

Leaders

A Newsletter for Florida School Board Members

Slim K-12 cuts in special session but more budget reductions ahead

It's hard to imagine that an education funding cut could be considered good news, but that, in theory anyway, was what transpired during the recent special session of Florida's Legislature, called to deal exclusively with the state's worsening economic climate.

"The two percent cut for schools was less than we anticipated," said FSBA Executive Director Wayne Blanton. "We appreciate the Legislature working with us to minimize our funding reductions and listening to local boards as they requested more flexibility in their budgets. This flexibility will allow us to get through this year and then the real fight begins."

That two percent final cut figure includes the 1.93% reduction (or \$355 million statewide) school districts had already taken prior to the Special Session, where another \$15 million was cut from school districts budgets.

More importantly, districts were given some flexibility, allowing them to use capital outlay millage funds to pay property and casualty insurance without the district having to meet other requirements, such as class size targets or being able to show they can meet capital outlay needs over the next five years. This flexibility will be in force until June 30, 2010.

However, as Ruth Melton, FSBA's Legislative Relations director noted, "It's important to remember the bad news. Because there are only minimal cuts to the education budget now, if there is no new revenue, there will have to be

far more substantial cuts to the education budget (possibly billions) during the regular legislative session." A more complete review of the Special Session is available from FSBA's Web site, www.fsba.org.

Florida's short term revenue picture isn't promising. Amy Baker, Florida Legislature Office of Economic and Demographic Research, at a joint meeting of school boards, cities and counties, pointed out that historically, Florida has never had three years of revenue declines as has occurred the past three years. The projection for 2009-2010 isn't much better, predicting a slight 1.6% increase in revenues, which means that it could be 2010-2011 before the state's economic recovery begins to take hold.

Creation of the Senate Select Committee on Florida's Economy could help alleviate some of the painful budget cuts, but many of its potential solutions would be long-term. The committee is chaired by Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Fort Walton Beach, a former school board member and superintendent.

The senator, at the same joint meeting, noted that Florida's budget had been growing about 8% a year for the past 10 years to the \$73 billion level. Had this growth continued, that budget would have climbed to \$83 billion in the next several years.

"In reality, we'll have \$63 billion in revenue (for 2009-2010), \$10 billion less than we had previously," he said. "While we can obsess about the budget, the real problem is the economy. We cannot cut our way out of this problem, nor can we tax our way out," he said.

One of the new committee's goals is to identify other revenue sources, including examining the billions of dollars in sales tax exemptions, he said.

"We've been asked by the Senate President (Sen. Jeff Atwater, R-North Palm Beach) to review the tax code. That's not code to raise taxes. We will be examining tax exemptions."

From this committee could come proposed legislation for action this year, policy changes or proposed constitutional amendments, including possibly seeking to change how school

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Special Report

**Announcing new buyer's consortium
Thanks to our Fall conference sponsors**

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Leadership Calling

School boards, counties, cities support tougher restrictions on unfunded mandates

A joint January meeting of executive officers from FSBA, the Florida League of Cities and the Florida Association of Counties yielded issue statements regarding unfunded mandates and expenditure caps. Both will be presented to the state Legislature prior to its regular session which begins March 3.

In the first statement, the three groups "oppose legislative or constitutional restrictions" that would limit a local government's taxing authority.

With unfunded mandates, the three organizations support legislative or constitutional efforts that would provide "meaningful enhancements to the existing unfunded mandates provision." This would include eliminating exemptions from unfunded mandate scrutiny, providing greater public notice, legislative scrutiny and fiscal information and enhancing accountability and transparency.



FSBA President Beverly Slough, St. Johns County School Board, was one of several FSBA officers to attend the joint meeting of the Florida Association of Counties and Florida League of Cities. Flanking Ms. Slough are the respective presidents of the other two groups, Councilman Carmine Priore, Wellington, left, and Commissioner Rodney Long, Alachua County.

Don't miss Day in Legislature

F SBA's annual Day in the Legislature will be held March 19-20 in Tallahassee. It follows by a day the association's New School Board Member Orientation, a two-day affair beginning March 17. Both events are at the Doubletree Hotel a block from the Capitol.

"It's important that every member be here to meet with their legislators and impress upon them that school districts have already cut their budgets as far as they can," said FSBA Executive Director Wayne Blanton.

The Florida PTA is also sponsoring a rally for schools on March 18 to encourage legislators to adequately fund public schools.

"Funding and flexibility will be our motto for this legislative session," said Dr. Blanton.

