

Leaders

A Newsletter for Florida School Board Members

Performance pay may get a face lift

School start dates, teacher performance pay, property taxes and charter schools—They were key legislative issues last year and they’re back again in 2007 when the Florida Legislature convenes for its annual 60-day session March 6.

With a bit of luck, you can kiss STAR (Special Teachers Are Rewarded) goodbye after June 30. That’s when the 2006-07 budget, that included the STAR program, is replaced by the new Fiscal Year funding plan. By then, most, if not all, of the \$147.5 million that funded the teacher performance pay program, will have been spent by school districts.

The Legislature is looking at new performance pay scenarios and has solicited help from school boards, superintendents and others in crafting a new teacher performance pay law.

One of the major proposals is that school districts would have complete control over performance pay. The FSBA plan eliminates Department of Education and State Board of Education oversight.

“The approval process (would be) strictly at the local school board level,” said Max Schmidt, executive director of the Florida School Labor Relations Service.

STAR also called for performance pay going to the top 25% of teachers in each district. The new proposal would eliminate the percentage of teachers eligible to receive the pay. Instead, each district would designate a performance level and any teacher achieving that level would be eligible for performance pay.

The Legislature would fund this performance pay each year through a categorical allocated to each district.

In addition, the performance pay would be considered “a supplement” so it could be figured in retirement calculations. “We’re not calling it a bonus,” said Dr. Schmidt. Under STAR, school districts had no recourse but to consider the performance pay a bonus since there was no guarantee the money would be available the following year.

STAR was included in *proviso* language in the 2006-07 budget. All 67 school districts met the Dec. 31, 2006 deadline for submitting their STAR proposals. The State Board of Education has 45 days after a district’s STAR plan is submitted to approve it. If fault is found with the plan, the State Board must spell out specific areas that need revision. Districts then have until March 1, 2007 to submit their final plan. STAR money is to reward the top 25 percent of

high performing teachers in each district with five percent bonuses.

Another bill that passed last year that educators would like to change is the one regulating school start dates. One bill that would have given school districts more flexibility in setting school start dates was narrowly defeated earlier this year by the Senate’s Education Pre-K-12 Committee.

According to legislative sources, the only hope now is if the bill’s language can be attached to another bill, known as a “train,” during the Legislature’s closing days. That’s how the original language, forbidding schools from starting no earlier than two weeks before Labor Day, passed last year. It ended up as part of the massive A++ bill.

The school start date bill by Sen. Bill Posey, R-Rockledge, would have allowed school districts to adopt opening dates earlier than 14 days for schools that operate year-round or that offer advanced placement courses or dual enrollment. That covers most high schools. However, school boards would have also had to hold at least three public hearings on the new start date, surveyed the parents of all enrolled students, and adopted the new date by a two thirds majority.

Under current law, districts, beginning with the 2007-08 school year, cannot start school any earlier than Aug. 20, which meets the 14-day window for Labor Day this year.

According to Pre-K-12 committee staff, 13 districts this school year started school between July 31 and Aug. 4, 2006; another 40 districts began between Aug 7-11; 12 districts between Aug. 14-18, and two districts between Aug. 21-25. Had the legislation been in effect for this school term, school could not have started before Aug. 21. That means 65 districts started earlier than the allowed date had the law been in effect last year.

Continued on Page 4

In this edition. . .

- 2 Day in Legislature coming**
- 3 Tax Reform Commission named**
- 4 Education is big business**

Leadership Calling

Day in Legislature for Florida school boards coming in March

FSBAs 20th annual Day in the Legislature is scheduled for March 28-30 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Tallahassee.

The first day will feature an afternoon briefing on the key issues facing schools and legislators this session. FSBA Legislative Committee Chair Lee Swift, Charlotte County School Board, and vice chair Beverly Gallagher, Broward County School Board, will preside over the two and a half hour briefing. Speakers will include Dr. Wayne Blanton, FSBA executive director, Ruth Melton, FSBA's legislative relations director, and legislative liaisons from several school districts. An FSBA reception will conclude the first day.

FSBA President Sue Hershey will preside at the breakfast meeting March 29 which will feature yet to be announced speakers from the legislative leadership.

The afternoon has been set aside for FSBA members to visit with their legislative delegation.

"To ensure successful meetings with your legislative delegation, it is imperative that you contact them as soon as possible to make an appointment," Ms. Hershey said. "The importance of a scheduled meeting with your delegation cannot be over emphasized."

Friday, March 30, is reserved for the FSBA Board of Directors breakfast and meeting.

School board members can earn a maximum of six points in the Certified Board Member Program for attending this conference.

NSBA conference to feature former President Clinton

The 67th Annual National School Boards Association Conference, code-named "Reach Higher," will be held April 14-17 in San Francisco.

Several key speakers include former President Bill Clinton; the Honorable Sandra Day O'Connor, former U.S. Supreme Court justice; actress Jamie Lee Curtis of *Halloween* fame; Maryland kindergarten teacher Kimberly Oliver, National Teacher of the Year; and Alan Blankstein, author of *Failure is not an Option: Six Principles That Guide Student Achievement in High Performing Schools*.

There will also be sessions on NCLB, community engagement, targeting student learning, mentorship, sexual orientation conflicts and finding a common ground and legislative and Supreme Court updates.

For further information, go to NSBA's web site: www.nsba.org/conference.

Upcoming Events

March 6

Florida Legislative Session begins, Tallahassee

March 27-28

Certified Board Member training, DoubleTree Hotel, Tallahassee

March 28-30

FSBA Day in the Legislature, DoubleTree Hotel, Tallahassee

April 14-17

NSBA Annual Conference, San Francisco, Calif.

