

CONCERNS RELATED TO THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED MINIMUM FLORIDA TEACHER SALARY

Governor Ron DeSantis announced shortly after his inauguration that making transformative improvements in Florida public school teachers' salaries was one of his signature priorities. Recently he has held several public announcements promoting his proposal to establish a minimum teacher salary of \$47,500. The Governor is doing a masterful job of generating support for his proposal, and he has shown since being elected that he has significant gifts for establishing priorities and leading them through the tests and challenges of public opinion and the Legislative process. The Governor's salary proposal has received support from editorial boards, district school leaders and leaders of teachers' organizations. There is a palpable sense that his proposal, or a similar one will emerge as a bill and be passed in the coming Legislative session.

This is what we know so far.

First the Governor's announcement said, "The Governor's proposed 2020 budget recommendation will include a pay raise for more than 101,000 teachers in Florida by raising the minimum salary to \$47,500."

The Governor's announcement went on to say; "We are experiencing a teacher shortage in Florida," said Governor DeSantis. "With a strong economy and plenty of jobs available in other fields, unfortunately too many college graduates are unwilling to enter the teaching profession. My proposal to increase the minimum salary for teachers to \$47,500 will help alleviate this shortage and elevate the teaching profession to the level of appreciation it deserves. This is long overdue, and I look forward to working with the legislature to make this a reality."

Included in this announcement was this statement by Senator Rob Bradley, the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee: "Teachers have made an incredibly positive impact on my life and the lives of my wife and kids," said Senator Rob Bradley. "This session, it's time to say thank you both in word and in deed. I'm proud to stand with Governor Ron DeSantis as we fight for higher pay for Florida teachers."

We do know that the Governor is focused on teachers. We know that because he said that. The Governor also cited free market forces that are creating a shortage of qualified college graduates who are becoming and staying public school teachers.

We know that the Governor is seeking a minimum public school teacher salary of \$47,500 per year.

We know it is projected that this initiative will impact about 101,000 teachers, because the Governor said so.

We know that this initiative will not, in and of itself, impact every teacher, because we know that there are more than 101,000 public school teachers in Florida.

We will see the details of the Governor's proposal when he releases his recommended budget, which is required to be released thirty days before the first day of the regular session of the legislature. That means we should see details by or before December 16, 2019. The Governor can request a delay in the date to release his budget, but Governor DeSantis has been very proactive in creating, promoting, and securing his priorities.

Here are some things we don't know. Included are some things we can infer.

We can infer that the Governor's proposal will not include a statewide raise package for any other public school employees. He spoke only to teachers. He did that because he said he believes that the quality of the classroom teacher is the single most important factor driving student achievement.

The Governor did not speak to other public school personnel. He did not speak about guidance counselors, media specialists, assistant principals, principals, custodial employees, school bus drivers, teacher aides, or any other school employees. Please note that the Governor did not dismiss the importance of any of these employees or their responsibilities. He focused on a single, highest priority position, that of classroom teacher, and he supported that priority based both on the impact of various positions of student achievement and the free market which has declared a shortage of teachers, which demands a market based response.

The Governor did not address the impact of increasing the minimum public school teacher salary to \$47,500 upon other teachers making more than \$47,500, or the disparity of the impact between the increase to be felt by a first year teacher in a district making \$36,000, or a first year teacher in a district making \$45,000, or a 15 year teacher making \$47,300. There has been some discussion about these types of impacts. Most discussions concluded that the responsibility of reconciling these impacts with other salary schedules and with salary schedule differences around the state would reside with local school districts.

The proposal does not address the impacts of local referenda generated revenue for teacher salary improvements which have been approved by voters in several school districts around the state.

The proposal does not speak to differences in costs of living around the state. It seems to contemplate a single minimum salary of \$47,500 in all parts of the state.

It is not clear if a district has higher teacher salaries due to salary revenue from a referendum that it would therefore receive less state revenue directed to increase the minimum teacher salary because it has a higher minimum salary because of the referendum revenue.

The proposal by the Governor must be understood for what it is, which is a proposal by the Governor. Other than veto authority, the Legislature is the sole appropriating authority in the state. Any proposal will have to be written into an appropriations bill and passed by both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Governor DeSantis has been very skillful and effective when working with the Legislature and given the focus he has placed on this priority it is safe to assume he will be actively engaged in the process.

It is not unimportant that the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee participated in the first public announcement. It is very likely that his visible presence shows support by Senate President Bill Galvano. That would seem to signal that the Senate would positively consider the recommendation.

The Miami Herald reported the reaction of Speaker of the House, Representative Jose Oliva. The article reported: "...But the Florida House, typically the more fiscally conservative chamber, may be more skeptical. Republican House Speaker José Oliva of Miami Lakes released a measured statement Monday afternoon, signaling that he is committed to keeping state spending tight "I am in receipt of the governor's statement regarding teacher compensation as I am of the over \$2B (billion) of new spending requests from his agencies," he wrote. "My initial thought is one of gratitude for those who came before us and saw it fit to bind us and all future legislatures to a balanced budget."

It is clear that there will be challenges related to crafting and passing necessary bills.

It is not clear what revenue sources would be used to fund the proposal. It was estimated that the proposal would cost about \$603 million.

However, it is interesting to note that Senator Bradley introduced SB 486 to repeal the Best and Brightest bonus program. The current FEFP contains \$284.5 million for that program. It is also interesting to note that the total funds compression adjustment is set to expire on July 1, 2020. The current FEFP contains about \$54.2 million for that program. Should both of these programs be repealed, it would free up about \$338.7 million of current FEFP funds which could be reinvested into the salary proposal.

It is interesting to note that the current Long Range Financial Outlook's forecast of General Revenue and General Revenue Expenses did not include any funds from the expired Seminole Gaming Compact, which had been generating about \$350 million. If a new compact is agreed to and includes only as much revenue sharing as was shared in prior years, the revenue would be "unencumbered" in the Long Range Financial Outlook and would more than cover the remaining cost of the proposal.