

FASA Legislative Workshop

January 20, 2007

Jim Warford welcomed attendees and gave a talk highlighting FASA's goal to make our state's educational administrators' voices heard. He touched on the FASA website, its changes, and the new email tool that allows members to voice their opinions immediately (in real time). This will be a vital tool for obtaining and getting out information during the upcoming Legislative Session.

Mr. Warford introduced Ruth Hall, President of FASA. Attendees present introduced themselves. Mr. Warford stressed the importance of changing the way that public education administrators are perceived. He gave accountability results from the last six years. 80+ percent of schools in Florida are graded "good" or "excellent". Administrators need to become the "agents" of change, not the "objects" of change. Public school leaders have the answers for making long-term improvements in our schools. FASA is leading the charge, together with the legislature, to carry out those goals.

Juhan Mixon, lobbyist, welcomed the group and thanked everyone for coming. He recognized retirees and thanked them for their involvement. A booklet, *Grassroots Lobbying*, was distributed. Mr. Mixon introduced and told a little about Senator Steve Wise from Duvall County.

Senator Steve Wise spoke about his experiences in education and his involvement in politics. A graduate of Florida Southern College, he obtained his doctorate from the University of Alabama. Senator Wise spent 23 years in education at Florida Community College before he had an opportunity to run for House of Representatives in Jacksonville, FL. During campaigning, he passed out Wise potato chips for name recognition to help him win the vote! In 1996, Senator Wise suffered a heart attack and the next running slogan became "Keep Wise Alive!" He was appointed to be over all education committees and became Appropriation Chairman for Education.

In 1999-2000 Senator Wise was involved in putting together a bill for a Math/Science school in partnership with the space program. Middle school girls and boys (separately) attend for nine weeks then high school students (girls and boys separately) for nine weeks, getting involved with astronauts and college professors. Goals of the program are to help keep the best and brightest students from going out of state.

Working for three years in conjunction with the electric company, plans are being made in Duvall County, in conjunction with Florida Community College, to have residents send donations with their electric bills for pre-paid college for students on free or reduced lunch. Culmination of the program is planned for the year 2012. Goals are to cut the juvenile crime rates by 25% and provide post-secondary education for any student who wants it. If the Governor will talk with all utility companies in the state for a similar program, every student in the state could have an opportunity to attend college.

Representative Dennis Baxley from Jacksonville addressed the workshop attendees. He told that his experiences as a legislator have taught him to be a better listener. He told of some of his involvements with family, community and in the legislature. To him, his most important job has been being dad to his five children, one of them blind. He thanked those present for their involvement in the education of his children.

Rep. Baxley congratulated the attending group for being involved, and for putting leaders in Tallahassee like Jim Warford and Juhan Mixon. He challenged the group to agree to disagree when necessary to work together and get the job done to build a great future for Florida's students. He

challenged those present to remain at the table, so as not to end up on the menu! Sound economic futures cannot be built if the next generation is not taught what they need to know to compete in the global market. Accountability is not pleasant, but it is vital. The educational model is the key for the future. Go get 'em!

Question, Answer and Comments Session:

Currently, there exist 120 House members and 40 Senators. But! *All politics are local*. Representatives want to hear from **one** person they know. Our job should be to get to know the legislators personally. The best ways to get to know or communicate with a legislator are:

Steve Wise: Work in the campaign of the person you want to get to know. Get involved. Contribute to the campaign. Go by the office. Identify yourself and your district.

Dennis Baxley: Figure out who taught the children of the legislator and get **those** teachers to contact the legislator. Identify those who already have a relationship with the legislator. Volunteer to campaign. **After the race** – get to know the victor, whether or not you voted for them. 95% of folks who make appointments want something from the legislator. Offer help without asking for anything. Don't write people off just because you weren't in their camp, especially on educational issues.

Q: John Miliziano, Hillsborough: Administrators throughout Florida want to someday see the 1.6% multiplier for retirement benefits increased to at least 2%. Does it look like that multiplier will ever be increased? Doesn't the local School Board fund it?

A: It is all funded by the state, and the state sets the rates for what dollars are put in. It will probably not ever pass. It has too much fiscal impact. Currently, the 2.0% multiplier is for exceptional risk. Just a move to 2.0% would explode the budget. The issue will never get out of the Operations Committee. Elected officials get 3.0%, judges get 3.3%. Could probably look at picking up health care costs (HIS) as an alternative. A HIS supplement bill has been filed by Senator Lawson and by Bob Allen in the House. Another benefit that Senator Wise is carrying is the eight-year DROP bill.

Q: Neriah Roberts, Polk County: For the past three years getting the multiplier increased has been pursued. One train of thought has been to implement it incrementally. Regarding DROP, we are asking that administrators be treated as teachers (eight years). Of the three issues, (DROP, HIS or 1.6%), which is the likeliest to pass?

