

## Summary of Florida Legislature Special Session

On Wednesday, January 14, the Florida Legislature passed a budget revision for the 2008-09 fiscal year and ended their Special Session. The budget revision was required by the Florida Constitution. Unlike the Federal Government, Florida must have a balanced budget.

The Constitutional requirement to balance the budget could have been met in several ways. Unfortunately, the legislature only looked at budget cuts. Multiple revenue options, such as the Seminole Gaming Compact and Increasing the Cigarette Tax were available, but specifically excluded from the budget discussion by the leadership of the Florida House and Florida Senate.

Miami-Dade County Schools took a significant cut. MDCPS lost \$47.7 Million in the FEFP and another \$900,000 in DCD mitigation funds. This cut is real, but not unexpected. The Governor had warned all districts about this impending cut in November/December in order to give school districts time to prepare. Although a deeper cut was feared, it did not occur.

Although the legislature did not consider additional revenue, they did approve requests for additional flexibility within the budget. Districts have been granted additional opportunities to use Capital Funding to defer some of the cuts to the Operating Budget. The state has also provided school districts additional flexibility for the usage of the Instructional Materials categorical funding.

The initially proposed budget included a particularly nasty provision that would have instituted a new requirement on school districts to maintain a 2% reserve and allowed school districts or the Commissioner of Education to unilaterally open contracts and cut employee salaries in order to balance a budget and provide for an adequate reserve. The United Teachers of Dade and the Florida Education Association fought this provision successfully. Teachers and other education employees should not be taxed in order to fund public education.

We must now turn our attention back to MDCPS. We need to make sure that they take advantage of the additional flexibility they have been granted as they revise the budget. We cannot allow MDCPS to take the cuts out of our salaries.