

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION ONLY

INTRODUCTION

The Florida Association of District School Superintendents is the professional organization comprised of Florida's 67 public school superintendents. As constitutional officers, Florida superintendents have a responsibility to meet the education needs of a diverse and growing population of almost 2.8 million students enrolled in Florida's public schools. High quality public schools are critical to Florida's economic growth and prosperity. Without them, businesses are reluctant to relocate to Florida and jobs are lost.

Florida superintendents support increased rigor and academic standards that are data-driven with the goal of providing every student the same opportunity for educational excellence. Florida superintendents support an assessment system that is aligned to Florida's standards and, concurrently, does not unduly disrupt valuable instructional time for all students. Florida superintendents support a high quality public education system that:

- Graduates students prepared for careers and postsecondary education,
- Promotes student learning and academic performance,
- Supports a teacher and school-based administrator evaluation system that is fair and based upon student achievement and professional practices, and
- Is fairly and efficiently funded to fully implement all required legislative mandates and Florida State Board of Education (SBE) rules.

LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

Florida Superintendents hold fast to the principle that local decision-making is fundamental to establishing, implementing and operating sound education programs for students. Superintendents – working in concert with locally elected school boards – know their communities well, and are empowered to set educational priorities for their school districts to meet the educational needs of their students. Superintendents and their local school boards are accountable to their communities.

FLORIDA'S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Florida's school districts have been in transition to a new accountability system over the last several years. This system has also been modified as education stakeholders, communities and parents have weighed in on the implementation of new education

standards, assessments, and school grades. During the 2015-2016 school year, school districts will continue to implement an accountability system in transition and must:

- Implement Florida State Standards across all grades and subjects.
- Expand the computer based administration of the Florida Standards Assessment.
- Implement a new school grading system.
- Implement a new salary schedule incorporating student performance as a major component of compensation.
- Expand the use of technology in the classroom and for online assessments without having the required infrastructure or devices.

THE 2015 LEGISLATURE RESPONDS

The 2015 Legislature recognized the challenges faced by superintendents and school districts and provided significant relief:

- Reduced the number of assessments for students by eliminating the required administration of an 11th Grade English Language Arts Assessment (ELA) and the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT).
- Provided school districts with flexibility in measuring student performance in courses not associated with state assessments thus reducing local end of course exams or EOCs.
- Prohibited EOCs or final exams in addition to state required EOC assessments.
- Limited the administration of state and local assessments to no more than 5 percent of a student's total school hours.
- Required the Department of Education (DOE), school districts, and public schools to publish a uniform assessment calendar.
- Modified the teacher and site-based administrator evaluation components by reducing student performance to one third of the evaluation; requiring at least one third to be based on instructional practice or leadership; and authorizing other indicators of performance to be reflected in the evaluation.
- Required DOE to adopt rules for submission and monitoring of district evaluation systems.
- Required DOE to distribute any liquidated damages resulting from the spring 2015 assessment administration.
- Required 3rd grade students who scored in the bottom quintile on the 2014-2015 ELA assessment to be identified as "at risk of retention" and be provided intensive instruction and support until the assessment's validity is confirmed.
- Suspended the issuance of school grades and teacher evaluations for the 2014-2015 school year until an independent entity conformed the validity of the initial administration of the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA).
- Eliminated prescriptive remediation requirements for low-performing students and provided for targeted instructional support in reading for K-3 students.

CHALLENGES REMAIN IN TRANSITION TO NEW ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

FLORIDA STATE STANDARDS

Superintendents strongly support the Florida State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Full implementation throughout all grades is a multi-year effort of intense teacher professional development, coupled with the adoption of curriculum and instructional materials that are accurately aligned with the new state standards.

FLORIDA STANDARDS ASSESSMENTS

The initial administration of the Florida Standards Assessment or FSA in spring 2015 was extremely challenging and frustrating for everyone involved – students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The comprehensive problems encountered throughout the testing window raised legitimate doubt on the validity and reliability of the test results. The full effects of these failures may never be completely known. While students may have ultimately completed the tests, it is impossible to know the extent to which the administration failures have affected their scores.

