface in 2012:

SB 588 (Flores)/ HB 481 (Kiar) Regarding Student Safety/ Notification – This was another key bill that the Conference advocated for during the 2011 Session. It would have required response agencies that already notify public school districts about certain local emergencies that may include bomb threats, natural disasters and fires to also notify private schools. It provided an "opt in" method for private schools to determine whether or not to receive such alerts. The bill passed with unanimous support in the House but unfortunately did not gain even a committee hearing in the Senate. All this being noted, the House sponsor is optimistic for gaining passage in 2012.

The Florida Catholic Conference Education Department exists to assist you in the work of educating our young people.

2.) SB 1550/ HB 1225 Regarding Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) –

This bill was monitored but not actively supported by the Conference during the 2011 Session due to key concerns raised by superintendents during a Governmental Issues Subcommittee Conference Call. The bill would have allowed parents of a Florida public-school child to receive 40 percent of what the public school system would spend on their child. These funds would be deposited into an “Education Savings Account” to allow parents to decide how funds should be used. In particular, funds from the ESAs could be used for the following purposes:

- K-12 private school tuition and fees;
- K-12 virtual school tuition and fees;
- K-12 tutoring and other supplemental education services;
- Payments of books for students at dual enrollment public institutions;
- Tuition for dual enrollment in ICUF institutions;
- Contributions to the child's 529 plan; and/or,
- Purchase of a Florida Prepaid College Plan.

The bill was first suggested in Governor Scott's “Transition Team Report for Education” which was disseminated in December 2010. During the 2011 Session, Senator Joe Negron indicated that as a bill sponsor, he wanted to help introduce the idea into the “court of public opinion” and then follow up in 2012.

Status – After a “testing of the waters” in 2011, the ESA effort is likely to be more actively promoted during the 2012 Session. The FCC staff will continue to advocate for adjustments to the proposal in response to superintendent concerns. In particular, it would be helpful to address the “prior-year” requirement in public schools and the unintended consequences of students transferring back and forth from private to public sectors.

Hopeful Thoughts abound for a Blessed New School Year as We Enter into the Rhythm of Campus Life and Prayer By James Herzog, FCC Associate Director for Education

The rhythm of the new school year is like the rhythm of monastic life. We enter into a repeating series of daily events like a monk enters into lauds, vespers, etc. along with work ranging from baking homemade bread to running spiritual retreats. Our teachers, parents and schoolchildren typically start each day with assembly, prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. From there, our mission is to make Catholic education not just one among a number of options available to the parents and families we serve, but the preferred option. We strive to foster a vibrant Catholic identity as a lived reality on our campuses, strong academic programs, a disciplined and safe setting for children and so much more.

With this big picture in mind, I would like to join my words of welcome to the chorus undoubtedly rising to greet each of you at the start of this new school year. Some of you are familiar faces to me as we have crossed paths in settings such as past Florida Catholic Conference (FCC) Administrators' Conferences and (accreditation) visitation teams. For those “friends I have not yet met” as the late great Will Rogers would say, I would also like to briefly share more about myself.

This school year I am entering my seventh year at the FCC. I began at the Conference back in August 2005 in the role of Accreditation Program Manager. Incidentally, this role is now filled by my colleague, Mary Camp; we have been blessed with her service at the Conference since July 2010. (Prior to that time, she served as a mathematics teacher, elementary school principal, etc. for Catholic schools in Ohio.) Since February 2009, I have served as Associate Director for Education. In my current position, I help to act as a voice for the Florida Bishops on matters of education policy, interactions with lawmakers and state agency officials, etc. I also facilitate positive working relationships with contact persons at the Florida Department of Education in an effort to secure the equitable share of services generated by our Catholic students under federal programs. Furthermore, I serve as a resource person to the seven superintendents on our FCC Schools Executive Committee (SEC) in monitoring legislative proposals, managing statewide educational programs and testing, etc.

