

May 17, 2017

Rick Scott, Governor
Office of the Governor
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor Scott:

On behalf of the School District of Manatee County's approximately 49,000 students and 7,000 employees, and in the best interest of public education in the state of Florida – I strongly urge you to veto HB 7069.

While I endorse and support all of the points outlined in a letter to you from the Florida Association of District School Superintendents – which also asks you to veto HB 7069 – I wanted to directly address three specific areas that will have an adverse impact on the School District of Manatee County if this bill passes into law.

First, the proposed state changes to how school districts in Florida use federal Title I funding would have a negative affect on our ability to directly address the needs of our community's most disadvantaged children. Right now, we expect to have 25 Title I schools in our district for the 2017-2018 school year. If HB 7069 is signed into law, the number of Title I schools in Manatee County could surge to 36 schools, a move which would severely dilute our ability to meet the needs of students who need the most help.

Changes in the application of Title I funding would also negate some of our school district's most innovative programs.

Two years ago, our district initiated a unique new program that placed an employee in each Title I school to specifically address the problem of chronic absences. We named those employees Graduation Enhancement Technicians (GETs) and their task was to work with families of students who were chronically absent to determine the causes of absenteeism and to help find solutions. In the first year of the program, our district was able to reduce the number of chronically absent students in our Title I schools by 50 percent.

The dissolution of our Title I funds would also force us to drop programs designed to help children of poverty avoid a "summer slide" in educational skills, such as our Camp RISE (Reading Inspired Summer Experience) and our Camp SNAP (Science and Nature Adventure Program).

Secondly, the provision in HB 7069 that would require school districts to share their discretionary capital millage with charter schools would be extremely burdensome on the School District of Manatee County.

Like many districts across the state, our district had to defer badly needed maintenance and costly repairs of existing schools during the Great Recession. Only now are we getting to a point where we can adequately address those long-awaited needs. In addition, our district is growing by 800 to 1,000 students per year the last four years and we are now in a position where we must build new schools to accommodate that growth to relieve overcrowding. We begin construction on a new high school this summer and are in the planning stages for a new middle school and a new elementary school.

Having to share the discretionary capital millage would almost certainly force us to further delay important maintenance and repair needs or postpone plans for new schools, forcing more public school students into portable classrooms. Neither of those choices is good for our students or community.

Finally, the fact that the base allocation funding for each student will be reduced by \$27.07 will result in a loss of at least \$1.5 million to the School District of Manatee County.

That a financial loss of this magnitude would come at a time when our student population is growing and more and more demands for academic improvement are being laid on the backs of our students and teachers, is at best disheartening, and at worst, negligent.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize again that I stand united with other school superintendents across the state in supporting the objections outlined in a letter to you from the Florida Association of District School Superintendents.

Please hear our voices. Please stand up for Florida's public schools. Please veto HB 7069.

Respectfully,

Dr. Diana Greene