Reported testing issues that were experienced consistently throughout Florida school districts include:

- Test Administrator and student logins timing out and receiving run-time errors.
- Test Administrators indiscriminately logged out of the system.
- Students kicked out of the system while they are taking the test due to browser crashes. In some cases the student was not able to log back-on.
- Students whose work was lost when they were kicked out of the system.
- White screens intermittently appearing during testing.
- Students that actually read the prompt before being “kicked-off” or losing work that was or was not recovered during the session, thereby allowing some students additional time to research the topic or to preplan a response.
- The text to speech accommodation was working intermittently during the initial days of test administration.
- Serious issues with the Writing prompt security which impacts validity and reliability of the writing prompt.
- Script errors appearing when students attempted to submit answers.
- Extremely long wait times for the AIR helpline.

Continued concerns

- **Disrupted Instructional Time:** The requirement for the FSA and other statewide assessments to be computer based disrupts instruction and reduces instructional opportunities for all students in school. Students are displaced from their computer classrooms for extended periods so that other students can complete testing. Media centers are closed for weeks to accommodate testing. Testing permeates every part of the school day for months. Yet, computer based testing will expand this year

and for the next two years until all grades assessed using statewide assessments are computer based.

- With all statewide assessments ultimately being administered online or computer based, there is an inherent assumption that all students will have the computer literacy skills to successfully take the assessments. Being familiar with technology does not translate into being successful in taking a high-stakes assessment online. The new FSA will require students to compose essays using word processing skills. The math portion will require additional computer skills. Technology enhanced questions are also embedded in the assessment. Students must be computer literate, yet word-processing skills and computer based testing skills are lagging.
- Meeting technology requirements is a continuing and recurring challenge including the availability of funds to purchase specific hardware and software, ensuring network capability, providing security, and availability of the necessary broadband capacity to successfully administer the assessments.
- There are a limited number of students who do not pass the required statewide assessments necessary to be awarded a standard high school diploma. These students, for lack of passing a test, will face a diminished future without the opportunity to join the armed services or pursue postsecondary training.

FSA Recommendations

- The Department of Education must hold AIR accountable for the problems encountered during the spring administration of the Florida Standards Assessment.
- The Legislature must provide adequate funding for purchasing and maintaining the infrastructure, devices and software to administer state and locally required assessments and to provide the delivery of instruction through technology.
- Disruption to instruction must be minimal. The administration of all assessments using paper and pencil must be available to districts and schools when the technology is not sufficient or fails.
- Another pathway that is rigorous and academically valid must be developed for students who do not pass the required statewide assessments that lead to a standard high school diploma. These students must not be left behind.

TRANSITION TOOLS NEEDED

School districts have depended upon tools that were previously provided by DOE to assist in the transition to new standards and assessments. Two programs – CPALMS, the central repository for standards and the PERT assessment were not funded by the Legislature for the 2015-2016 fiscal year.

CPALMS serves as Florida's official source for standards information and course descriptions. CPALMS is the central repository for Florida's college-and career-ready standards and is used to comply with statutory requirements related to state standards, course descriptions and the Course Code Directory. It is an online toolbox of information resources and interactive tools for Florida educators to support instruction aligned to the Florida State Standards. CPALMS has more than 9,000 available educational resources for math, science, and language arts. These resources were created by educators specifically to align with the Florida State Standards. CPALMS was not funded in the 2015-2016 fiscal year. A total of \$3,075,000 was requested.

The Postsecondary Education Readiness Test or PERT measures and reports the readiness of high school students for postsecondary education, dual enrollment and Gold Seal scholarship eligibility, as well as a comparative score for the Algebra 1 EOC assessments for high school graduation. The requirement to administer PERT to high school students, followed by required instruction for postsecondary readiness was repealed but PERT is an important tool for students to gain a comparative score for the Algebra 1 EOC and other postsecondary opportunities. A total of \$991,500 was requested last year, but not funded.