For more information about the March conference, go to FSBA's Web site, www.fsba.org or phone 850-414-2578.



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Joe Pickens receives FSBA's Lifetime Achievement honors

Former State Rep. Joe Pickens is the recipient of the Florida School Boards Association's Lifetime Achievement Award which was presented during the organization's annual fall conference in Tampa last month.

"He has been our best friend in the Florida Legislature for the past eight years," said FSBA Executive Director Wayne Blanton, who, along with Lake County School Board member Larry Metz, chairman of the association's Legislative Committee, presented the award to Rep. Pickens.

Term limits forced Mr. Pickens to step down following the 2008 legislative session. Prior to his election to the Florida House, Pickens had served as Putnam County school board attorney for 17 years. Earlier this year he was named president of St. Johns River Community College in St. Augustine. The Palatka Republican also received FSBA's Legislator of the Year award seven of the eight years he spent in the Legislature.

This is the fourth time FSBA's Lifetime Achievement



Former State Rep. Joe Pickens, center, receives congratulations from FSBA's Legislative Committee Chair Larry Metz, Lake County School Board; Mr. Pickens' wife, Linda; FSBA President Beverly Slough and Executive Director Wayne Blanton.

award has been presented. Other recipients have included Florida's former lieutenant governor Frank Brogan; Senate President Toni Jennings, who served as lieutenant governor under Jeb Bush; and Gov. Lawton Chiles, who died in 1998 during the last month of his second term.



Joe Joyner Superintendent of Year

St. Johns County Superintendent Joe Joyner, center, was the recipient of the Superintendent of the Year award given to him by the Florida Association of District School Superintendents in December. Offering congratulations are, from left, Bill Montford, FADSS CEO; Peg Smith, Volusia County School Superintendent and FADSS president; FSBA President Beverly Slough and Executive Director Wayne Blanton.

Gus Stavros honored with FSBA's Citizen of the Year Award

Pinellas County businessman and philanthropist Gus Stavros is the recipient of the Florida School Boards Association's Citizen of the Year award. It was presented to him by Pasco School Board member Kathryn Starkey during the association's annual conference in Tampa in December.

The 83-year-old Stavros founded the Pinellas Education Foundation, which has raised more than \$90 million for Pinellas teachers and students. He also initiated Enterprise Village and Finance Park at the Stavros Institute, which has provided free enterprise education to nearly 500,000 fifth and eighth graders. In addition to the Gus A. Stavros Institute in Largo, the Free Enterprise and Economic Education Centers at Florida State and the University of South Florida both bear his name.



Congratulating Gus Stavros, center, are, from left: Kathryn Starkey, Pasco County School Board; Mr. Stavros' wife, Frances; FSBA President Beverly Slough, St. Johns County School Board; and FSBA Executive Director Wayne Blanton.

From the President

By BEVERLY SLOUGH



Beverly Slough

As legislature gets ready for 2009 session, battles loom over adequate education funding

In any war, strong alliances and coalitions can spell the difference between victory and defeat. The latest battle in the war over education funding ended in a measured victory, with our cuts ending up at two percent rather than something much deeper, thanks in part to the efforts of our grassroots partners across the state.

Beginning with the 50th No More group in St. Johns County, many coalitions of parents and other partners have sprung up in Florida. (The name is derived from U.S. Census figures showing that Florida is last, 50th, in education funding.) FSBA has been coordinating the efforts of the various organizations to harness the power of these grassroots efforts.

We have held three statewide meetings—two in St. Augustine and the latest in Orange County—to bring together partners from Palm Beach, Broward and St. Johns counties, the Central Florida Coalition, the Florida PTA, the Florida Education Association, and, of course, FSBA's own advocacy committee to rally the efforts and present a united front as we work to ensure that Florida's children have the resources they need for a quality education.

Many ideas were generated and concrete plans are coming together to make our legislators fully aware of the necessity for finding stronger funding streams for our children.

On March 18, during FSBA's Day in the Legislature, the Florida PTA is organizing a rally at the capitol beginning at 11 a.m. This group plans to bring parents from all over the state to join with us to show mass support for proper—and in the words of Florida's Constitution—adequate funding for education.

Please plan to attend our Day in the Legislature and arrive in time for the rally. Our legislators need to see that

there is grassroots support for new funding sources and strong advocacy for stopping the bleeding to the education budget.

The joint meeting of the executive committees of the Florida School Boards Association, Florida League of Cities, and Florida Association of Counties was held Jan.15. We heard from Amy Baker, Florida's chief economist, who noted that Florida's economy is continuing to deteriorate.

