



Update: Governor DeSantis' Proposal for Starting Teacher Salaries **October 8, 2019**

Florida Governor, Ron DeSantis, announced on Monday that he would be proposing to the Florida Legislature that there be a raise in the minimum **starting** salary for Florida teachers to \$47,500. Florida is experiencing a teacher shortage. DeSantis said he believes that passing his proposal would lead to more than 100,000 teachers receiving a raise across the state. The increase will cost a total of \$603 million.

Speaking at a news conference at Middleburg High school in Clay County, DeSantis said, "If you look at ways to make an impact on students' achievement...having a great teacher in front of students is really the best thing you can do."

While this proposal is certainly a step in the right direction for Florida teachers, it is way too early to start celebrating. Many unaddressed concerns and unanswered questions remain about the proposal. While the Governor intends to include the request for this money to the Florida Legislature, we need to be mindful of the following.

- The proposal is for the 2020 Legislative session and not for the 2019-2020 school year.
- The Governor can certainly include the proposal in his budget. It is the Legislators, however, who make the decision each year on how the state will spend its money, not the Governor. There is no guarantee that the Legislators will fund the proposal.
- Even if the proposal is funded, the proposal, currently, only addresses the teacher starting salary. Is the intent to provide funding only for starting teachers?
- Raising the minimum starting pay is a beginning, but what are Gov. DeSantis' plans to retain experienced teachers who have devoted years to their students, and how will he provide fair, competitive pay for all the people essential to our schools?
- What, if any, additional funds will be available to raise all employee salaries?
- If no additional funds are allocated to districts for veteran teacher salaries, does the Governor understand the impact on the morale of veteran teachers knowing that the starting teacher salary would be higher for new teachers than for veteran teachers not yet making \$47,500? Duval currently has 7781 teachers. 4764 teachers are paid below \$47,500.

In response to questions about veteran teacher pay from reporters in Fort Lauderdale, DeSantis said that he was working on additional proposals that will be announced before the 2020 legislative session begins in January. It is speculated, however, that future proposals may entail teacher bonus programs, not salary increases, for veteran teachers.

Later, at an appearance at a Broward County school, the Governor was asked why he opted to raise the minimum salary and not the overall average salaries for educators, DeSantis said the plan would affect "60 percent of teachers" and have the most impact.

For years now, the Legislature has relied on bonus programs to provide veteran teachers with additional money. Best and Brightest, recently modified, is one of those programs. Teachers, however, have long said they would prefer across-the-board raises to bonuses as salary increases would allow for greater financial security. Bonus programs have proven to be selective and not inclusive of all teachers as well as unreliable. Monies from bonuses are not counted as salary for Florida Retirement purposes and are not recurring from year to

year. The Legislature either renews the funding or not each year. Late last week, in fact, a bill was filed to repeal the Best and Brightest program from state law, saying it had not fulfilled its goal. The bill was filed after the state agreed to pay \$15.5 million to settle a class-action lawsuit that focused on allegations that the bonus program discriminated against black and Hispanic teachers. Those allegations stemmed from the state's past use of teachers' scores on ACT and SAT college-entrance exams in helping determine whether teachers should receive bonuses. This past spring the Legislature and DeSantis moved to do away with that test requirement and revamp the program (**See the latest DTU "Keeping You Informed" for details of the revised Best and Brightest Program).**)

DTU and FEA will continue to lobby the Governor and the Legislature for increased salary funding for all school district employees. We will wait to hear how the governor plans to lift Florida out of the basement in national rankings on education funding and to ensure that all of our students have the opportunity for a world-class education.