Recommendation

The Legislature should fund CPALMS and the PERT assessment in order for districts to transition to and successfully implement the new Florida State Standards and accompanying assessments.

TRANSITION TO A NEW GRADING SYSTEM

School grades were not held in abeyance during this time of transition from FCAT 2.0 to the Florida Standards Assessment. The Legislature required a validation study of the first administration of the Florida Standards Assessments after the problems with the spring administration. This has resulted in a delay in the release of assessment results, completing teacher and administrator evaluations and the calculation and release of school grades.

At some point, the standard-setting process will begin in order to set performance level expectations, commonly referred to as "cut scores." This will provide a new baseline for school grades and other accountability measures.

Calculating school grades utilizing the new Florida Statewide Assessment is, at best, unrealistic and at the most, misleading. The spring administration of the assessments was problematic and the validity and reliability of the scores, regardless of the outcome of the independent validation study remains.

School Grading System Recommendations

- The administration and results of the new Florida Standards Assessment must be reviewed and adjustments be made to ensure that a fair, valid and reliable administration is ready for the 2015-2016 school year.
- The stakeholders group that will be established, as has been used in the past, must be comprised primarily of education stakeholders who are directly involved in the implementation of the accountability system in school districts.
- The Department of Education should develop a comprehensive public information campaign that informs the public about the new Florida Standards Assessments and the new accountability system.
- The Florida Legislature should hold school grades in abeyance for the 2014-2015 school year and the Commissioner of Education given the authority to extend it through the 2015-2016 school year.

IMPACT ON EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION (ESE) STUDENTS

All students with disabilities participate in the statewide assessment program including the Florida Standards Assessment and end of course exams. The educational standards for ESE students must be rigorous and, at the same time, take into account the challenges these students and their parents face. The state accountability system must not be structured in a manner that could potentially hinder their success. In addition, the school grading system must fairly reflect the performance of these students.

ESE Recommendations

- The accountability system and applicable grading system should be structured as to ensure that ESE students take assessments that best reflect their achievement level; not the age appropriate grade level.
- The Legislature should review the current graduation requirements for students with disabilities and implement a realistic pathway to high school graduation for all students.
- Students with disabilities who participate in publically funded scholarship programs should be required to participate in and take the assessments that would otherwise be taken if the student were attending a public school. Parents have a right to know whether their children are succeeding in the educational choices they are making. In addition, the taxpayer must be assured that their funds are being expended in an accountable manner.

CLASS SIZE REDUCTION (CSR)

Legislation revising the method of calculating the penalty for schools that fail to comply with the class size requirements at the school average instead of the classroom level have almost passed in the last two sessions. The penalty for charter schools, district-operated

schools of choice and district innovation schools is already calculated at the school level instead of the classroom level.

CSR Recommendation

Superintendents support legislation that calculates the penalty for schools that fail to comply with the class size requirements at the school average.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

A high quality career and technical education system continues to be critical to Florida's economic growth and expansion. Florida's public postsecondary technical institutions are an integral part of this system and provide the necessary training to meet the shortage of skilled workers in Florida. Public postsecondary technical colleges/centers, governed by school districts, provide quality training in specific occupational program areas in order to meet the employment needs of business and industry. The technical centers have the ability to be market driven, responsive to business and industry needs, cost effective and focused on results.

Career and Adult Education Recommendations

- Continue the expansion of the Statewide Postsecondary Student Information System.
- Support a state funding model for postsecondary workforce education program that includes a new component to the funding model to provide direct support dollars to adult students with unique abilities who have a 504 plan.
- Support the expansion of the apprenticeship training through a grant to assist employers throughout Florida meet their needs for a high skilled and professional workforce.
- Authorize technical colleges/centers to offer technical education programs as credit hour instead of clock hour as appropriate and necessary. This will substantially improve transferability and articulation of credits for all students and reduce administrative costs.
- Authorize the technical colleges/centers to award college credit certificates in cooperation with state colleges from the technical education program inventory maintained by DOE as approved by the governing board of the institution.
- Support initiatives to award funding to technical colleges/centers that can rapidly implement/expand technical education programs in high wage, skill and demand occupations.
- Request flexibility to allocate the current fees at each institution in order to meet student needs. No additional fees would be authorized, but institutions would be allowed local flexibility within the authorized amount to spend on programs determined to be the most critical.