On a personal note, my wife Cathie and I have been happily married for ten-plus years now. We have two sons who are attending Trinity Catholic School. As our boys –ages 9 and 6 respectively – complete their homework, attend Cub Scout activities, etc. I am often reminded of the vital mission of bolstering Catholic education throughout the Province of Miami. For the past eight years, Cathie and I have also enjoyed working in marriage preparation ministry via Catholic Engaged Encounter weekends/ presentations in our home Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee.

In closing, welcome to the 2011-2012 school year; please don't hesitate to contact our FCC Education Desk if you have any questions/ suggestions for how we can better serve you. We are also fortunate to have Allison Clow on board our “education team” at the FCC. She has served as our Administrative Assistant for Education since January 2010 (though she worked at the Conference for about a year prior to that time). You may see her name on various email reminders or hear her cheerful voice as she helps with our phone calls and other tasks. Finally, Mary Camp and I look forward to seeing as many of you as we can at our FCC Administrators' Conference Oct. 5-7, 2011 in Orlando, FL.

Accreditation Cycle Events

By Mary Camp, Accreditation Program Manager

Our FCC Accreditation process has **three major benefits**. The school improvement plan provides the school with a means to describe and evaluate their Catholic identity and academic programs. The annual report for continued accreditation is one tool to maintain accountability to standards. The analyzing of collected data gives stakeholders concrete proof of student progress. While we have always maintained that Catholic schools have strong Catholic identity, valuable programs, high standards, and excellent academics, **the accreditation process provides tangible evidence of this assertion.**

Visitation team members have an opportunity to actively participate in the accreditation process. They validate the efforts of another school community and make recommendations with side benefits of professional development and acquisition of new ideas for their own school.

The **third year** of the process gives a school the chance to step back and objectively review the progress they are making in their action plans. During the **conference** the implementation team can seek advice from diocesan and program personnel.

Florida Catholic Conference

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VISITATION TEAMS

Thank you to everyone who agreed to be chairpersons or team members for our 27 visitations this school year:

St. Augustine

Jean Barnes
Rhonda Rose
Anne Marie Barta
Rosemary Nowotny
John Luciano
Angie Fuller
Pat Bronsard
Laurie Albright

Palm Beach

Sr. Joan Dawson - 3
Suzanne Sandelier
Rita Kissel
Vicky Farrington
Leanne Kratofil
Mary Patricia Camber
Karen Sprague

St. Petersburg

Eileen Daly
Mary Beth Scanlon
Martaluz Pozo
Chris Wiand - 2
Elizabeth Fulham
Alberto Vazquez-Matos - 2
Lou Whitaker
Therese Jackson - 2
Valerie Wostbrock
Tonya Peters-Calabrese
Linda Whitman
Sr. Veronica Visceglia

Miami

Clara Cabrera
Kristen Hughes - 2
Nydia Claudio
Carlota Morales
Elena Ortiz
Susanna Rivera
Lori St. Thomas
Maria Glass
Stephen Brown
Michele Sanders
Beth Alzola

Savannah

Carrie Jane Williamson
Diana Hankins
Erin Mary Finn
Lynn Coleman Brown
Sr. Rose Mary Collins - 2
Diane Baker
Mary Lou Gamache
Chris Trott
Danni Harris
Paige Parel

Pensacola-Tallahassee

Ray Thompson
Sr. Robert Anne Jones
Fran Hudson
Janet Powell
Kevin Vickery
Sr. Barbara Zipoli
Jennifer Llewellyn
Lorelei Darga
Ann Williams
Janet Gendusa

Venice

Denny Denison - 2
Tommy Bridges
Siobhan Young
Irene Lynch
Sr. Elizabeth Meegan
Gina Groch
Janet Ortenzo
Kristine Brennan

Orlando

Jacqueline Tobin Zackel
Yvonne Toro
Gerri Gendall - 2
Mary Christine Moran
Jim Cooney
Lee Sayago
Patricia Kahle
Deborah Schwope