



FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF DISTRICT SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

2016 LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Florida superintendents support increased rigor and academic standards that are data-driven with the goal of providing every student the same opportunity for educational excellence. Florida superintendents support an assessment system that is aligned to Florida's standards and, concurrently, does not unduly disrupt valuable instructional time for all students. Florida superintendents support a high-quality public education 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 that is fair and 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 DECISION-MAKING

Florida Superintendents hold fast to the principle that local decision-making is fundamental to establishing, implementing and operating sound education programs for students. Superintendents – working in concert with locally elected school boards – know their communities well, and are empowered to set educational priorities for their school districts to meet the educational needs of their students. Superintendents and their local school boards are accountable to their communities.

FLORIDA'S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM – CHALLENGES REMAIN

Florida's school districts have been transitioning to a new accountability system over the past several years. Throughout this transition, this system has also been modified as education stakeholders, communities and parents have weighed in on the implementation of new education standards, assessments, and school grades. During the 2015-2016 school year, school districts will continue to implement an accountability system in transition and must:

- Implement Florida State Standards across all grades and subjects.
- Expand the computer based administration of the Florida Standards Assessment.
- Implement a new school grading system.
- Implement a new salary schedule incorporating student performance as a major component of compensation.
- Expand the use of technology in the classroom and for online assessments while having neither the required infrastructure nor devices.

While the 2015 Legislature recognized many of the challenges faced by superintendents and school districts and provided significant relief through various legislation, challenges associated with the transition to a new assessment and accountability system still remain. The multitude of changes to Florida's accountability system over the past several years – regardless of intention – have resulted in a continual erosion of Florida accountability system. Superintendents continue to call for a comprehensive review of the accountability system in its entirety to ensure the system is working as designed to improve student performance and inform instruction.

FLORIDA STANDARDS ASSESSMENT

The initial administration of the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) in spring 2015 was extremely challenging and frustrating for everyone involved – students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The comprehensive problems encountered throughout the testing window raised legitimate doubt of the validity and reliability of the test results. While students may have ultimately completed the tests, it is impossible to know the full extent to which the administration failures have affected their scores.

TRANSITION TO A NEW GRADING SYSTEM

Calculating school grades utilizing the results of the spring 2015 administration of the FSA is, at best, unrealistic and, at most, misleading. The 2015 school grades will be issued using incomplete data by depending on traditional criteria (proficiency) and excluding learning gains, which is a key component of the school grades calculation. As we move forward, special attention needs to be given to learning gains so that a year's growth in a year's time is considered a "learning gain." At the end of the day, school grades should inform instruction; not further erode a floundering accountability system.

IMPACT ON EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION (ESE)

All students with disabilities participate in the statewide assessment program including the FSA and end of course exams. The educational standards for ESE students must be rigorous and, at the same time, take into account the challenges these students and their parents face. The state accountability system must not be structured in a manner that could potentially hinder their success. In addition, the school grading system must fairly reflect the performance of these students.

CLASS SIZE REDUCTION

Legislation revising the method of calculating the penalty for schools that fail to comply with the class size requirements at the school average instead of the classroom level has almost passed in the last two sessions. The penalty for charter schools, district-operated schools of choice, and district innovation schools is already calculated at the school level instead of the classroom level. Additionally, public schools and programs of choice are treated, for class size purposes, the same as charter schools. The calculation for compliance with maximum class size is the average number of students at the school level. This provision, which treats public school choice programs and schools the same as charter schools, must continue if the legislation revising the penalty calculation is not successful.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

A high quality career and technical education system continues to be critical to Florida's economic growth and expansion. Florida's public postsecondary technical institutions are an integral part of this system and provide the necessary training to meet the shortage of skilled workers in Florida.

FLORIDA HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS ASSOCIATION (FHSA)

The governance and oversight of high school athletics is under the purview of the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSA). The regulation of high school athletics has become more difficult as sports have become a gateway to postsecondary colleges and professional sports; combined with the growth of choice programs for students. Any modifications to the FHSA governance structure and/or requirements for high school athletics should be carefully considered for unintended consequences for both students and access to sports.

CHOICE PROGRAMS

Charter Schools

Since the inception of charter schools in Florida in 1996, charter schools were offered as a means to provide students and their parents with programmatic options that were not available in regular public schools. Today, many charter schools are not innovative, but rather duplicate educational programs that are already offered by regular public schools. Districts should be authorized to deny charter applications that either do not meet a need expressed by the local district and when sufficient student stations are available to meet students' needs in existing public schools. Moreover, additional measures should be put into statute to ensure educational, fiscal, and operational accountability of charter schools.

