



FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF DISTRICT SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

2014 Legislative Platform Executive Summary

High quality public schools are critical to Florida's continued economic recovery and growth. To that end, Florida superintendents support a high quality public school accountability system that:

- **graduates students prepared for careers and postsecondary education,**
- **promotes student learning and academic performance,**
- **supports a teacher and school-based administrator evaluation system based upon student achievement and professional practices, and**
- **is fairly and efficiently funded to fully implement all required legislative mandates and Florida State Board of Education (SBE) rules.**

Local Control

Florida superintendents hold fast to the principle that local control is fundamental to establishing, implementing and operating sound education programs for students. Superintendents – working in concert with locally elected governing boards – know their communities well, and are empowered to set educational standards and priorities for their school districts to meet the educational needs of their students. Because superintendents, their local boards and their management staff are accountable to their communities; they must be free from unwarranted intrusion by state and federal authorities.

Florida's Accountability System in Question

The overall purpose of Florida's accountability system must be to improve student performance. There has been so much change in the overall accountability system, including school grades, that Florida is facing a perfect storm. The school grade system changes every year and now, many lack confidence in school grades as a precise measure of a school's performance. The public does not understand a system that celebrates student performance on national assessments, FCAT and statewide end-of-course exams; while the school grading system yields an unprecedented number of schools with grades of "D" or "F" and significant drops overall in school grades.

Florida's current letter grade system takes what should be an understandable, common grading scale and applies multiple, ever-changing criteria that force a school grade that may not accurately reflect the teaching and learning that is experienced by students in the school. In order to move Florida's accountability system forward, we need to pause and revamp the accountability system and regain the trust of the public and the students we serve.

Develop and Implement a Realistic Transition Plan for Successful Implementation of Common Core

Superintendents strongly support Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Full implementation is a multi-year effort of intense professional development and adoption of curriculum that is aligned to the standards. A realistic transition plan is critical until the assessment and accountability/school grading system are fully and accurately aligned.

- **Align New CCSS Assessment to Standards and School Grading System.** The new state-wide assessment must be aligned to the standards and school grading system; provide cross-state comparability, and produce accurate, timely results. Until there is an aligned statewide assessment, the credibility of Florida's accountability system including school grades will continue to be at risk.

- **District Developed End-of-Course (EOCs) Exams.** Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, each school district must administer a student assessment that measures content mastery for each course. Such assessments may include state-wide assessments, other standardized assessments, industry certification examinations, and district-developed or selected EOC assessments. While many districts have made strides in development of local assessments, including EOCs; most districts will not be able to comply.
- **Teacher Evaluation/Pay for Performance.** The Student Success Act or SB 736 radically changed the relationship between school districts and teachers by authorizing only an annual contract to teachers hired after July 1, 2011. New salary schedules incorporating student performance as a major part of compensation must be fully implemented in the 2014-2015 school year. While a strong teacher and school-based administrator evaluation system based on performance is supported by superintendents; implementation of all the required elements of the Student Success Act within the statutory timeframe is problematic at best. Additionally, performance pay should be based on an evaluation system that is flexible and utilizes assessments that accurately and fairly measure student performance.
- **Amend Florida Statutes to Implement Alignment and Transition to Common Core.** Florida Statutes must be amended to reflect a transition plan to a new accountability and school grading system using the new Common Core Standards. At a minimum, this includes modifying SB 1664, SB 736, and possibly SB 1076.

Identify Needed Modifications in NCLB Waiver

The state accountability system must not be structured in a manner that hinders the success of Exceptional Student Education (ESE) and English Language Learners (ELL). Modifications are needed in the NCLB waiver to address the impact on ESE and ELL students. These students must be treated fairly and given the opportunity to succeed. In addition, the school grading system must fairly reflect the performance of these students.

Choice Programs

The growing number of choice options has impacted the ability of districts to appropriately fund all of the choices made available to students. Funding for choice programs is capped at 1.0 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) which is just 25 hours a week or 5 hours a day of funding. The exponential growth of virtual and dual enrollment programs resulted in a modification of the funding formula that will ripple through the entire public school program. Maintaining equitable funding for students within a funding formula is a challenge that must be recognized and addressed.

