

# Florida Education Association

# *Frontline Report*

*2024 Legislative Session*

*December 08, 2023*

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

The penultimate committee week was light on legislation and full of presentations. Only one bill was heard in an education committee this week: a bill to rename Tallahassee Community College to Tallahassee State College.

The most eventful part of the week took place on Tuesday nearly 500 miles away from Tallahassee when Gov. DeSantis visited a charter school to announce his [budget recommendations for the 2024-25 fiscal year](#). This was followed by a Senate Education Committee meeting on Wednesday where Commissioner Manny Diaz presented the [education portion of the budget proposal](#) and took questions from the committee. Read below for more details.

## **Gov. DeSantis Budget Proposal**

DeSantis cemented his desire for Florida's teachers and staff to remain among the lowest paid in the nation by suggesting a raise of less than \$1,000 for all instructional personnel while also suggesting a \$16 billion surplus. Let's be clear, Florida's budget surplus is built on the backs of underpaid teachers and education staff professionals.

As you have likely heard by now, DeSantis is touting his proposed per-student funding of \$8,841 as "historic" and the "highest ever." It would seem that DeSantis is not familiar with either the concept of inflation or the [very first budget](#) he proposed. When adjusted for inflation, DeSantis' most recent budget proposal spends \$500 less per student than the budget he first proposed back in 2019. If it feels like you are being asked to do more and more with less and less, it's because you are.

The good news is that the governor's budget proposal is just that, a proposal. It is up to the Legislature to craft a budget. In previous years we have seen the final budget look much different from what the governor initially proposed. And, of course, we'll fight once again to make sure there

is enough funding in the education budget to make sure every educator is paid the professional salary they deserve.

## Senate Education Appropriations Committee Meeting

When Manny Diaz presented Gov. DeSantis' proposed budget to the Senate Education Appropriations Committee, he touted the teacher salary increase allocation and wanted the committee to believe that Gov. DeSantis has made increasing teacher pay a priority. You know the reality that Florida's teachers are in the bottom five in the nation in average teacher salary. To the extent Gov. DeSantis has had a priority regarding teacher pay, his priority has been keeping Florida's teachers among the worst paid in the nation.

We appreciate Sen. Tracie Davis (D-Jacksonville) for pushing back and asking Diaz why this proposed budget keeps Florida's teachers in the bottom five in the nation in average teacher salary. Diaz gave a rambling somewhat incoherent response ([you can watch it here](#)) in which he blamed school districts and collective bargaining for salaries being so low.

Is it the case that some school districts around the state are keeping their fund balances unnecessarily high when those funds could be used to increase salaries and benefits for employees? Of course. That is why our local unions are so important as they fight to get the best raises possible. But, let's not miss the big picture: in 2006-07 Florida's teachers were 28 in the nation in average teacher salary. When adjusted for inflation, per-student spending that year was nearly \$1,500 more per student than in Gov. DeSantis' proposed budget. For each educator in Florida to be paid what they deserve, Florida's politicians must prioritize funding public schools. That is why FEA is calling for \$2.5 billion in new education funding each year for the next seven years. When that happens, Florida's teachers will move from the bottom five in the nation in average teacher salary to the top ten.

We also appreciate Sen. Corey Simon (R-Tallahassee) for asking about raises for education staff professionals. Like the answer about teacher salaries, this question was answered by pointing fingers at school districts while ignoring the reality Florida's schools are near the bottom in the nation in per-student spending.

## Looking Ahead

Next Tuesday, Dec. 12 at 9:30 a.m. the Senate Fiscal Policy Committee will take up [SB 7000](#), [7002](#), and [7004](#). Collectively, these bills aim to clean up some of the messes legislators have created over the past two decades. At the same time, they create some new messes by continuing to restrict collective bargaining rights and keeping restrictions on how raises must be given for instructional personnel. If you need a refresher on the bills, you can read all about them in our [prior edition of Frontline](#).

We remain concerned at how rushed the process has been. The text of the bills was released mere hours before the bills were presented in their first committee stop last month. Tuesday's committee meeting will be only their second committee stop, but it will also be their last committee stop before they are ready for a full vote in the Senate. Rushing the process like this leads to bad legislation. We have no doubt that if the bills pass in their current form legislators will be creating more problems for a future Legislature to come back and fix.

Next week will be the final interim committee week before session starts in January. Be sure to stay tuned to [FEA's legislative webpage](#) for all the latest information regarding the 2024 legislative session.

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