

DTU Legislative Update 2021 Legislative Session

1st Interim Committee Week Jan. 14, 2021

In an effort to keep members informed on what is being proposed during the Florida Legislative Session, DTU will email a Legislative update to our members. The Update will be emailed weekly during the actual Legislative Session and twice a month during committee meeting weeks.

We must Continue a Decade of Progress for Our Public Schools & Be Prepared to Push Back:

This legislative session, your local union and FEA are pushing forward with our Decade of Progress for our public schools as we fight to fund our future in public education. We will fight:

- for increased funding for our public schools.
- to address Covid-19 issues in our schools, including the continued administration and abuse of high-stakes testing.
- for fair wages for all FEA members, free of interference from lawmakers and the Department of Education.
- for job security for all educators.
- to bring back the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) in the Florida Retirement System (FRS).
- to eliminate the use of Value-Added Model (VAM) scores on employment and evaluation decisions.

Capitol Protocols:

Many people have asked us what this session will look like. We can answer honestly – we're just not sure yet. Even the Speaker of the House and the Senate President haven't publicly stated what we will and won't be allowed to do inside the Capitol. This

is, in large part, because we just don't know what Florida's Covid-19 cases will look like by then. What we do know now is the following: Senate President Wilton Simpson (R-Spring Hill) has limited any public appearances in the Senate. Only those individuals invited to present on a panel before a committee will be allowed in the Senate building. All public testimony to a bill or an issue by the general public will be done via live feed from the Leon County Civic Center. All senators and staff are required to wear masks, and all meetings with senators or staff must take place outside the Senate.

Again, these are the interim Committee week rules, but we expect similar rules as we enter the session. This is why building relationships with legislators at home and in the districts, has been crucial to our success, especially now.

Senate Education Committee 1/12/2021:

The Senate Education Committee met for the first time on Tuesday and received an update on voucher programs for K-12 schools and financial aid programs for college and university students. Most of the state's voucher programs have seen a decline in applications, however, the newest voucher for the Family Empowerment Scholarship, which is funded out of General Revenue, more than doubled in size from 17,923 participants in 2019-20 to 36,384 to date. This scholarship is driving the seven percent increase in growth across all voucher programs.

Following the DOE's presentation, Doug Tuthill, the Director of Step Up for Students presented to the committee.

The committee wasn't all about vouchers – Sen. Perry Thurston (D-Fort Lauderdale) asked the DOE about accountability for special skills exceptions to private school teacher certification, questioning whether they monitor anyone with these “special skills.” Chancellor Hall responded that after the initial affidavit is sent into the department, they do not follow up on these individuals. So, in other words, you can teach in a private school without any certification, relying solely on “special skills” and no one actually checks to see if you have these skills or how they are being used.

Looking Ahead:

There will be no committee meetings next week. Interim Committee meetings will resume January 25 and continue weekly through the week of February 15. The regular session will be here before we know it – starting March 2. We'll keep our fingers crossed that the 60-day session is only 60 days this year (you might remember the last

few sessions had to be extended to reach an agreement on the budget). If all goes according to plan, session will end on April 30.

Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078.

Thanks to Yale Olenick for content this week, and our faithful comms team for making us all sound better!

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