We also heard from Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Fort Walton Beach, who gave an overview of the new Senate Select Committee on Florida's Economy, a group charged with a review of Florida's tax structure, economic needs, and identifying incentives and disincentives to allow our state to emerge from the recession sooner than later.

The two year work is "hard wired to the Senate floor" and is expected to generate legislation and possible Constitutional amendments, according to the charge given the committee by Senate President Jeff Atwater, R-North Palm Beach. The group, which Senator Gaetz chairs, is traveling the state, seeking input from local citizens. FSBA, the Florida Association of Counties and the Florida League of Cities are working closely to formulate recommendations to share with the committee.

FSBA is working diligently to strengthen these coalitions and build others so that we may win the battles and ultimately the war. Please visit the FSBA website, www.fsba.org, often to access advocacy tools, information, and calls to action. Working together, we will build the bridge over troubled economic waters that will ensure the success of Florida's children.

Ms. Slough, a member of the St. Johns County School Board, is FSBA's 2008-09 president.

Upcoming Events

March 3	Legislature convenes, Tallahassee
March 5-6	Master Board Forum, Gainesville
March 17-18	New Board Member Orientation Doubletree Hotel, Tallahassee
March 18	Florida PTA's education funding rally Tallahassee
March 19-20	FSBA's Day in the Legislature Doubletree, Tallahassee
April 4-7	NSBA's 69th Annual Conference San Diego, Calif.

K-12 cuts

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districts must comply with class size mandates.

"We're hearing from lots of people that class size is a major economic impediment," said Sen. Gaetz.

He also issued a challenge to cities, counties and school boards. "If you know of things that we could change, tell us specifically. Don't tell us that we have too much permitting. Be specific about which ones."

Education buyers consortium can save school districts money

With school districts already hit by two percent budget cuts and more reductions likely to come during the 2009 Legislative Session, organizations representing school boards and superintendents have banded together to create a new group that could save districts' money in the equipment and supplies they buy on a daily basis.

To that end, FSBA's board of directors and the Florida Association of District School Superintendents have approved creation of the Florida Education Purchasing Consortium.

The consortium's major purpose is to "maximize every dollar a school district spends," particularly on school equipment and supplies, said consultant Jim Hamilton, a retired assistant Hillsborough County superintendent who has helped put the consortium together and is now acting as its liaison.

"Now, more than ever, we have to get the biggest bang for our dollar," said FSBA Executive Director Wayne Blanton.

Candace Lankford, Volusia County School Board, chairs the consortium. Vice chair is Orange County Superintendent Ron Blocker.

"This will help members of FSBA and FADSS squeeze every dollar they can out of what they purchase," said Mr. Hamilton.

For example, every school district has to buy paper. If a district is a member of the consortium, the paper costs would be lower than if the district had purchased the item individually, added Mr. Hamilton.

All districts have to do to become members of the consortium is for each to approve a resolution to join, then submit a membership agreement to the consortium. There are no membership fees or costs to districts to participate and they are not obligated to buy anything, he said.

All purchasing activities will meet required competitive solicitation procedures. In addition, consortium members will develop the standard

product specifications.

In addition to leveraging school districts' buying power, a vendor fee could generate income for districts that would lead to rebates.

"We are asking board members and superintendents to join and support the consortium," said Dr. Blanton.

More information about the consortium will be disseminated to school districts in the next few weeks.

Here's a brief look at how the consortium will operate:

- Member districts identify goods and services common across the state.
- The consortium then establishes agreed-upon specs for the product or service.
- A member district will become the lead district to handle the solicitation.
- Member districts can also participate in pre-solicitation meetings with vendors to establish terms and conditions and to explain to participants the vendor fee and business volume.
- All awards will stipulate that the quantity to be provided reflects the needs of the participating members.

In addition, school district staffs can help develop the bid specifications.

He emphasized that local vendors won't be cut out of the bidding process. The consortium intends to work with communities to make sure these vendors can still participate.

"This consortium is the same business model of Wal-Mart and other major businesses," said Mr. Hamilton, "This way, they can leverage their total purchasing power to get the maximum best value."

Added Dr. Blanton: "What's not to like about this new organization? School districts have nothing to lose and a lot to gain by joining the Florida Education Purchasing Consortium."

We thank the sponsors of our Annual Fall Conference Dec. 2-5, 2008

The Florida School Boards Association, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents and the many other associations which helped produce our annual Fall Conference would like to recognize our highly valued partners. Relationships with our sponsors are instrumental in our pursuit of a higher quality of education in Florida. Thank you!

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