



Oct. 7, 2019

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FEA: Tell us more about educator pay and education funding

TALLAHASSEE — The Florida Education Association (FEA) was encouraged to hear Gov. Ron DeSantis make clear that teacher pay matters to his administration on Monday. The governor's announcement in Clay County was a starting point in addressing the needs of our students.

"We thank the governor for opening a dialogue on salaries and for acknowledging that our teachers are woefully underpaid," said FEA President Fedrick Ingram. "Raising minimum starting pay is a beginning. We still hope to hear about what Gov. DeSantis plans to do to retain experienced teachers who have devoted years to their students, and about how his administration will provide fair, competitive pay for all the people essential to our schools — bus drivers, paraprofessionals, food-service workers, office staff, custodial personnel and others."

As state Sen. Rob Bradley pointed out during the governor's Monday morning news conference, Florida needs to not only recruit qualified teachers, but to retain those teachers once they are in our classrooms.

Looking at the big picture, our students need more than great teachers, and both students and teachers need support. The FEA is waiting to hear how the governor plans to lift this state out of the basement in national rankings on education funding and to ensure that all of our students have the opportunity for a world-class education.

The Florida Education Association is calling for an investment of \$2.4 billion for public education in the next state budget — as a down-payment on the \$22 billion needed over the next 10 years to overcome decades of disinvestment in our public schools. We currently rank 43th nationally in funding for public education.

FEA has numerous questions concerning the governor's announcement, including where is the money for starting teacher salaries coming from, given that he foresees no new money for schools? Florida must fund our future by investing in our students, public schools and educators.

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The Florida Education Association is the state's largest association of professional employees, with more than 145,000 members. FEA represents pre K-12 teachers, higher education faculty, educational staff professionals, students at our colleges and universities preparing to become teachers and retired education employees.