A: Senator Wise: The original premise of DROP was to have a plan that would allow educators to stay on or come back after retirement due to a teacher shortage. Now the administrators are also retiring in large numbers (the leadership) and a new problem has arisen. Within the next three and a half years, 60% of Florida's educational administrators will be eligible to retire. That data should cause the issue to get attention. If actuarially sound, perhaps the 1.6% could be increased to 1.75%, but other areas will pay for the increase. DROP is the likeliest to pass. Actuarial studies on the DROP extension show it won't cost the state.

C: Walter Pierce, Palm Beach County (comment): Regarding the DROP extension – every time we lose an administrator, we pull a teacher out of the classroom.

Q: Lou Cerreta, Hillsborough County: DROP – after retirement, teachers must stay out one month, administrators one year to avoid penalty. Can this be addressed with current bill?

A: Representative Baxley: People need to be educated about DROP. Everything has some kind of compromise. Use those disparities for argument points.

Q: Ruth Hall, Hillsborough: We need to have a way to continue to have high-quality leadership development. Due to attrition and DROP, a lot of people are coming in new, both administrators and teachers. How can dollars be recouped for professional development?

A: Senator Wise encouraged everyone to log on to **Teaching Point.com** – 100 programs that have been put together in accordance with Sunshine State Standards. Senator Wise is running it by different organizations for input. Look at website and respond to srwise@comcast.net with your evaluations. Staff development dollars, from a Senate standpoint at least, will be appropriated. In the past, problems with training dollars were that they were not coordinated toward a common goal. Some legislators were concerned that value of those dollars was being lost. What is needed is alignment and prioritization for the existing dollars.

Q: Marjorie Ebersbach, Brevard County: School calendar issue: 54 of the districts in the state have early start calendars. It makes a tremendous impact on employees who will go three weeks to a month without pay. Can the vote be reconsidered? What are the chances of having it re-examined this session?

A: Debatable issues will always come back. 36 new members in the House will be approached with the issue. Save Our Summers organization gained momentum that had nothing to do with operating schools. They are part of the discussion. Not an easy struggle to get it back on the table, but it will be back. It's Posey's bill (Brevard). Joe Pickens' idea was to make an "opt out" chance for counties whose communities were in agreement.

Q: What are the legislative next steps for Secondary School Redesign Initiative?

A: Bill Daggett will address the issue on February 14th to the committees and interested parties. On the House side, it's Joe Pickens.

C: Steve Richardson, Citrus (comments): Lives by the Law of Accumulated grievances, Law of Unintended Consequences. Regarding the 1.6 percent: it is not just 1.6, it's 1.6 percent of *what*? Recruitment issues arise. For example, STAR has diminished relationships between unions, administrators, etc. It took a year that started out really well and turned it into a year of friction. Give time for initiatives to be implemented at the school level. Think of the impact on teachers and administrators before things get passed that will cause difficulty for educators.

A: Hearings on STAR before Appropriations Committee will be the first week of February. Contact your legislators to give input, but **be positive**.

Q: Florida Virtual School enacted legislation that students could have access during the school day. There are 350,000 students in the system. Students are being denied access now – why?

A: Senator Wise needs to know the details, because he's on both committees. Rep. Baxley noted his excitement for the program. Long-term view is that he'd like to see it grow until 20% of high school students access virtual school. We need to rethink how to mix the programs and get over turf wars and weld the two arenas together. 97% of parents are most satisfied with virtual school. It's a huge tool to reach our potential.

C: Patricia Ramsey-Baney, Orange County (comment): STARS and the demoralization it causes: Teachers need support and administrators are trying to provide that support. Teachers deal with kids with all capabilities, not just brilliant students. Give schools the money so they can divvy it up where it is needed. Intentions may have been good, but mission has failed.

Senator Wise encouraged Ms. Ramsey-Baney to come to Tallahassee to testify regarding STARS.

At this point in the program, Juhan Mixon introduced Vern Crawford. Mr. Crawford's comments included:

All politics is local! True statement. Involvement is crucial, as is information flow is very important

FELL (Florida Education Legislative Liaisons) – began 31 years ago, includes conglomerate of associations and those with educational involvement. Helps put a local face on concerns – humanizes issues for legislators. Current representatives from school districts across the state are recognized in Tallahassee. Each person should capitalize on any relationship that they have with a legislator to make their issues and concerns known.

Calendar issue SB 148 will be coming up next week. In reality, it will probably hang around until the last week of the session and possibly until the beginning of summer.

Some other issues for the coming year: STAR, School Reform, Class Size, School Grades, Teacher Salaries.

Mr. Crawford turned over the program to Jim Warford:

1. Remember that politics are local!
2. Actions alerts – only helpful if you respond.

Thanked attendees for their attendance and input. Communication, communication, communication – you have to work at it every day.

Invited the group to get lunch and network with each other during lunch.

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