



WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER!
Points of Interest: Legislative Summary
May 10, 2021

The regular 2021 legislative session has come to an end. As with any session, there was a lot at stake for Florida's students, DTU members and our public schools, colleges and universities. During this session we saw literally hundreds of bills dealing with education.

As we started this session, it was made clear that we had to push a positive agenda for our public schools and our professions, while fighting off any attacks. We committed to getting members involved, to helping unify our message and to engaging in a very nuanced and difficult strategy. Let's face it: This was really hard for us and many of us were panicking at one point or another this session. However, your dedication and hard work as well as all of us staying so unified is ultimately what led to us becoming more powerful and influential. The budget and the defeat of SB 1014 made that clear. But the work is far from over. **If there is one thing we learned this session, that is not to underestimate the power of our membership!**

Here are some key elements of this session you should be aware of:

The Wins:

Budget:

- Going into this session, we were told to expect deep cuts in the higher education budget and small cuts in the PreK-12 budget. In the end, the budget allowed for level funding with increased flexibility for PreK-12. The budget also, for the first time anyone can remember, set aside funds for additional students who may show up in the fall; meaning mid-year cuts are much less likely next year. Considering the challenges that Covid has presented for finances in Florida, this is a win for Florida's students and public schools. The budget is not perfect, as it continues to keep veteran teachers and education staff professionals down. We will have to work on changing the narrative and gaining support for all who work in our schools. Finally, let's not forget the federal dollars coming down to districts. That should help our students and our employees.

PreK accountability:

- Our public schools have incredible PreK programs. Now, some of the private programs that take VPK dollars will have to match some of that accountability. This is not only good for students, but also will demonstrate that our public schools truly are the best place for students to learn.

The Union Movement:

- The union bill was defeated, but it is important for us to take a step back and recognize the work that we did this session. FEA was heard this session. *Florida Politics*, a political daily publication, listed FEA as a winner on April 24 in the "Capitol Directions" section of the [Takeaways from Tallahassee](#) newsletter. Ultimately, the nearly 10,000 FEA members who stayed on message were responsible for securing us a much better session than was predicted. You proved the power of our 150,000 members is real!

The Stops:

- **Senate Bills 1014 and 78 (House Bills 835 and 947) were stopped** thanks to your hard work and unified member involvement. The two key turning points that kept this legislation at bay involved members being in Tallahassee and delivering a short, strong and unified personalized message to lawmakers.
- **Senate Bill 84, the pension bill, passed the Senate.** However, several House lawmakers heard us and agreed this was not the year to go after the retirement security of frontline public employees. **The House never took up the bill.**
- **Senate Bill 220 (House Bill 997) would have taken presidential searches for colleges and universities out of the sunshine.** The bill was expected to pass this year, despite the fact it required a two-thirds vote. **It ultimately failed after our members,** led by UFF, spoke up.

The Not So Good:

- Part of our strategy this year was to engage other groups in work that was important, but not one of our top priorities. This included vouchers (SB 48/HB 7045) and charters (SB 1028/HB 51), which every year get expanded. The Florida PTA, Pastors for Florida Children, the NAACP and other parent groups pushed back on these expansions. While the expansions were not as large as originally proposed, **we need to closely monitor vouchers and charters directly.** Our focus going forward must be lifting up our public schools as the best place for kids to learn while making clear the challenges and lack of oversight that exist in voucher and many charter schools.
- There remains a lack of concern for veteran teachers and education staff professionals: Once again, lawmakers continued the policy that makes it harder for districts to provide fair pay increases to all. Our work going forward will be to expose the massive teacher and staff shortages and what needs to be done to address them. **The DOE decided not to use test scores in a negative way for students or schools, but did not provide the same courtesy for teachers. Nor did the DOE take action to help teachers who have had challenges during the pandemic related to certification or the reading endorsement.**
- **SB 264/HB 233 passed the Legislature.** This bill is an attempt to limit the academic freedom of college and university professors and will allow the recording of instructors during class time.
- SB 192/HB 149 only targets Broward County, but it is certainly a concerning start that could be expanded. This bill allows parents of self-contained EBD students to request cameras be placed in their child's classroom. The bill has no funding attached, so the money for these cameras will have to come from the district's funds.

The Work Ahead:

- We had about 10,000 FEA/DTU members engage in the work this session.
- FEA engaged the public and members:
 - Over 15 million views and engagements of our ads.
 - Nearly 1 million texts sent to likely voters in certain Senate districts, generating more than 10,000 calls.
 - Thousands of door knocks that resulted in post cards and phone calls to certain senators.

There will be a special legislative session May 17. Stay tuned ...