Scholarship or Voucher Programs

Superintendents support public school choice, yet have serious concerns about the lack of educational accountability, fiscal accountability, and transparency to the public as to the quality of services being provided to these students with taxpayer dollars.

NEW LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

The Legislature established and funded two new programs in 2015 – the **Best and Brightest Teacher Scholarship Program** and the **Standard Student Attire Incentive Fund** – both of which require additional scrutiny regarding implementation. Prior to continued funding, the Legislature should evaluate both these programs to determine implementation issues, identify program deficiencies, determine whether programs goals and objectives have been met, and recommend whether each program should continue.

ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES PROGRAM

Funding for the Adults with Disabilities Program has decreased over time from approximately \$20 million overall to just over \$9 million for school districts in the 2014-2015 school year. The Legislature did not fund the program for this current school year. Superintendents recommend that this program be funded in order to continue to serve these vulnerable adults with programs that improve their quality of life.

SCHOOL SAFETY

The safety of students is a paramount concern to school superintendents. For many students, school is a refuge and a safe haven for learning. Funding for safe schools has not caught up to prerecession levels and is almost \$13 million less than was appropriated by the Legislature for the 2007-2008 fiscal year. School districts are supplementing this program from general operating dollars to fund school resource officers and other school safety measures.

PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING – CHALLENGES CONTINUE

General Funding for Students

The Legislature recognized the importance of public education as the foundation for economic recovery and growth in Florida by appropriating more dollars for public education – even through the Great Recession. However, while overall funding has steadily increased over the past several years, it still continues to lag when compared to funding by the Legislature before the recession began. The Base Student Allocation (BSA) is still down by \$9 when compared to the Legislative appropriation in May 2007. At the start of the 2007-2008 school year, funding per student was \$7,305.79. The current budget for this year provided \$7,096.96 per student, representing \$208.83 less per student to operate Florida public schools eight years later.

As a final comparison, through 2013, Florida is ranked in the bottom quintile in per pupil spending when compared to the national average of \$10,700. In addition, Florida has also seen an increase of almost 150,000 students in the intervening eight years.

Additionally, the impact of two funding policy changes implemented in the last two years has further reduced the availability of funds to school districts: (1) 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; and (2) school districts are now required to pay tuition to state colleges and universities for students taking dual enrollment courses on college campuses.

Flexibility and Funding to implement the “Lowest 300” Elementary Schools

Learning to read is the gateway skill for students to be successful in school and life. Superintendents support the requirement to provide an additional hour of reading instruction beyond the regular school day at the state’s lowest 300 elementary schools in terms of reading test scores – but flexibility in program delivery and additional funding is needed. While the Supplemental Academic Instruction (SAI) and Reading Instruction categorical funds are used for this purpose, the Legislature has not provided the funding to meet all of the needs and programs identified in these categorical programs.

Capital Funds to Meet Maintenance and Technology Demands

Facility Maintenance – School buildings are a critical public asset. Florida school districts comprise over 425 million square feet of facilities. Schools represent a public asset of \$85 billion based on an average cost of construction of \$200 per square foot. As of June 30, 2013, the average age of Florida’s schools was 28 years old. Preventative maintenance, repairs, and the upkeep or replacement of building systems (i.e. HVAC, lighting, school safety) is critical to ensure these public schools are quality places for students to learn. Failure to do so will eventually lead to the premature replacement of failed buildings at an increased cost to taxpayers.

Technology Demands – Technology is an essential instructional and assessment tool in today’s public schools. Adequate bandwidth, infrastructure, computers and other devices must be accessible for students to learn and teachers to teach. Fortunately, the Legislature included \$60 million in the Digital Classrooms funding categorical. However, considering the current enrollment of almost 2.8 million students, this represents less than \$50 per student.

Millage Authority – Superintendents support the restoration of discretionary millage authority in order to help districts meet capital outlay needs. The restored authority will go a long way towards addressing maintenance needs that have been delayed.

PECO Funds – PECO funds for new school construction have also declined significantly in recent years. The Legislature has restored some PECO funding, but it is inadequate to meet local needs. Superintendents support the issuance of PECO bonds to support school construction, the Special Facility Construction Program (rural schools), and technology.