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The Miami Teachers Union Election

After DeSantis boosts competition, an upstart alternative wants to cut dues and quit politics.

By The Editorial Board [Follow](#)

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Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis PHOTO: DYLAN TOWNSEND/ZUMA PRESS

Florida's biggest teachers union might be about to lose its job, as it faces a certification election under a law signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis. Roughly 24,000 mail ballots went out this month and are due back by Sept. 24. Whatever the result, this is healthy competition, as an upstart alternative pledges to cut dues in half and refrain from politicking.

United Teachers of Dade (UTD) represents school employees in Miami-Dade County. Mr. DeSantis's law, signed last year, requires public unions to prove their popularity to keep power. If a union can't show that 60% of its bargaining unit is

dues-paying members, it must hold an election to keep its certification. Last year UTD came close, 56%, but fell short by about 878. To continue representing Miami teachers, it now needs to win 50% of returned ballots.

Teachers and school staff who don't like UTD can vote for no union, or they can cast ballots for a new group that promises to serve their interests better. That's the Miami-Dade Education Coalition (MDEC), led by teachers dissatisfied with the status quo. UTD members who are full-time teachers pay about \$1,000 a year in dues, and a good chunk goes to affiliates, which include national unions such as the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers.

UTD also makes political endorsements, and no prizes for guessing which party it wants in power. Two years ago UTD's president, Karla Hernández-Mats, even ran for Lieutenant Governor as the running mate of Democrat Charlie Crist, who lost handily to Mr. DeSantis.

MDEC wants to halve dues, keep funds local, and stay out of polarizing politics. "Somebody has to do better than what it is right now," says Renee Zayas, a high-school teacher who is MDEC's vice president. While UTD's leader made more than \$200,000 in 2022, MDEC says it won't pay officers more than the median teacher salary.

To qualify for the ballot, MDEC needed signatures from 10% of the bargaining unit, or 2,368, which it achieved. That's far from the 50% it would take to win the election, and UTD has the advantage of size and organization. But the mere fact that a challenger made the ballot should give UTD pause. "We're getting a lot of teachers that are very excited about finally being able to see a change," says Ms. Zayas.

Mr. DeSantis's law is also having similar effects elsewhere. Dozens of unions have been decertified in the past year, including SEIU and AFSCME affiliates, some of which hadn't managed to sign up more than 25% or even 10% of their eligible workers as dues-paying members, according to a database kept by South Florida public radio site WLRN.

Bringing more worker democracy into union representation, as Mr. DeSantis's law does, isn't anti-union. It's a way of making sure that workers are represented by unions that actually care about their interests.

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Videos

