

Leaders

A Newsletter for Florida School Board Members

Give us some class size flexibility

Class size requirements are here and they're not going to go away. In fact, educators recently appearing before a committee of the Florida Taxation and Budget Reform Commission (TBRC) wanted it made clear they don't oppose smaller classes. The problem is how they're going to reach that goal without breaking the bank. One answer: allow them flexibility in determining class sizes.

The commission, which meets just every 20 years, has the authority to place constitutional amendments on next year's General Election ballot without legislative approval. It began meeting earlier this year.

Speaking before the Mental Services Committee of the TBRC, Wayne Blanton, FSBA executive director, warned members that while school districts "have done a pretty good job of getting to the school level, the big problems are going to come as our schools try to meet the per class level" of 18, 22, and 25 students for elementary, middle school and high school. That is to happen by the 2008-2009 school year.

He said student enrollment has been growing about 5,000 students a year. "It dropped a little this year which has taken some pressure off class size, but not much."

Bill Montford, CEO of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, said the association "opposed class size from the beginning. We're not opposed to smaller classes, it's just how do we get there," he added.

"We have found that class size is popular but a couple of

issues are causing problems." One of those is the strict interpretation being taken by DOE on class size numbers. If a district has an average class size of 18.02, it is still out of compliance, he said.

Even legal experts have agreed with DOE's interpretation, said Mr. Montford, and, as Jim Hamilton, retired assistant superintendent from Hillsborough County, told the committee: "The Constitution doesn't say 'maybe, kinda or sorta.'"

"You need to look at some way to provide us with flexibility," said Mr. Montford. "Even rounding down would help. When the 19th child comes into a class, that child will trigger another classroom. That makes it real difficult when you have to tell some of those students they're going to be moved into another class and that won't be popular with parents."

In answer to an "is class size working" question, Dr. Blanton replied: "The only empirical evidence we have is elementary seems to have seen some improvement."

Mr. Hamilton said his district opposed the class size amendment when it was first proposed. "We felt it wasn't appropriate for the Constitution and that it's not the highest and best use of tax dollars."

One solution has been with co-teaching, "But we've already had feedback that it's not the best. We foresee the day when there will be an interpretation that we can't do that either."

He said one way to meet the per class requirement is to establish even smaller classes to give districts some flex-



Bill Montford

School board attendance at TBRC meetings critical

It is important that school boards attend as many meetings of the Florida Taxation and Budget Reform Commission as possible. What the commission decides could have an impact on Florida's finances, including education funding, for years to come.

"We need to make sure our input is heard and we can only do that by attending these meetings," said FSBA Executive Director Wayne Blanton.

Meeting dates and other commission actions can be viewed at the commission's web page: www.floridatbrc.org.

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Leadership Calling

Superintendent Elia honored by state's education administrators

Hillsborough County Schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia received the Lamp of Knowledge award recently from the Florida Association of School Administrators.

Hillsborough County School Board Chair Jack Lamb, former FSBA president, accepted the award on behalf of the superintendent, who was out of town for a previously scheduled event. Dr. Lamb, who won the award in 2003, also nominated Superintendent Elia, noting that she "truly hit her stride" when she took over as superintendent in 2005.

Ms. Elia was recognized for securing the largest teacher raise in 20 years, working closely with U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings on the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, and leading the state in implementing performance pay plans for teachers.

The Lamp of Knowledge award is given annually to an education administrator for outstanding contributions to the field of education.



MaryEllen Elia

Lake County begins superintendent search

The Lake County School Board is beginning its search for a new superintendent. Voters last year decided they wanted the post to be appointive, rather than elective.

Anyone interested in the position should contact Dr. Wayne Blanton, FSBA executive director, who is helping Lake County conduct the search. The successful candidate won't assume his or her post until late 2008 (after the November general election) but will likely be named by spring, 2008, said Dr. Blanton.

Another special session ahead

The Florida Legislature's third special session will kick off Sept. 18 and could run until Oct. 5. The reason? Less-than-anticipated revenue is throwing Florida's budget out of balance.