Career and Adult Education

A high quality technical education system is critical to Florida's recovery and continued growth. The new statewide assessment must be aligned to the standards and school grading system; provide cross-state comparability, and produce accurate, timely results. The recent passage of CAPE legislation and increased standards that will ultimately impact adult education, call for renewed interest in and support for technical education. The technical centers have the ability to be market driven, responsive to business and industry needs, cost effective and focused on results. To better meet the needs of students and business, technical centers should be authorized to award college credit when appropriate, award AAS degrees or College Credit Certificates and adopt the name technical college, upon approval of the local school board.

Charter Schools

Since its inception in 1996, the charter school statute has been amended almost annually. Legislation enacted in 2013 incorporated some accountability measures to address financial excesses of charter school operators. As part of that legislation, FLDOE is required to recommend a standard contract as required use by sponsors and charter schools. However, flexibility must be maintained for sponsors and charter schools to craft a contract that addresses the needs of the students and local community. At a minimum, addenda to contracts must be maintained.

District Innovation Schools of Technology

The Legislature authorized the establishment of district innovation schools of technology by school boards. These schools afford school districts the same flexibility provided charter schools. As districts plan to implement these schools, greater flexibility is needed to ensure their success. For example, fewer districts can establish these schools because of the drop in district grades as a result of the drop in school grades. To participate, a district must have had a grade of “A” or “B” in each of the past 3 years.

Public Education Funding Challenges

School superintendents have been leaders in adapting to adversity and implementing measures to continue providing a quality education to Florida’s public school students. The \$1 billion funding increase in operating dollars helped districts begin a financial recovery from the Great Recession; however, challenges remain.

Two policy changes have impacted the availability of funds to school districts this year. The Legislature has established that no student may generate funding that exceeds 1.0 FTE per student per year. Consequently, if a student takes more courses or is enrolled in a program that exceeds 1.0 FTE (25 hours a week), the cost is prorated across the courses or programs that are provided funding for that five hours per day. Funding for students enrolled in the Florida Virtual School is now prorated across the services and programs in which students are enrolled.

In addition, changes in the law concerning dual enrollment will require districts to pay millions of dollars to the colleges to provide this program, payments that had not been required in the past. School districts are now required to pay tuition for students taking dual enrollment courses on college campuses, pay the cost of instructors if taught on public school campuses and pay additional costs to colleges. School districts were not budgeted for this change.

Funding Recommendations

The 2013 budget represents the first post-recession budget with all of the temporary budget supports of federal stimulus and reduced FRS rates removed. The following recommendations are made within this economic context and in recognition of the continued constitutional and legislative mandates on school districts.

General Operations

- Establish a separate funding source for programs taken by students beyond the 1.0 FTE cap or 25 hours a week.
- Repeal the requirement that school districts pay tuition for dual enrollment and authorize school districts to share the costs within the articulation agreements at the local level.
- Increase the Base Student Allocation to accurately reflect student growth and inflation.
- Begin addressing the gaps within budget categories such as transportation, instructional materials and school safety.
- Recognize that the \$480 million set aside for teacher raises is now part of the base budget. Any substantial salary increases must be funded by increasing the Base Student Allocation or continuing the salary categorical.
- Determine the cost of required improvements in technology infrastructure and devices, and fund technology needs required by legislative action in all policy areas, including infrastructure and maintenance, for online assessments and delivery of instruction.
- Establish separate additional funding for the extra hour in the school day for the 100 lowest performing schools in reading.
- Fund teacher and school-based administrator professional development requirements for the continued implementation of common core standards and new assessment requirements.
- Provide general operating dollars without any additional mandates in order for districts to implement and sustain new performance salary schedules.

Capital Outlay

- Funding for maintenance and repair of district operated public schools and for the technology needed for instruction and assessment is critical. School boards should be authorized, by a super majority vote, to levy a discretionary millage of up to .5 mills to address these needs.
- Capital outlay funds for charter schools should only be provided through a separate statewide funding source and distributed only based on demonstrated need with provisions made to insure that the taxpayers acquire an asset for their investment and the need for public disaster shelter requirements are met.
- Any local discretionary capital improvement funds provided to charter school facilities and capital equipment must continue to have the consent of the local school board.