



Vision:
100% Student Success

Mission:
"Educate and prepare each student for college, career and life."

May 12, 2017

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

Dear Governor Scott:

In the six years you have served as Florida's governor, you have not faced a more critical decision for the protection and welfare of our children, families and public education system than the one before you with HB 7069 and the proposed FEFP budget. I urge you, on behalf of the Pinellas County School Board and the more than 100,000 families we serve, to veto both HB 7069 and the proposed FEFP budget. Vetoes to both are equally important. In taking these actions, you can provide our elected officials a strong message to adequately fund our children and teachers. A veto of both will free more than \$430 million for incorporation into the FEFP budget, bringing educational funding in line with your original proposal to the State Legislature.

This action is necessary to appropriately fund the growth and needs of K-12 public education in Florida and set policies that will improve our public schools. The creation and approvals of HB 7069 and the FEFP were mired in politics without a focus on the needs, desires and will of Florida's citizens. Doing what is right for the more than 2.7 million children in Florida's public schools should not be a partisan issue.

Under the leadership of Education Commissioner Pam Stewart, Florida's public schools have seen consistent improvements in student achievement even with increases in educational standards. HB 7069 includes a misguided provision that would send approximately \$140 million to private charter companies outside of Florida and allow them to employ uncertified teachers and administrators in their Florida operations. We've already seen private charters shutter their doors in Pinellas after failing to raise student achievement in high poverty areas or after misappropriating taxpayer dollars. Our students will be better served if we maintain high standards and continue to invest in the strategies driving favorable results in the state's most struggling schools. Florida has seen the number of F schools drop from 191 in 2014 to 110 in 2016. That's a 42.4 percent decrease in two years. I am confident there will be another decrease in 2017 in the state overall and in Pinellas. In support of our most struggling schools, we in Pinellas created a Transformation Zone focused on providing resources and support to improve student achievement in our lowest performing schools. The academic growth of

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students in the Transformation Zone is outpacing most schools in Florida. This progress can be replicated instead of ignored.

The provision in HB 7069 to provide a one-time bonus based on evaluations disregards the performance pay programs already implemented in each district with consensus building, school board approval and approval from the state Department of Education. This unsustainable method of compensating teachers undermines the process set forth by the state and overlooks the thousands of other school-based employees integral to a school district's success. A non-recurring bonus also does not enhance the work districts do to recruit and retain quality teachers.

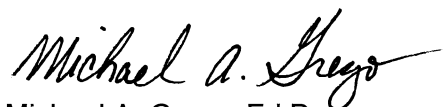
The proposal in HB 7069 requiring districts to share local capital outlay millage funds with charter schools, reduced by existing debt service, unfairly punishes school districts, such as Pinellas, that have exercised fiscal restraint over the years and have very little outstanding debt. In Pinellas we would lose more than double per student compared to other large districts that have incurred higher debt service. For example, Pinellas' charter school per student allocation would amount to approximately \$1,100 per student as opposed to other districts' allocations of approximately \$500 per student. I am disappointed the Legislature is proposing this inequitable and punitive provision. If this legislation is enacted, it will result in the elimination of approximately \$30 million of already planned and much needed school facility renovations allocated within the current five-year capital outlay plan for Pinellas County Schools. Examples of renovation projects that may be impacted include Cypress Woods Elementary School, St. Petersburg High School, Starkey Elementary School, Clearwater High School, Belleair Elementary School, Ponce de Leon Elementary School, Northeast High School, Seminole High School and Tyrone Middle School.

The provision in HB 7069 amending the Title I funding allocation process would result in a potential reduction in services to our neediest schools. In our Transformation Zone schools, which have experienced improved student performance, the district may not have the flexibility to maintain the resources necessary for a sustained increase in student achievement. If HB 7069 is enacted, Pinellas will be forced to eliminate, among other things, approximately 25 instructional coaches and 82 paraprofessionals who currently support our lowest performing students. The proposed allocation process would also result in a supplemental funding reduction to our Summer Bridge program, a six-week summer program helping to narrow achievement gaps.

HB 7069 is replete with problematic legislation. Lawmakers that voted in favor of it have stated revisions will be needed, a clear indication that this legislation should not move forward. Additionally, this legislation does not do what a conforming bill is meant to do: amend statutes to provide for specific changes in the general appropriations bill. The proposed per student funding contained in the 2017-18 FEFP is less than that contained in the 2007-08 fiscal year. With that level of funding, the district would be forced to reduce positions and programs.

You have long been a champion of public schools. In January, Pinellas County Schools urged members of the State Legislature to adopt your proposed education budget. Unfortunately the State Legislature chose a different course of action, one that threatens the well-being of students attending public schools throughout Florida. On behalf of the students, teachers, parents and School Board of Pinellas County, I ask that you continue to be an advocate for public schools and veto House Bill 7069 and the proposed FEFP budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael A. Grego".

Michael A. Grego, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Pinellas County Schools

Cc: Pinellas County School Board
Pam Stewart, Commissioner, Florida Department of Education
Senator Bill Montford, Chief Executive Officer, Florida Association of District School Superintendents