House Speaker Marco Rubio, R-Miami, and Senate President Ken Pruitt, R-Port St. Lucie, sent a memo to lawmakers in July about the special session.

An economic slowdown, caused in large part by a slumping housing market, has forced a drop in tax receipts that is expected to top \$1 billion during the next year. Exactly how much that will affect education is not yet known.

While Gov. Charlie Crist has already ordered state agencies to prepare for 10% cuts, a more likely scenario is around four percent.

The first special session was in January, two months prior to the regular 2007 session, to fix the state's homeowners insurance market. Legislators also met in June to approve some property tax cut measures.



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Upcoming Events

December 4-7
FSBA Annual Joint Conference, Tampa



Florida School boards encouraged to adopt sportsmanship resolution

FSBFA is encouraging school boards around the state to make good sportsmanship a priority at its schools.

The association in June sent school boards a suggested resolution they can adopt emphasizing the importance they place on sportsmanship.

"Over the last couple of years, there have been incidents on football fields and basketball courts," said FSBA Executive Director Wayne Blanton. He added that while there are some good role models among professional athletes, recent incidents also show there are problems there as well. "I think some of our professional role models are failing us," he said.

FSBA at its spring conference in June in Tampa adopted a suggested resolution that school boards can use. It says that each school principal "should ensure that those individuals connected

with his/her school adhere to the high standards set forth by the Florida High School Athletic Association..."

The resolution goes on to say that "each coach in all sports will exercise control over every individual student athlete to ensure fair play, respect and graciousness in winning or losing."

It suggested that at the beginning of each school year, every high school principal should "meet with the school's student leaders, coaches and sports notables to convey the values of sportsmanship and good conduct."

Finally: FSBA "expresses its unconditional support for all student athletes, coaches and any employee associated with athletic activities in the high school to exercise exemplary sportsmanship at all times..."

"The FHSAA is delighted the Florida School Boards Association has taken such a bold stance on sportsmanship for

the 2007-08 school year," said FHSAA Commissioner John Stewart. "Their leadership in this all-important area means a great deal and hopefully it will have a positive impact on the behavior of athletes, coaches, and fans at athletic contests.

"Civility at athletic contests has been declining the past several years and every effort needs to be made to stress why we use athletic competition to teach young people the importance of teamwork, loyalty, commitment, dedication, self discipline, proper nutrition and health habits," Mr. Stewart added.

Dr. Blanton said in some cases, opposing teams are forbidden to shake hands after a game for fear of a fight breaking out. "This kind of thinking has to stop," he said. "The way to do that is at the individual school because good sportsmanship starts at home."

Flexibility

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ibility. "But we'll have to pay that premium. The only way we're going to meet that ceiling is to set it lower than the cap."

His suggestion? "Remove the hard caps. I would prescribe a district-wide, or school-wide average with schools being given some flexibility. Having this flexibility would solve most of our problems."

As an indication of just how expensive class size compliance has become, he said that under his calculations, "all new state funding dollars (over the past five years) has gone to cut class size."

Another issue, highlighted by Vern Crawford, former Palm Beach County assistant superintendent and now legislative consultant for several school districts, regards teacher recruitment. "At a time when Florida needs teachers worse than ever, they can't afford housing. In Monroe, the average cost of a house is \$700,000. Teachers can't afford housing so they're taking jobs in Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, regardless of the state income tax there," he said.

Dr. Blanton agreed. "I also don't think we're getting the same level of quality teachers as we were a few years ago. Then, we were hiring 22,000 teachers; now we're hiring 30,000."

Mark Pritchett and Doug Tuthill from the Collins

Center for Public Policy, said some of the innovations the Legislature has allowed over the past few years, such as charter and virtual schools, are taking some of the class size pressure off school districts.

"Our main message is, innovation is good," said Mr. Pritchett.

Their recommendations:

- ✓ Expand public education to include qualified publicly funded private providers.
- ✓ Remove barriers to innovations.
- ✓ Enable more local flexibility to spur creativity.

"There are so many state hurdles that get in the way. So much creativity is tied up in public education. We need to get bureaucracy off their (teachers) backs (because) teachers are way over regulated," Mr. Pritchett added.