FLORIDA HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS ASSOCIATION (FHSA)

The governance and oversight of high school athletics is under the purview of the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA). The regulation of high school athletics has become more difficult as sports have become a gateway to postsecondary colleges and professional sports; combined with the growth of choice programs for students. Any modifications to the governance structure and requirements for high school athletics should be carefully considered for unintended consequences for both students and access to sports.

FHSAA Recommendations

- Sports play an integral role in the education of Florida’s students and parity among sports within specific districts and among districts must be maintained.
- Superintendents support the current governance structure of FHSAA.

CHOICE PROGRAMS

“Choice” has been the catchword for enhanced educational opportunity. School superintendents have embraced public school choice by providing nationally recognized magnet programs, magnet schools, CAPE and career academies, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) programs, dual enrollment, virtual schools, and specialty programs and schools. The variety of educational choices for parents and students in Florida public schools is abundant. The growing number of choice options has impacted the ability of school districts to appropriately fund all of the choices made available to students.

Funding for choice programs is capped at 1.0 Full Time Equivalent (FTE), which equates to 25 hours a week or 5 hours a day of funding – regardless of the number of hours/classes a student is taking. The exponential growth of virtual and dual enrollment programs resulted in a modification of the funding formula that will have a negative ripple effect on the entire public school program. Maintaining equitable funding for students within an insufficiently funded formula is a challenge that must be addressed.

Charter Schools

Since its inception in 1996, charter schools were offered as a means to provide students and their parents with programmatic options that were not available in regular public schools. Charter schools were also seen as a solution to overcrowding in regular public schools. Today many charter schools are not innovative, but rather duplicate educational programs that are already offered by regular public schools. Overcrowding is no longer an issue due to the implementation of class size reduction. Consequently, many districts have unfilled student stations. Districts should be authorized to deny charter applications that do not meet a need expressed by the local district and also deny an application when sufficient student stations are available to meet students’ needs in existing public schools. Moreover,

additional measures should be put into statute to ensure educational, fiscal and operational accountability of charter schools.

Charter School Recommendations

- Charter school applications should only be approved when the proposed instructional program and growth align with the school district needs.
- The application should be modified to require disclosure of the academic and financial history of the applicant, governing board members and proposed management company or cooperative.
- The application should be modified to document that the governing board is independent of any management company or cooperative and at its sole discretion, may terminate a contract with the management company or cooperative at any time.
- Standards of conduct, financial disclosure, and identification of conflicts of interest should be clarified and expanded.
- Student reporting requirements relating to withdrawals, suspensions, expulsions, and other related instances where students are no longer enrolled in a charter school must be the same for all public schools, including charter schools.
- In order to ensure financial stability, school districts must have the authority to require a surety bond or the maintenance of a specific amount in an escrow fund to protect the school district and taxpayer.
- The statute must be clarified for double session schools or schools that do not provide instruction for the full 900 hours to only be reimbursed for actual instructional time provided.

Scholarship or Voucher Programs

Florida has established several scholarship or voucher programs. The Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship Program provides scholarships to eligible low-income students for, among other things, private tuition and fees. The FTC Program is funded with contributions to private Scholarship Funding Organizations (SFOs) from taxpayers who receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for use against their liability for corporate income tax, insurance premium tax, and other taxes. The scholarship amount and student eligibility has expanded over the years of implementation, while academic standards and fiscal accountability of these programs have been routinely questioned. Participating students are only required to take the norm-referenced assessment offered by the private school and are not required to take the statewide assessments required of students in public schools.

