

Leaders

A Newsletter for Florida School Board Members

STAR deadline nears; problems still exist

There's just about a month left for school districts to submit their STAR proposal which, if approved, would allow them to receive a prorated portion of \$147.5 million to use for teacher bonuses. Yet, STAR is still causing headaches.

"One can argue the merits of STAR, but it is creating major labor relations problems in several Florida school districts," said Max Schmidt, executive director of the Florida School Labor Relations Service.

STAR (Special Teachers Are Rewarded) was included in *provisio* language in the 2006-07 state education budget. That makes it and its \$147.5 million allocation good for just one year unless the Legislature next session again includes it in the budget or passes a separate law creating the STAR program.

STAR officially went into effect July 1. It is designed to reward teachers who perform well in the classroom as illustrated by how well their students do. If a district's STAR plan passes State Board of Education muster, the district will be eligible to receive a portion of that \$147.5M. STAR funds will be allocated based on each district's proportion of the state total K-12 base funding, subject to review by the State Board of each district's plan, which must be submitted by Dec. 31.

The State Board has 45 days after a district's STAR plan is submitted to approve it. If fault is found, the State Board must spell out specific areas that need revision. Districts then have until March 1, 2007 to submit their final plan.

But once a plan is approved, districts can begin rewarding high performing teachers with bonuses as early as this school year.

Dr. Schmidt pointed out that STAR is strictly voluntary. "Some districts think they have to impose it," he said. That's not correct.

And while it's highly desirable to have the local teacher's union agree on the district's STAR proposal, that's not mandatory either.

"School boards can impose it (STAR) over the teacher's union objections," added Dr. Schmidt. "However, they need to carefully weigh the impact of making that decision."

One often over-looked portion of the *provisio*, the last line in fact, allows districts to reward school-based administrators as well. It says: "District school board STAR Plan

proposals may include a methodology for performance pay rewards for district-selected school-based leaders who supervise or directly assist the instructional personnel whose student achievement results in a STAR Plan reward."

And what happens if the district doesn't use all its STAR allocation? "I'm telling school districts that anything that is left over should be treated like a categorical. Hold it for next year," said Dr. Schmidt.

He also warned districts "to be very careful in implementing their STAR plan. If you have a legally binding contract, make sure you don't commit the district for the following year." That's because, as mentioned, STAR is a one-time-only program unless the Legislature renews it during the 2007 session.

Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa was the first school district in Florida to receive approval from the Florida State Board of Education for its STAR teacher bonus program. (See Page 3.)

Dr. Schmidt said it would be difficult for other districts to piggyback on Hillsborough's plan. "I think it's Hillsborough-specific," he said. "They've had a performance pay program for a few years, and they've made modifications to address the requirements for STAR that are uniquely theirs."

One of the biggest concerns for districts has been in deciding how to measure performance for those teachers handling subjects not tested by the FCAT, such as music, art, physical education, or those with school-wide responsibilities, such as guidance counselors, media specialists and reading coaches.

The DOE has developed value tables to assign scores to student achievement outcomes. Information on these value tables can be obtained from DOE.

In this edition. . .

- 2 Charter schools commission**
- 3 Board member orientation**
- 4 Election brings new faces**

Leadership Calling

Working with new charter school body

FSBAs Executive Director Wayne Blanton told the new Florida Schools of Excellence Commission that the association will continue to work with the commission despite a law suit FSBA will be filing against the state law which created the commission.

"It's a governance issue, there's nothing personal," Dr. Blanton told a meeting of the new commission.

Legislation passed this year called for establishment of the seven-member appointed commission that's supposed to be "an independent, state-level charter school authorizing entity working in collaboration with the Department of Education and under the supervision of the State Board of Education."

According to the new law, the commission has the power to authorize and act as a sponsor of charter schools. It also can allow cities, state universities, community colleges, and regional educational consortia to act as charter school cosponsors.

School districts contend that the law usurps a school board's authority to operate charter public schools.

"We will continue to work with them as our litigation proceeds through the court system," said Dr. Blanton. "It's not a charter school law suit, it's a governance issue," he said of the legal action. "We support charter schools."

He said the commission "understands where we are. We want to keep an open line of communication between school boards and the commission, and they agreed," he added.

Search on for superintendents

Hernando and Broward county school districts are looking for new superintendents. FSBA Executive Director Wayne Blanton is handling the search for the Hernando post.

Hernando has a student population of 22,000. If you have any individuals in your district who might be interested in this position, they should contact Dr. Blanton at 850-414-2578.

Broward County has also begun its search for a new superintendent. For further information on this position, contact Broward County School Board Chairman Benjamin Williams at the Broward School Board office, 754-321-2005.