The Government Services Committee, one of four the commission created to look at budget- and tax-related issues has been meeting periodically around the state. Several more meetings of this committee are scheduled in August and September and soon thereafter, the full commission will begin holding public hearings.

The commission will begin drafting its recommendations between December and February. In March and April it will then debate the proposals, settling by May 4 on the amendments it will place on the November, 2008 ballot. To track commission activities or to find out when the commission will be meeting, check out its web site at www.floridatbrc.org.

From the President

By JEANNE DOZIER

A busy summer for FSBA and education



Jeanne Dozier

In July, your Executive Committee attended the NSBA Southern Region Conference hosted this year by the Texas Association of School Boards. In addition to promoting public education and school board service, this annual conference encourages the exchange of information regarding public school policies, education advances, school management, and other related issues.

Prior to the official start of the conference, there was a leadership symposium to which all of the leaders from the southern region states were invited. As your president, I was asked to present a session with Jim Methvin, president of the Alabama Association of School Boards. I addressed the evolution in leadership that has occurred and what our state association provides at the local level in the area of board development to enrich our experience as board members. The session was well received by all those who attended.

It was an honor and a privilege to represent FSBA while in Texas. As I met and talked with presidents from other states, I was thrilled to learn about all of the exciting things going on across America. But one thing is certain—Florida is right out there in the forefront on educational issues. We are to be proud of what we are doing for Florida's students.

On the legislative front, I would like to share with you some of what resulted from Florida's special legislative session on local property taxes. The Legislature agreed to put a Constitutional Amendment before the voters to replace the Save Our Homes benefit with a greatly expanded homestead exemption for homesteaders who elect the new system.

As part of the proposal, House Speaker Marco Rubio, R-Miami, and Senate President Ken Pruitt, R-Port St. Lucie, pledged in a memo to make up any revenue losses for school districts as a result of the amendment passing. Current estimates suggest that the proposal would cost school districts as much as \$1.7 billion per year, which is roughly equivalent to setting the level of public school funding backward by one year.

Allowing this to happen is unacceptable in a state where the voters have twice changed Florida's Constitution to support and mandate greater funding for public schools, and it is heartening to hear the leadership of the Legislature agreeing.

The concern, however, is what does it mean when they say that they will hold public school funding harmless at a time when the same leadership is preparing to cut the

current year budget for public schools because of general revenue shortfalls? While some recent early polling suggests majority support for the amendment, it is my belief that the citizens will not approve this amendment by the 60% margin needed to pass unless they are convinced that the Governor and Legislature have a solid financial plan to make good on their promises. We will need to watch closely for any new developments in this area.

Please remember that our Committee Days are scheduled for Oct. 24 and 25 in Tampa. If you haven't already signed up to serve on one of the committees, I would encourage you to do so. Our association cannot settle for being only good, it must work toward being great, and it can only achieve greatness through your participation. Please do your part by becoming an active member. Contact the FSBA office to offer your service.

Many of our members will be attending the Annual Board of Directors' Retreat in September. As you know, the location of the retreat is selected each year by the president and is held in his/her region. I am very pleased to host this year's retreat at the Hyatt Coconut Point in beautiful Bonita Springs beginning Sept. 6 and concluding Sept. 8. We have a full agenda, and I am very excited about all of the wonderful things we have planned. If you will be joining us, please be sure to submit your paperwork early so we can finalize all of the arrangements.

Plans have already begun for the Annual Joint Conference in December. This year's agenda is packed with informative sessions and plenty of opportunities to network and share best practices with board members throughout the state. We have also arranged to have David Warlick (former teacher, author and educator), Bill Daggett (International Center for Leadership in Education) and Dr. Tonia Stewart (director of Theatre Arts, Alabama) as our conference speakers. I know that their presentations will inspire and motivate us all. So, please mark your calendars to attend the Annual Joint Conference, which will be held at the Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay Dec. 4-7. I hope to see you there!

It is my distinct pleasure to serve as your president for the coming year. I hope to see you at some of the upcoming events so that we may work and grow together as we build futures, one student at a time.

Ms. Dozier, a member of the Lee County School Board, is FSBA's 2007-2008 President.