

# 2010 Preliminary State Legislative Priorities

## August, 2009 (work document)

### Treasure Coast School Districts

(Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, Palm Beach, St. Lucie)

#### **Guiding Principles**

- K-12 Education is a paramount duty of the state pursuant to Article IX of Florida's Constitution;
- Improvement of economic development cannot occur with a reduction of educational dollars and services to support business recruitment/retention;
- The state needs to raise its resources to be internationally competitive, not decrease its financial support for education and workforce programs.

#### **1. Funding**

Florida school districts underwent an unprecedented three-consecutive legislative years of revenue reductions caused by sharply declining sales and other state taxes plus lottery dollars. The state's Florida Education Finance Program is now majority-funded by local property taxes (53-47% ratio).

The advent of \$907,000,000 in federal State Fiscal Stabilization Funds (SFSF) prevented a serious loss for FY10. These federal stimulus dollars go away, however, in 2011.

It is imperative the legislators during the regular 2010 session approve funding--and if necessary, revenue--mechanisms that will not only compensate for the loss of federal dollars, but make up for the continuing decline of state sales tax and local property tax dollars for Prek-12 schools.

- Move Florida from the nation's bottom quartile (35<sup>th</sup> at best according to 2010 US Census data for 2006-2007 expenditures by state) so that the state will meet its constitutional mandate of Article IX, Section 1, of adequate funding for all children and free public schools.
- Increase the Base Student Allocation (BSA) to provide adequate and competitive increases for enrollment, price level inflation, teacher and other employee salaries and to provide quality academic program improvements to enhance student achievements, consistent with Article IX, Section 1 of the Florida Constitution which makes it "a paramount duty of the state to make provision for the education of all children residing within its borders."

## **2. Class Size Reduction (CSR)**

Current constitutional law requires CSR at class level in 2010. In 2008, the Florida Board of Education estimated class level cost for FY10, a year earlier, at an **additional** \$823 million over FY09 expenditures. Coupled with issues in 1., above, Florida not only has insufficient revenues, but successful implementation with an absolute cap in each class (core content) is very questionable, given 1) that students move around within and among counties and 2) Florida has strict rules related to pupil assignment under school concurrency.

For FY11, the Legislature should return to the voters with a referendum modification in November, 2010, to either freeze CSR at the current school average with no caps, or ask for an extension of 4-5 years for full implementation when state coffers may be better suited to pay for class caps. Meanwhile, FCAT scores appear to validate research that says class size makes a difference in elementary, but not secondary schools. such should be documented and validated during an interim extension.

## **3. Accountability with Flexibility**

Prudent business practice requires common goals, but flexibility among the implementers to achieve those, particularly without undue restriction.

- The 2010 Florida Legislature needs to review the 1800+ pages of Florida Statutes to remove those that micromanage school districts and give flexibility in the use of total potential state/local dollars to meet A+ and FCAT accountability requirements. Categorical funds are good and support our programs, but come with too many strings, particularly in the areas of Supplemental Academic Instruction (SAI) and reading.
- Second, the State of Florida, constitutionally or legislatively, must subscribe to specified funding for all mandates. Recommended is adoption of language in New Hampshire's Constitution:

***Art.] 28-a. [Mandated Programs.] 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. (November 28, 1984)***

- Differentiated accountability (HB991, 2009) should be kept at current levels until such time as Congress reauthorizes the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act (ESEA) so that districts are not placed, again, in a position of having to serve two masters measuring student and school performance.

## **4 Other Issues**

Rather than to duplicate efforts, the Treasure Coast Workgroup endorses the legislative programs of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents and the Florida School Boards Association for 2010.

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