

Budget, Personnel Reassignments, DROP, Decentralized Decision Making and Open Enrollment
By Julie M. Janssen, Ed.D.

As we enter the final days of the school year, I want to take a moment to thank each of you for your hard work and for what you have done for your students, your schools and the district this year. A special thank you to all the teachers, administrators and support staff members at Clearview Avenue, Gulf Beaches, Kings Highway, Madeira Beach, North Ward, Palm Harbor and Rio Vista elementary schools and Coachman, Kennedy, Madeira Beach and Southside middle schools for your many years of service at each of these schools. Generations of students and their families have benefitted from your dedication and for that we are most appreciative. You helped make Pinellas County Schools one of the top school districts in the state. I wish each of you much success as you bring your many talents and skills to a new school home.

Now that the legislative session has concluded, we are better able to move through the budget process. The legislature funded K-12 education for 2009-10 at about the same rate as the current level of funding. The small increase of \$25.92 per student in Pinellas does not make up the \$14.8-million cut resulting from the January 2009 Special Session plus another reduction of \$4.5-million. Our district will start the next fiscal year in July with a \$13.7-million decrease (mostly due to declining student enrollment) if no other revenue is generated through a property tax option. The federal stabilization funds of \$36-million have helped but there are some restrictions in how those funds can be spent. I know many of you are awaiting word about a number of budget-related decisions as they pertain to job assignments for next year and possible furlough days. We are still discussing the perimeters and possible solutions surrounding these issues and will get word to you as soon as final decisions are made.

Our Human Resources Department continues to identify instructional vacancies and those affected by involuntary transfers. A Placement Fair is scheduled for Friday, June 5, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. at Pinellas Park High School and Morgan Fitzgerald Middle School. Additional information with a detailed explanation of the process has been sent to schools. If positions are available after involuntary transfers are placed, we will consider voluntary transfers. Details regarding the voluntary transfer process (application, postings, etc.) will be shared before June 4.

Two Supporting Services Placement Fairs are scheduled for June 17 and 23 at Osceola High School, from 8 a.m. -5 p.m. Employees will be notified about which day they should attend. Our intent is to notify affected employees as soon as we have firm numbers but well before the Placement Fair. Representatives from pTEC, risk management, WorkNet Pinellas, Employee Assistance Program, and other outside resources will be in attendance. Please be assured that we will be working individually with every employee impacted by the reductions. As we go through these difficult times, I appreciate your continued support and patience. We hope to have the final decisions made very soon.

Guidelines for DROP (Deferred Retirement Option Program) extension requests and requests for re-employment following DROP for administrators have been sent out to schools and departments. Extensions and rehires for those who complete DROP will be handled after the district has reassigned all of our displaced employees and we have identified vacancies that cannot be filled through the transfer process. Requests must be signed by the immediate supervisor and must provide a rationale for the request. Employees will not be guaranteed reassignment to their same position but may be assigned based on the needs of the district. Instructional employees will be authorized to return at step 8 on the PCTA salary schedule and administrators will be returned at their current salary or the midpoint of the range to which they return, whichever is lower.

Requests must be submitted to Dr. Ron Stone, Associate Superintendent for Human Resources not later than Friday, May 29, 2009.

At the May 12 school board meeting, board members unanimously approved the first reading of a decentralized decision making (DDM) policy. The policy defines decision-making as a process of empowering parents, teachers, school principals and community members in a spirit of collaboration with the authority and responsibility to make decisions at the school level. The successful implementation of DDM involves a number of key initiatives – professional development, establishing parameters for which decisions will remain at the district level, which will remain with the principal and which will be made by a shared decision-making team at the school. Next year, a number of schools will be piloting this system and we'll learn from their experiences as we go forward. Ultimately, I believe this will positively affect student achievement across the district.

Planning for the new school year is well underway. Our schools have been registering new students for weeks. We are urging all parents of incoming kindergarteners to register by June 4 before school personnel leave for summer break. The summer open enrollment period is scheduled for July 1-30 to accommodate parents who wish to request a change in school assignment. Assignments will be made on a space-available basis. The opening and closing times for next school year will be on the May 26 school board meeting agenda.

Finally, take time to enjoy end-of-year activities and celebrate your accomplishments and those of our students. We wish our graduating seniors all the best, knowing they are well-prepared for the next journey in their lives. I hope you have a safe and enjoyable summer.