May 4

Florida Legislature adjourns



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Taxation and Budget Reform Commission set to begin work this year

School boards will be closely monitoring the actions of the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission which will begin its work for just the second time in 17 years. Senate President Ken Pruitt, R-Port St. Lucie, and House Speaker Marco Rubio, R-Miami, recently named their appointees to the commission.

The commission was originally established by constitutional amendment in 1988 and met for the first time in 1990. Changes adopted by voters in 1998 called for the commission to meet again in 2007 and every 20 years thereafter to examine the state budgetary process, the revenue needs and the expenditure processes of the state, the appropriateness of the State's tax structure; governmental productivity and efficiency; and review the ability of state and local government to tax and adequately fund governmental operations and capital facilities.

The Commission has full authority to place amendments on the ballot without legislative approval. These amendments, if any, would appear on the 2008 general election ballot. Its proposed constitutional amendments must be submitted by May 4, 2008.

The Senate President and House Speaker each appoint seven of the 25 voting members and two legislators to serve as non-voting, ex-officio members. Gov. Charlie Crist will name the other 11 members.

President Pruitt's appointees are Talbot D'Alemberte, Tallahassee law professor; Mike Hogan, Duval County tax collector; Jacintha Mathis, Delray Beach attorney; Randy Miller, executive vice president of the Florida Retail Federation; Former State Sen. Les Miller, Tampa, now manager of minority business development and government relations for Tampa General Hospital; Jade Moore, executive director of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association; Susan Story, president and CEO, Gulf Power Co., Pensacola and ex-officio members, Sen. Mike Haridopolos, R-Melbourne and Sen. Gwen Margolis, D-Miami Beach.

Speaker Rubio's appointees are Former House Speaker Allan Bense, R-

Panama City; former State Rep. Bruce Kyle, now a circuit judge in southwest Florida; Patricia Levesque, former deputy chief of staff to Gov. Jeb Bush and now executive director of the Foundation for Florida's Future; Alan Levin, president and CEO of the North Broward Hospital District; Brian Yablonski, vice president, public affairs for the St. Joe Company and former director of policy and deputy chief of staff for Governor Bush; Julia Johnson, president, NetCommunications,

Windermere; former State Rep. Carlos Lacasa, Miami attorney; and ex-officio members, Rep. Ray Sansom, R-Fort Walton Beach and Rep. Frank Peterman, D-St. Petersburg.

A couple of the changes that came out of the 1990-92 commission included the 72-hour waiting period before the Legislature could adopt a budget and creation of the budget stabilization fund that mandates a reserve fund equal to five percent of the state's total general revenue.

FADSS fetes legislators, educators



A reception sponsored by the Florida Association of District School Superintendents gave educators a chance to meet some of the new legislators who were elected in November, as well as touch bases with veteran lawmakers. Pictured above are, from left, Rep. Will Kendrick, R-Carrabelle; Wayne Blanton, executive director, Florida School Boards Association; Bill Montford, CEO, FADSS; and Herb Stanley, Florida School Book Depository.

School Superintendents Calvin Steven-son, left, Washington County, and Reginald James, right, Gadsden County, welcome Rep. Lorraine Ausley, D-Tallahassee, to the FADSS reception at the Governor's Club in Tallahassee.



From the Executive Director

By WAYNE BLANTON



WAYNE BLANTON

Education is big business

How big is Florida education? If it were a business, it would be listed among the top companies in Florida. Its \$18.2 billion budget clearly dwarfs every other area of state government.

Last year's spending increase, more than eight percent, was the largest in years. (And it might be the high water mark since I don't think we'll be seeing increases like this past year for a few years to come.)

That \$18 billion is just what the state pays and what districts spend to run schools on a day-by-day basis.

Whether it can be considered a business or not, what other company do you know that has 422 board members (school board members from 67 counties plus superintendents) running the business?

Locally is where the statistics really take off. The millions of dollars each district pours into its local economy is practically incalculable. There are too many variables.

Every district has a construction budget to build new or maintain existing schools. That money is spent on contractors who hire employees. Those same contractors also buy lumber, concrete and other building materials.

You have 175,000 Florida teachers plus another 165,000 school district employees. They receive pay checks which they spend in local supermarkets and retail stores. They buy or rent homes or apartments. They buy automobiles. They buy gasoline and they must get their vehicles repaired.

Back to the school district. It operates buses, which means it also must buy fuel to keep those buses running. The district has to keep the schools themselves operating. The electric bill alone would rival that paid by most large corporations.

Nearly all the money that is generated by school districts goes right back into your community. Last year school districts paid \$431 million in utility payments alone.

You need to educate (no pun intended) your local officials just how important your school district is to the community.

One way to do this is

to take the number of your school district employees times their average salary and determine (approximately) how many millions of dollars your district's employees alone put back into your communities.

Let them (your community and business leaders) know how important we are to their survival. Face it: We're taken for granted because, like large corporations that are sometimes bashed, everyone knows we're not going to pack up and go home.

It's important you let your community know you are one of their biggest businesses.

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

Performance pay

Continued from Page 1

Another issue that could affect schools is property tax relief being sought by homeowners. While Gov. Charlie Crist has specifically exempted schools from any changes to property taxes, this is still an area that needs to be closely watched.

School boards would also like to see some changes made in the charter school law that passed last year creating the Florida Schools of Excellence Commission, which has the authority to approve charter schools. FSBA and about a dozen school districts have filed suit against the law, claiming it is unconstitutional.

Despite that legal challenge, there are other issues in the law that need to be clarified, such as how many public dollars charter schools are entitled to.

Growth management legislation also needs clarification, particularly in regards to impact fees and when the developer of a project that would require a new school should pay the fees—before, during, or post construction of the development.

All of these issues and more will be discussed during FSBA's Annual Day in the Legislature, scheduled for March 28-30. (See Page 2 for more conference information.)