The 2014 Legislature established the Florida Personal Learning Scholarship Accounts (PLA) Program for students who have an eligible disability. The legislation provides that a parent who applies for a PLA is exercising the parental option to determine the placement or services that best meet the needs of the child. Personal Learning Account Scholarship funds may be used to purchase a variety of items or services including instructional

materials, specialized services, enrollment in an eligible private school, fees for assessments, contributions to the Prepaid College Program, and contracted services provided by a public school or district. Students in grades 3 through 10 must take a nationally norm-referenced test or the statewide assessments required in public schools. Students with disabilities for whom standardized testing is not appropriate are exempt from this requirement.

Superintendents support public school choice, yet have serious concerns about the lack of educational accountability, fiscal accountability, and transparency to the public as to the quality of services being provided to these students with taxpayer dollars.

Scholarship/Voucher Program Recommendations

- All scholarship program students must be held to the same academic and educational standards as regular public school students and the scholarship program must ensure these standards are met.
- Students who return to or enroll in a regular public school must identify whether they were a scholarship student in order to hold the transferring school accountable for performance.
- Corporations that take advantage of a tax credit must be transparent and the identification of the corporate donor and the amount of the tax credit should not be exempt from the public records law.
- Programs or individuals providing services to these students must meet a threshold of accountability requirements that are reported to and published by the Department of Education.
- Students who participate in state supported scholarship programs should be required to take the assessments that would otherwise be taken if they were attending public schools. Parents have a right to know whether their children are succeeding in the educational choices they are making. In addition, the taxpayer must be assured that their funds are being expended in an accountable manner.
- All scholarship/voucher programs should be annually evaluated to ensure academic and fiscal accountability to parents and to the taxpayer.

NEW LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

The Legislature established and funded two new programs in 2015 – the Best and Brightest Teacher Scholarship Program and the Standard Student Attire Incentive Fund. The Best and Brightest Teacher Scholarship Program rewards Florida’s teachers who have been evaluated as highly effective and who have earned SAT or ACT scores at or above the 80th percentile. The Legislature appropriated just over \$44 million to fund a maximum of 4,402 teachers with a \$10,000 scholarship. However, if the number of teachers exceeds the appropriation, DOE will prorate the per teacher scholarship amount.

The Legislature established and funded the Standard Student Attire Incentive Fund. This program provides \$10 million for school districts to establish and implement a district-wide, standard student attire policy to promote safe and supportive learning environments and improve school safety and discipline. The funds are distributed based on a first come/first serve basis and there is no authority to prorate individual district or school awards.

Recommendations

- Prior to continued funding, the Legislature should evaluate both these programs to determine implementation issues, identify program deficiencies, determine whether programs goals and objectives have been met and recommend whether the program should continue.
- Rather than being established only as a budget issue, these programs, if continued, should be codified in statute.

ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES PROGRAM

The Adults with Disabilities Program provided funding to school districts and colleges that gave adults and senior citizens with disabilities the opportunity for enhancement of skills consistent with their abilities and needs. Funds may be used in programs to:

- Improve quality of life through recreational activities and intellectual stimulation.
- Serve adults with disabilities who are not suited for workforce development education programs.
- Provide lifelong learning activities to senior citizens with disabilities.

Funding for this program has decreased over time from approximately \$20 million overall to just over \$9 million for school districts in the 2014-2015 school year. The Legislature did not fund the program for this current school year.

Adults with Disabilities Program Recommendation

Superintendents recommend that this program be funded in order to continue to serve these vulnerable adults with programs that improve their quality of life.

SCHOOL SAFETY

The safety of students is of paramount concern of school superintendents. For many students, school is a refuge and a safe haven for learning. Funding for safe schools has not caught up to prerecession levels and is almost \$13 million less than was appropriated by the Legislature for the 2007-2008 fiscal year. School districts are supplementing this program from general operating dollars to fund school resource officers and other school safety measures. Legislation to authorize district school boards to implement armed school safety designees on school property has been considered for at least the last two legislative sessions as one way of addressing school safety issues.

