

superintendent's update

February 17, 2009



Focus on Learning, Student Assignment, Budget
By Julie M. Janssen

This is the first monthly superintendent's update, a way for me to regularly communicate with PCS employees about things that are happening in the district.

In the midst of the many challenges we face, it is more important than ever to stay focused on our main mission – student learning. During school visits, I see the great job each of you do to support teaching and learning. Teachers, support staff, administrators, and district office staff all play a vital role in providing the best education possible for the students we are privileged to serve. During this time of year, our students demonstrate what they've learned on standardized testing. We've begun the annual "testing" cycle - FCAT writing, reading, math and science. I appreciate the efforts of teachers and other district staff members who work diligently to prepare our students.

In January, the school board addressed the issue of declining enrollment and approved the closing of six elementary and two middle schools for 2009-10. (Our district has lost 10,000 students over the past five years and is expected to lose 10,000 more over the next five years.) The middle school closings are part of the consolidations of Kennedy/Coachman and Madeira Beach/Southside. A transition team of administrators, instructional and support staff and parent representatives from each of the schools involved has been meeting periodically to work through a number of issues related to students, staff and other resources.

Visiting teams have been assembled for the schools scheduled for closing or merger next year and they will meet to finalize the protocol for handling the transfer process and to answer questions from faculty and staff members. It is our hope to send the teams out to the schools impacted by the transition during the balance of the month of February. A placement fair will be scheduled later this spring to include these schools and others affected by the budget reductions.

Each day we hear about the economic woes in Florida and throughout our country. Our school system has already begun to feel the budget strains in the areas of salary freezes for all of our employees, reductions in operating budgets, and freezes on filling vacant positions. Employees have been sent a [budget update](#) that explains our financial challenges in greater detail. This information also has been posted on the "bulletin board" section of the staff home page on the district website.

On a brighter note, Pinellas is scheduled to receive a significant increase in both Title I and IDEA funds starting in July 2009 and will also be repeated in July of 2010. However, these funds are earmarked for specific areas and cannot be used for general operating expenses. I'm sure most of you are wondering how the nation's stimulus plan will affect our budget. The stimulus plan will provide \$2.7 billion for Florida through the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund. How and when these funds will be distributed is unclear at this point, and more difficult to analyze is whether or not Florida qualifies for these funds. The situation is fluid and we expect to know more in the next few weeks as to how this could potentially help education funding in Florida.

We are hoping that the 2009 Florida Legislature provides some much needed flexibility when it convenes for the regular session in March. Some of the issues that may be considered are:

- A delay in full implementation of the class size amendment (stay at the school average level and eliminate penalties for non-compliance).
- Redefining class size calculations to provide realistic flexibility.

- Continued flexibility in the use of capital outlay and instructional materials funds.
- Expanded flexibility to include more options for capital outlay funds.
- Consideration of holding in abeyance funding for School Recognition, Merit Award, Excellent Teacher, Differentiated Salary, and Teacher Lead Programs.
- Consideration of amending mandates in middle and high school Physical Education, Virtual Education, the new High School Grading system, Reading funding, Eighth Grade declaration of majors and minors fields of study, FCAT retakes, and Differentiated Accountability.
- Consideration of additional state revenue.

Now is the time to voice our concerns to state legislators. Pinellas County Schools, in partnership with the Pinellas Administrators Association, Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association, Pinellas County Council of PTAs, Pinellas Education Employees – Retired, Pinellas Education Support Personnel Association, and Pinellas SAC Association are rallying in Tallahassee on March 18. Administrators, PTA members, teachers, parents and concerned citizens will unite in a “spirit of unity,” for the *Rally in Tally* road trip to voice our commitment to investing in public education. For more information, contact Charles Derexson, President, PCCPTA (727) 510-7683 or Peggy Johns, Pinellas Administrators Association at johnsp@pscq.org.

We will continue to work closely with all of our employee organizations to find solutions to these financial challenges. Approximately 3,000 district employees submitted almost 17,000 comments and ideas on ways to trim spending. I appreciate the time and effort of those who sent in recommendations.

Today, I will be presenting a policy for decentralizing decision-making to the School Board in a workshop. This is the first of many steps to re-think how we can deliver services with improved efficiency. I am confident, that despite the difficulties that lie ahead, together we will continue to make great strides each day serving this county’s young people and their families. Thank you for what you have done and will do to make this school system even better.

Julie M. Janssen, Ed.D., Superintendent, Pinellas County Schools