

FLORIDA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION, INC

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★ 2009 FSBA Legislative Platform ★

PRIORITIES FOR THE 2009 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The Florida School Boards Association endorses the report of the bi-partisan Constitutional Accountability Commission calling for the state to fulfill its constitutional obligation to the children of Florida to provide a “uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education.” In pursuit of accomplishing this paramount duty, the Florida School Boards Association urges the Legislature to:

- ✧ Identify new state revenue sources to be used to increase the state’s proportionate share of education funding, to restore funding for cuts during the 2007-2008 fiscal year, to avoid additional cuts to education funding, and to fulfill the state’s promise to hold school districts harmless from the effects of property tax initiatives;
- ✧ Support a constitutional amendment to provide that “The state shall not mandate or assign any new, expanded or modified programs or responsibilities to any political subdivision in such a way as to necessitate additional local expenditures by the political subdivision unless such programs or responsibilities are fully funded by the state or unless such programs or responsibilities are approved for funding by a vote of the local legislative body of the political subdivision”;
- ✧ Suspend class size requirements and related statutory sanctions for non-compliance, and require a financial impact study for the costs of class size implementation to date to be presented to the Legislature no later than the beginning of the 2010 Legislative Session;
- ✧ Restore the full optional district 2 mill capital outlay levy, remove all restrictions on the use of this local revenue, and ensure full flexibility for districts to pay property and casualty insurance costs from the proceeds of this levy;
- ✧ Provide school districts with maximum flexibility in designing the school calendar, including flexibility to set the school start date and to determine the number of school days per week and per year.

POSITIONS ON ISSUES OF CONTINUING CONCERN

FUNDING

FSBA believes that a strong and consistent financial investment in education is critical to the success of public schools. Such an investment must be stable, equitable, and sufficient to meet the needs of all students. At a minimum, education appropriations must fully fund enrollment and inflation costs, and must not shift funding responsibilities to school districts.

The Base Student Allocation must be increased to provide for enrollment, price level inflation, adequate and competitive increases to teacher and other employee salaries, and quality academic program improvements. The state must also develop and implement an adequate statewide funding system for workforce education programs, including the restoration of cost factors for career education for students in grades 6-8. In addition, the state should require a study to determine the additional costs of providing state of the art education in high school career academies.

Full funding must be provided for transportation. At the same time, the definition of hazardous walking conditions should be updated so that middle and high school students are eligible for the same level of safety and FTE funding as elementary school students.

Statutes relating to District Millage Elections should be modified to allow school districts to renew a voted ad valorem tax millage for operations for a period of 10 years.

FACILITIES AND PLANNING

FSBA believes that adequate funding for a sufficient number of well constructed and well equipped school facilities is essential to excellence in education. Ample, equitable, and stable funding must be provided to ensure that school facilities offer environments that incorporate new technology, encourage and enhance teaching and learning, and allow for teacher to student ratios that are in keeping with class size reduction initiatives.

Student capacity formulas must accurately reflect the number of available student stations in a manner that is consistent with legislative policies regarding class size reduction, school concurrency, the use of portable classrooms, and all instructional programs requirements. Furthermore, the methodology for calculating statutory costs per student station must be modified to better reflect the added costs inherent to inflation, technology, regional cost considerations, and related factors.

Adequate funding must be provided for hardening of facilities that serve as emergency shelters, for replacement and repairs due to storm damage, and for operational costs associated with the operation of emergency shelters before, during, and after storms.

The Legislature must oppose any efforts to cap, reduce, eliminate, or direct the distribution of school impact fees. In addition, recent changes regarding the composition and legal counsel for Value Adjustment Boards should be repealed.

ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Work must continue on both the federal and state level to improve alignment of the federal No Child Left Behind Act with Florida's A+ Accountability system so they are consistent, accommodate individual student needs, and accurately reflect student achievement and progress.

In determining school grades, scores of students new to the district should be excluded until both performance scores and learning gain scores are available for these students. Further, recent revisions to the high school grade formula, including the imposition of new sanctions, should be delayed until the 2010-2011 school year.

