



## 2023 DTU Legislative Session Update

### **Beginning of the Florida Legislative Session:**

The Florida Legislature is in session from March to May of 2023. DTU will be sending members Legislative Updates each week that the Legislature is in session. Our goal is to keep you informed on pending and passed or defeated bills that could impact educators and education in general. Updates will be sent to your personal email address. Please update DTU on any changes to your personal email address so you can receive the updates. From time to time, DTU may request action on your part to contact Legislators on bills that we feel would be harmful to education.

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### **A Brief Recap of the Week:**

Though the official start to the legislative session is March 7, interim committee weeks are under way. For the most part, the education committees this week received presentations on various issues related to their committee's jurisdiction and did not act on bills. The one big exception was the House Choice and Innovation Subcommittee, which passed [HB 1](#), related to universal vouchers.

However, there was plenty of action outside of the committee meetings in Tallahassee this week. Governor Ron DeSantis announced proposed legislation to address FEA, our local unions, and our members.

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### **HB 1, Universal Vouchers:**

At the core of this bill is a massive transfer of funds from public schools to unaccountable private and religious schools and corporations. The official House analysis of [HB 1](#) lists the cost of the bill as "indeterminate," but the Florida Policy Institute estimates that [HB 1](#) will drain \$4 billion from public schools.

Representatives Angie Nixon (D-Jacksonville) and Susan Valdes (D-Tampa) both offered amendments to make HB 1 align with the vision most Floridians have for education.

Unfortunately, **the committee voted down the following amendments:**

- Setting an income threshold of \$1 million for voucher recipients to ensure that Florida taxpayers aren't subsidizing the private education of Florida's wealthiest residents.
- Requiring voucher schools to follow a student's Individual Education Plan.
- Requiring voucher schools to disclose if a classroom teacher is not certified.
- Prohibiting private schools from having admission policies that discriminate against students based on their race, color, national origin, sex, religion, disability, family status, birthplace, ancestry, culture, language, sexual orientation, gender identity or hairstyle.
- Suspending payments to any voucher school that disenrolls more than 25 percent of students who attend on a voucher within a single year.

No parent wants to send their child to a school that meets just the bare minimum requirements. The failure of these amendments to pass indicates that private schools do not need to meet the same standards as public schools which is to provide what the majority of parents want, a well-funded high quality public education.

The vote on the bill was 13-4 with Rep. Lisa Dunkley (D-Lauderhill) joining all the Republicans to vote in favor of the bill. HB 1 will next be heard in the [PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee](#). This will likely occur the week of February 6, the next committee week. We will know for sure when the meeting agenda is released next week.

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### **Limiting Rights of FEA, Our Local Unions, and Florida's Educators:**

No matter what school or grade level they work in, every educator in Florida deserves to have a voice in their workplace; be supported; have the resources they need to provide meaningful lessons; and be paid a professional salary that allows them to live in the community where they work. More than 150,000 teachers, staff and professors in Florida have found their voice by joining their local, state and national unions.

While to date, no legislation has been filed, in a press conference Monday, Governor DeSantis declared his intent to do the following:

- Limit or disallow any union communication on school campuses.
- Allow a minority of educators (40 percent) to decertify their local union.
- Give the Florida Department of Education the ability to inspect local unions' membership records, thereby allowing for the state to create a database of union members. Why this is necessary, we don't know.

**These provisions, of course, only apply to education unions.** At the same press conference where these priorities were laid out, Governor DeSantis also announced his proposal for teacher raises for the upcoming session. Florida currently has as a \$22 billion budget surplus, and Governor DeSantis proposes to use less than 1 percent of that towards raising teachers' salaries. **Such a small increase would ensure that Florida's teachers remain among the lowest paid in the nation.**

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### **Support Students' Freedom to Learn:**

In the same week that the nation paused to remember the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., news broke that Governor DeSantis would not allow the Advanced Placement African American Studies course to be taught in Florida when the course is rolled out for the 2024-25 school year. Currently, the course is being piloted in 59 high schools. It was being piloted in 60 high schools, but the Tallahassee high school piloting the course stopped doing so after the governor's announcement.

On Wednesday, civil rights leaders, clergy, state legislators and community activists gathered in the Capitol to hold a rally and announce their intent to file a lawsuit if Governor DeSantis goes through with his threat to forbid Florida students from taking the AP African American Studies course. AFT Secretary-Treasurer Fedrick Ingram, NEA President Becky Pringle and FEA Secretary-Treasurer Nandi Riley were all at the rally.

The plaintiffs of the potential lawsuit are three Tallahassee students who each spoke eloquently at the rally about the importance of their freedom to learn the full truth about America's history so they can learn from our past mistakes and build a better future for all of us. You can write to Governor DeSantis and FLDOE Commissioner Manny Diaz asking them to allow the [AP African American Studies course here](#).

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### ***How You Can Take Action Today***

Visit the [FEA website](#) to learn more about session and sign up for FEA Action Alert texts by texting "**edactivist**" to 22394.

***Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078***