As a result of the November election, Lake County will also be looking for a new superintendent, but not until November, 2008. Voters there approved a ballot measure changing to an appointed superintendent, but it can't take effect until the term of the current elected superintendent, Anna Cowin, is up.

Two other counties—Putnam and Pasco—had also sought to change from elected to appointed superintendents, but those measures were defeated.

Upcoming Events

Jan. 2
Gubernatorial Inauguration, Tallahassee

Jan. 11
FSBA Growth Management Workshop
Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, Sandestin

Jan. 17-19
Certified Board Member Training, Gainesville Hilton, Gainesville

Jan. 28-30
NSBA Federal Relations Network, Washington, D.C.



OFFICERS

Sue Hershey, Stuart
President

Jeanne Dozier, Fort Myers
President-Elect

Beverly Slough, Switzerland
Vice President

Joy Bowen, Tallahassee
Treasurer

Dr. Jack Lamb, Tampa
Immediate Past President

STAFF

Dr. Wayne Blanton
Executive Director

Karen Denson
Director of Board Development

Dr. Max L Schmidt
FSLRS Executive Director

Mark McKinney
Director of Risk Management, FSBIT

Ruth Melton
Director of Legislative Relations

Jim Barnidge
Loss Prevention Coordinator

Linda Quick
Comptroller

Jan Norris
Executive Administrative Assistant

Patricia Peterson
Administrative Assistant for Board Development

Mary Jane Angelotti
Office Administrator, FSBIT

Florida School Boards Association
203 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301
(850) 414-2578 or Suncom 994-2578
Fax (850) 414-2585 or Suncom 994-2585
E-mail: fsba@fsba.org

Editor
Andy Williams
Communications & Consulting
Tallahassee, Florida
(850) 894-2226
andyw313@earthlink.net

Hillsborough is first district to receive STAR approval

Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa was the first school district in Florida to receive approval from the Florida Board of Education for the STAR teacher bonus program. According to state board chair Phil Handy, Hillsborough's is one of only two such programs in the nation, and the only one adopted without voter approval.

The STAR program—Special Teachers Are Rewarded—was passed by the Legislature in the 2006 session last spring to give teachers more incentives for improving their students' academic achievement. Florida's average teacher salary is among the lowest in the nation.

Hillsborough's plan is an adaptation of a bonus program collaboratively developed with the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association in response to a state mandate three years ago. The STAR plan awards five-percent bonuses to the top 25% of instructional person-

nel for increased student achievement gains.

Instructional personnel will earn points on two criteria, 1) their individual performance evaluations, and 2) their students' achievement, as measured by standardized tests, such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, norm referenced tests or district tests. Student academic performance data used as pre-test and post-test measures of achievement will be converted using a value table that awards more points for students with higher gains. Points will be deducted for students whose scores decrease, except for students who fall one level below the highest scoring level. Points earned from both criteria, the teacher's performance evaluation and students' achievement gains, will be used to determine instructional personnel eligible for the bonuses.

Teachers in non-core academic subjects will use school-wide FCAT data as

the indicator of student achievement. Instructional personnel with school-wide responsibilities, such as guidance counselors, media specialists, reading coaches, etc., will use 50% FCAT scores and 50% district assessments as the indicator.



MaryEllen Elia

"The STAR plan provides us with the opportunity to reward hard working, successful educators for what they do every day to help their students achieve," Hillsborough County Superintendent MaryEllen Elia said.

Linda Cobbe, Office of Communications, Hillsborough County Public Schools.

Training available for new, existing board members

The FSBA can help you learn the ins and outs of being a school board member at its New School Board Member Orientation scheduled for Feb. 21-23 in Tallahassee. But it's not just for new board members. Veterans, too, will find topics to keep them occupied.

Conference topics for new board members—about 60 of them—will include:

- Legal roles and responsibilities of school board members and superintendents;
- A look at the Sunshine State Standards and the FCAT and how they affect local school boards;
- Florida's Government in the Sunshine Law, the Administrative Procedure Act and the Public Records Law;
- Ethics and financial disclosure;
- Understanding the Florida Education Finance Program, better known as the FEFP;
- Parliamentary procedure for school board meetings;
- Effective and successful lobbying for results;
- Current educational and economical issues facing school districts;
- "The State of the State," a 2007 state legislative perspective.
- Services available through FSBA, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, and the Florida Department of Education.

For existing school board members, the two-day conference will include advocacy training, meeting the challenge of the school board chairmanship, and parliamentary procedure.

