

DTU

2023 Legislative Update #2

A Brief Recap of the Week

It was a busy week in Tallahassee:

- Gov. DeSantis' education budget proposal was presented to various subcommittees,
- The Senate Education Committee considered further restricting students' access to learning materials,
- AFT President Randi Weingarten and Secretary-Treasurer Fedrick Ingram came to Tallahassee to bring good news, and
- On top of all that, there was a special session.

Read below to find out more.

Proposed Budget

Each year before the start of the legislative session, the governor is required by law to submit their proposed budget recommendations to the Legislature. Last week, Governor DeSantis announced his proposals, and this week his proposals were presented to various appropriations subcommittees.

We don't need to tell you how experienced teachers have suffered from the lack of flexibility in the Teacher Salary Increase Allocation (TSIA) funds. Since the TSIA was first placed in the budget we have been working for maximum flexibility with these funds so that local unions and school districts have the freedom to negotiate raises that are fair for all employees. One good aspect of DeSantis' [budget proposal](#) is that it does provide some of the flexibility we've been asking for. This is because of all the hard work we have done together.

However, when it comes to actual dollars and cents, the budget falls short. DeSantis is claiming a \$1 billion investment in teacher raises. The reality is his proposal is a \$200 million increase from the \$800 million for salaries from previous budget years. While the

\$200 million increase might sound like a lot of money, it adds up to less than \$20 per week for teachers *before* taxes and would keep Florida's teachers in the bottom five in the nation for average teacher pay.

While the governor proposes a budget, legislators create the budget. [Let your legislators know that DeSantis' proposal leaves students and educators behind](#), and they must make a significant investment in Florida's future beyond what the governor recommends.

Even Less Freedom to Teach?

Across Florida, teachers help high school students build professional resumes and get an edge up in college admissions using LinkedIn. Children of all ages watch educational content assigned by their teacher on YouTube. Teachers find a myriad of other ways to use social media appropriately to reach and teach children who have grown up as digital natives.

[SB 52](#) threatens to put an end to that. What started out as a bill to add "social media safety" to the [list of required instruction topics](#) in Florida, the law was transformed into a blanket prohibition of students accessing social media on school property.

Senator Danny Burgess (R-Zephyrhills) successfully amended the bill to "prohibit and prevent students from accessing social media platforms through the use of Internet access provided by the school district." When asked how [his amendment](#) would deal with situations like students using LinkedIn or watching YouTube videos assigned by their teacher, Senator Burgess' response indicates he does not understand how his amendment would impact classroom instruction.

You should [watch the video for yourself](#) so you can hear Senator Burgess say the amendment doesn't "specifically prohibit (it)" despite the [amendment](#) reading "prohibit and prevent students from accessing social media platforms." Again, there are no exceptions carved out in the newly added language to the bill. If this language stays in the bill, students will lose out on significant learning opportunities to build their resumes, watch educational videos at school and much more.

As we work to improve this bill, [we need your stories](#) of ways you and your students make appropriate use of social media, including watching educational YouTube videos; using LinkedIn; and any other way social media is used to help students learn and grow. [Click here to share your stories with us.](#)

Unions Make a Positive Difference in the Lives of Students and Educators

The Leon Classroom Teachers Association and the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association each were awarded a [\\$35,000 grant to help with recruitment and retention](#). Scott Mazur, president of LCTA, and Rocky Hanna, superintendent of Leon County Schools, joined Andrew Spar, Randi Weingarten and Fedrick Ingram to announce the grants. In this most recent round of grants, AFT awarded nearly half a million dollars to 14 locals around the nation.



During the [press conference](#) where the grants were announced, Weingarten drew a contrast between how our unions try to bring people together and uplift students and educators versus how certain politicians are trying to divide parents, educators and school communities in pursuit of a privatization agenda.

We know the best answer to the chaos our state is facing right now is to join in with the vast majority of Floridians of every race, religion and party affiliation who support public schools. These innovation grants are just another example of our union living out values and a reason for all of us to proudly declare, “*I’m sticking with my union!*”

Special Session

For the fourth time in less than a year, Florida’s Legislature has convened in a special session. As in the previous special sessions, this one is perhaps most notable for what isn’t being discussed. The kinds of issues that everyday Floridians care about — such as the housing crisis, skyrocketing insurance costs, making healthcare more accessible and affordable — are being ignored. House Minority Leader Rep. Fentrice Driskell (D-Tampa) introduced bills to address homeowners’ insurance and to expand Medicaid, but those bills were ruled out of order.

Other

Instead, the Legislature has focused on issues such as: [removing local control](#); [expanding the newly created elections police force](#); and [using taxpayer funds to fly immigrants across the country](#).

As we approach the start of the regular session on March 7, it is essential that you reach out to your legislators and ask them to focus on the real issues you face.

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.

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