School Safety Recommendations

- Superintendents support an increase in the Safe Schools Categorical at least up to the 2007-2008 legislative appropriation of \$77,150,000 without a decrease in other general fund or categorical funds.
- Superintendents oppose legislation authorizing armed school safety designees on school property. A better approach is funding school resource officers and other safety measures deemed appropriate at the local level.

PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING – CHALLENGES CONTINUE

General Funding for Students

Florida has weathered the Great Recession. Tourism is up, employment is improving, population is growing, housing is improving, and consumer perceptions have improved. The economic news is positive. The Legislature recognized the importance of public education as the foundation for economic recovery and growth in Florida by appropriating more dollars for public education – even through the Great Recession.

Overall funding has steadily increased, but it continues to lag when compared to funding by the Legislature before the recession began. The Base Student Allocation or BSA is still down by \$9 when compared to the Legislative appropriation in May 2007. In fact, the total funding per student through the FEFP continues to lag. At the start of the 2007-2008 school year, funding per student was \$7,305.79. The current budget for this year provided \$7,096.96 per student. This difference is noticeable in comparing categorical funding for this year with the 2007-2008 fiscal year. Funding for Safe Schools, SAI, ESE, in particular, transportation, and instructional materials have not yet recovered. Overall this represents \$208.83 less per student to operate Florida public schools eight years later. As a final comparison, through 2013, Florida is ranked in the bottom quintile in per pupil spending when compared to the national average of \$10,700. In addition, Florida has also seen an increase of almost 150,000 students in the intervening 8 years.

During this same time period school districts have been required to comply with increased requirements, and:

- Implement new Florida State Standards.
- Implement new statewide standardized assessments and local assessments.
- Implement new teacher and school based administrator evaluation systems.
- Implement teacher performance pay requirements.
- Outfit schools with the technology needed to implement Florida's transition to computer-based testing for statewide and local assessments.

- Provide teachers professional development to implement the new Florida State Standards.
- Purchase new instructional materials aligned with the new Florida State Standards and fulfill digital content requirements.
- Increase school security measures in response to tragic events occurring on school campuses across the country.
- Continue compliance with class size reduction requirements.

The impact of two funding policy changes implemented in the last two years has further reduced the availability of funds to school districts. The Legislature has established that no student may generate funding that exceeds 1.0 FTE per student per year. Consequently, if a student takes more courses or is enrolled in a program that exceeds 1.0 FTE (25 hours a week), the cost is prorated across the courses or programs that are provided funding for that five hours per day. This has adversely impacted programs for English Language Learners and ESE students because these students receive less weighted funding. Funding for students enrolled in the Florida Virtual School is now prorated across the services and programs in which students are enrolled.

In addition, school districts are now required to pay tuition to state colleges and universities for students taking dual enrollment courses on college campuses. Along with that, the cost of instructional materials for dual enrollment courses continues to increase at an alarming rate for which school districts do not receive sufficient funding. The Legislature has provided some relief in the area, however the policy is costly for school districts and one for which there is not any leverage for school districts to negotiate a reasonable agreement with state colleges. This policy works against having a K-20 education system, and pits school districts against state colleges.

Flexibility and Funding to implement the “Lowest 300” Elementary Schools

Learning to read is the gateway skill for students to be successful in school and life. Superintendents support the requirement to provide an additional hour of reading instruction beyond the regular school day at the state’s lowest 300 elementary schools in terms of reading test scores – but flexibility in program delivery and additional funding is needed. While the Supplemental Academic Instruction (SAI) and Reading Instruction categorical funds are used for this purpose, the Legislature has not provided the funding to meet all of the needs and programs identified in these categorical programs.

Capital Funds to Meet Maintenance and Technology Demands

School buildings are a critical public asset – Florida school districts comprise over 425 million square feet of facilities. Schools represent a public asset of \$85 billion based on

an average cost of construction of \$200 per square foot. As of June 30, 2013, the average age of Florida's schools was 28 years old. Preventative maintenance, repairs, and the upkeep or replacement of building systems (i.e. HVAC, lighting, school safety) is critical to ensure these public schools are quality places for students to learn. Failure to do so will eventually lead to the premature replacement of failed buildings at an increased cost to taxpayers.