Something new and existing board members need to note is FSBA's Certified Board Member (CBM) training programs. The first will be Jan. 17-19 at the Gainesville Hilton and will cover bargaining and personnel issues and the FEFP. Coming up March 27-28 at the DoubleTree in Tallahassee will be more CBM training, this one on policy governance.

A third CBM program—boardmanship—will be held April 26-27 at the Ocala Hilton, Ocala.

For further information on any of these training programs, contact Karen Denson at the FSBA office, 850-414-2578.

School district is now eighth largest in U.S.

The Associated Press recently reported that, according to *American School and University Magazine*, the Hillsborough County School District is now ranked as the eighth largest in the nation.

Based on a 2004-2005 student enrollment figure of 188,610, the school district moved from ninth place, passing the Philadelphia Public Schools. Each of the last three years the district has moved up one place on the list.

The magazine based the enrollment figures on State Department of Education data. According to the article, Florida is one of three states—California and Texas are the other two—that account for 43 of the largest 100 districts.



From the Executive Director

By WAYNE BLANTON



WAYNE BLANTON

New school board members and a fresh face in Tallahassee

Elections always bring changes. This one was no different, what with 60 new school board members, a new governor, a mostly new cabinet, some new senators and representatives and a new legislative leadership team.

We congratulate Charlie Crist for his resounding victory in November. We think Gov. Crist will be easy to work with. Even with new leaders in both the House and Senate, we expect continued cooperation from our legislators.

For our new board members we're already making plans to welcome them into the association with a new board member orientation in February. (See story on Page 3.)

Other changes which took place weren't with people but with constitutional amendments. One of the key amendments which passed in November practically guarantees that class size is here to stay. We had hoped that the Legislature last session would have adopted an amendment that would have toned down the class size requirements—not eliminate it, just give school districts more flexibility in how they can comply with the mandates.

Unfortunately, no amendment proposal was ever adopted. Now, with the new amendment that passed in November, it will take 60% of those voting in an election to adopt any new constitutional amendments. You'll recall that the original class size amendment barely passed with little more than the required 50% majority.

Now, districts must concentrate on building more classrooms, something that may not be very easy. For example, cost of construction has risen some 22% to 24% over the past couple of years and in at least two recent cases districts have received low bids for high schools exceeding \$100 million. Just a couple of years ago, the average cost for a high school was in the range of \$35 to \$40 million (not including the cost of land).

We must try to control the cost of construction. That, compounded with class size, are two critical issues we must deal with throughout the state in the coming years.

With declining enrollment, which means fewer dollars flowing to districts, we'll also be scrambling to find the money to meet those class size demands.

Just a few years ago, Florida's K-12 student population was growing at the rate of about 65,000 students a year. This year's budget was based on an enrollment increase of 50,000 students, yet recent Department of Education statistics show we can expect no more than 10,000 new students.

We've had some pretty good budget increases these past couple of years. In light of increased costs, I hope that trend continues.

Other legislative issues we'll be facing in 2007 include another major cost item for school districts—property and casualty insurance, or lack of it.

Hurricanes the past couple of years have driven some insurers out of the Florida market. For those which remained, cost increases have been astronomical. An insurance task force appointed by Gov. Bush has been looking into the problems, but that commission has focused mostly on homeowner insurance. As illustrated by a recent district-by-district survey conducted by the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, school districts are suffering—badly.

While total insurable building values for 2006-2007 are almost \$53 billion, insurance coverage on those buildings totals just over \$1.5 billion, according to the survey. That compares to \$42 billion worth of insurable building values last year and a total insurance coverage of nearly \$7.4 billion.

Bottom line: The total cost of insurance for Florida's K-12 educational facilities increased 81.5% from last year. The total paid for insurance this year was over \$167 million compared to \$98 million last year. In other words, while the total amount of insurance coverage decreased by 80%, insurance costs increased by the same percentage.

One can only hope that because we incurred no hurricanes this year, the insurance market will become more competitive, allowing districts to adequately meet their future insurance needs.

Charter schools will be another issue we'll face next year. As you'll recall, Florida legislators adopted a law earlier this year handing control of charter school approvals over to an appointed body called the Florida Schools of Excellence Commission. FSBA is in the process of fighting this new law in the courts because we feel school boards have a constitutional duty to supervise all public schools in their districts. Until the courts decide this issue, we must work closely with this new commission. (See Page 2 for more on my recent appearance before the commission.)

I think you can see that next year will be another critical one for education, both in terms of money, property taxes, insurance, and more.

For you new board members, we have a lot of work ahead. For those who have been in the trenches with us these past few years in our education-related battles, you know what to expect. We need all of your support if we're to continue to be successful for the children we represent.

Dr. Blanton is executive director of the Florida School Boards Association.