

Proposed Amendments Expected to Affect Public Education

Three proposed constitutional amendments, which will be on the ballot in November, are expected to significantly affect public education in Florida. Pinellas County Schools' citizens are urged to study each proposal carefully and to exercise their right to vote in November. Below is the ballot language for each amendment. For information about how these amendments could affect public schools funding, visit the Florida School Board Association's website, www.fsba.org.

Amendment 5 – Replacing state required school property taxes with state revenues generating an equivalent hold harmless amount for schools through one or more of the following options: repealing sales tax exemptions not specifically excluded; increasing sales tax rate up to one percentage point; spending reductions; other revenue options created by the legislature. Limiting subject matter of laws granting future exemptions. Limiting annual increases in assessment of non-homestead real property. Lowering property tax millage rate for schools.

Amendment 7 – Proposing an amendment to the State Constitution to provide that an individual or entity may not be barred from participating in any public program because of religion and to delete the prohibition against using revenues from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution.

Amendment 9 – Requires at least 65 percent of school funding received by school districts be spent on classroom instruction, rather than administration; allows for differences in administrative expenditures by district. Provides the constitutional requirement for the state to provide a “uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality system of free public schools” is a minimum, nonexclusive duty. Reverses legal precedent prohibiting public funding of private school alternatives to public school programs without creating an entitlement.

Budget Update

The Pinellas County School Board tentatively approved a \$1.47-billion budget last month and a tax rate increase of more than 4 percent. The proposed new tax rate is \$8.06 for every \$1,000 of taxable value, up from last year's rate of \$7.73. The final public hearing and vote are scheduled for Sept. 9.

The need for a tax rate increase, which is being faced by school districts throughout the state, is due to a drastic decrease in state funding for schools. Districts are required to replace that missing state money with local funds raised through property taxes.

Earlier this year, the school board cut \$43-million from the 2008-09 operating budget through the elimination of positions, employee reassignments, school closings, reduction in assistants principals and no raises for all employees. The budget picture is expected to be equally bleak next year with the possibility of another reduction in state funds before the school year ends and additional cuts in 2009-10. The proposed school district budget is available at www.pcsb.org/budget.

Address Change

If you moved over the summer, you are required to give the school your new phone number and provide proof of residency. Please visit your child's school to update your address and provide appropriate verification (power, water, cable or home phone bill).

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