Technology is an essential instructional and assessment tool in today's public schools. Adequate bandwidth, infrastructure, computers and other devices must be accessible for students to learn and teachers to teach. Fortunately, the Legislature included \$60 million in the Digital Classrooms funding categorical. However, considering the current enrollment of almost 2.8 million students, this represents less than \$50 per student.

Currently, school districts utilize the discretionary millage authority of assessing up to 1.5 mills to address maintenance and repair and school construction needs. In response to the Great Recession, the 2008 and 2009 Legislature reduced the discretionary capital millage authority of local school boards by 25 percent each year (2.0 to 1.5 mills). This was necessary to offset a comparable increase in the Required Local Effort levy to avoid additional operating budget cuts. School districts deferred capital purchases and tapped local capital reserves as is a common practice in an economic downturn. Over time, the substantial loss of capital revenue has crippled the ability of school districts to meet school facility maintenance, classroom technology, school safety and school bus needs. Superintendents support the restoration of discretionary millage authority in order to help districts meet capital outlay needs. The restored authority will go a long way towards addressing maintenance needs that have been delayed.

PECO funds for new school construction have also declined significantly in recent years. This revenue source is unable to support the needs of traditional and charter schools. The Legislature has restored some PECO funding, but it is inadequate to meet local needs. Superintendents support the issuance of PECO bonds to support school construction, the Special Facility Construction Program (rural schools) and technology.

The Special Facilities Program has served the needs of rural districts for many years and enables the construction of needed schools. Rural districts undergo a rigorous process through the DOE to ensure that the requested school is needed and the district pledges a portion of their local revenue toward the cost of construction in partnership with state funding. Only one school out of the five schools recommended was funded this past year.

Funding Recommendations

General Operations

- Increase the Base Student Allocation (BSA) for the 2016-2017 fiscal year by at least 5 percent to begin addressing student growth and increased operational costs.
- Establish a separate funding source for programs taken by students beyond the 1.0 FTE cap or 25 hours a week.
- Repeal or provide additional funding for the requirement that school districts pay tuition for dual enrollment and authorize school districts to share the costs within the articulation agreements at the local level. Adequately fund instructional materials for dual enrollment.
- Begin addressing the gaps within budget categories. For example, increase the Safe Schools Categorical to enable the hiring of school resource officers.
- Establish a new funding categorical to fully fund the “Lowest 300” extended instructional day requirement. This funding categorical should be beyond the current SAI and Reading funding categorical programs.
- Adequately fund purchasing and maintaining the infrastructure, devices and software to administer state and locally required assessments and to provide the delivery of instruction through technology.
- Fund CPALMs and the PERT assessment in order for districts to transition to and successfully implement the new Florida State Standards and accompanying assessments.
- Do not expand the curriculum, promotion or graduation requirements unless the school day is expanded.

Capital Outlay

- Funding for maintenance and repair of district operated public schools, for addressing school safety issues and for the technology needed for instruction and assessment is critical. School boards should be restored the authority to levy a discretionary millage of up to .5 mills to address these needs.
- Public Education Bonds funded by the PECO Trust Fund should be issued as bonding capacity is available in order to support the capital construction and technology needs of school districts.
- The Legislature should fully fund the Special Facilities Program including those projects that are underway, unfunded projects for the 2015-2016 fiscal year and any new projects recommended for funding beginning in the 2016-2017 fiscal year.
- Capital outlay funds for charter schools should only be provided through a separate statewide funding source and distributed only based on demonstrated need with provisions made to insure that the taxpayers acquire an asset for their investment and the need for public disaster shelter requirements are met.

- Any local discretionary capital improvement funds provided to charter school facilities and capital equipment must continue to have the consent of the local school board.

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