The statewide administration of the FCAT must be scheduled as late as possible in the school year. Test scores, content, and scoring methodology should be annually reviewed by an independent review team. Furthermore, publishers must be required to share FCAT test item banks when requested by districts.

Steps must be taken to fully implement the legislative intent to use verifiable alternative assessments as an alternative to FCAT in measuring and rating student progress by individual student, teacher, school, and district. Student learning gains must be diagnosed, monitored, and measured during the same school year.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS, SCHOOL CHOICE, AND VOUCHERS

Florida's citizens, economy, and general welfare are best served through the provision of the highest quality public educational programs that are tailored to the general and individual needs of all students – pre-kindergarten through adult.

Enhancements to the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program are needed to ensure alignment with the recommendations of the Universal Pre-Kindergarten Education Advisory Council. Sufficient funding must be provided to ensure that all eligible students are able to participate and are appropriately served. At the same time, statewide articulation agreements must be established so that dual enrollment credit will transfer to all state higher education institutions. Further, district personnel, district consortia, all interested vendors, and other stakeholders must be involved in the design and development of model virtual school program offerings.

All statutory provisions relating to the Florida Schools of Excellence Commission must be repealed. Further, the result of an appeal of a charter school application to the State Board of Education must not be binding on the school district. In addition, all charter school contracts must include provisions requiring the reversion of the facility to the school district and/or the recapture of any state or local investment in the facility.

FSBA remains steadfast in opposition to voucher programs. The statutory provisions enacting voucher programs must be repealed and the programs phased out. In the interim, consistent accountability and funding standards must be implemented for the students and non-public schools participating in these programs.

PERSONNEL

FSBA recognizes that excellence in student achievement depends greatly upon having dedicated educators who are highly skilled, thoroughly trained, and fairly compensated. In order to attract and retain topnotch instructional and administrative personnel, each school district must have the control and flexible use of adequate funds for locally bargained competitive salaries, professional development, and programs to support and mentor personnel.

Full funding must be restored for application assistance and for appropriate bonuses for teachers who apply for and obtain National Board Certification. In addition, full supplements must be restored for teachers whose students successfully complete algebra before high school and for students who successfully complete AP, IB, and other similar advanced programs.

A new, dedicated funding source must be identified to provide a full-time nurse in every public school.

LOCAL CONTROL AND GOVERNANCE

The Legislature must not encroach on the constitutional authority of elected school boards to “supervise, operate and control” public schools.

To increase operating efficiency and to reduce costs, school districts must be provided maximum flexibility in designing the school calendar, including flexibility to set the school start date and to determine the number of school days per week and per year. School districts must also have flexibility in implementing zero tolerance policies and age appropriate remedies for violations, including taking intent into consideration.

The Legislature should support state funding for the training of school board members. Such training should include legal mandates, best practices, open government, and other areas of expertise to assist elected school board members to fully serve the needs of the students in their districts.

FSBA FEDERAL RELATIONS NETWORK PLATFORM

FSBA urges Congress to:

- ✧ Involve all appropriate stakeholder groups in the design, development, and implementation of state Differentiated Accountability Models.
- ✧ Support grants and other funding for “Green School” projects.
- ✧ Improve the No Child Left Behind Act as proposed by NSBA.
- ✧ Increase federal funding for education, including funding for critical programs like Title I and federally-mandated programs like IDEA.
- ✧ Strengthen teacher quality by assisting schools and districts in the recruitment, support and retention of quality teachers through incentives, NCLB reauthorization, and Higher Education reauthorization.
- ✧ Expand and improve early education by creating a new federal grant program to develop, expand and sustain voluntary, universal preschool programs.
- ✧ Protect and strengthen the E-rate Program by opposing any attempts to undermine or de-fund it.
- ✧ Stop any efforts to prevent school districts from claiming reimbursement for administrative and transportation expenses in connection with services they provide to Medicaid-eligible children with disabilities.
- ✧ Oppose any effort to subsidize private school tuition with taxpayer dollars via vouchers and tuition tax credits.
- ✧ Provide assistance to school districts to strengthen math, science and technology programs.
- ✧ Support locally-developed strategies to improve student nutrition without expanding federal mandates or regulations that dictate nutrition standards to local school districts.