

# Leaders

A Newsletter for Florida School Board Members

## The 'iffy' federal stimulus package

**O**f, if, if...that pretty much sums up Florida education's current economic picture. For example, if a waiver is granted, Florida will receive its stimulus funds. However, if a waiver is granted, there may be other stipulations which could limit the amount of money the state receives. If a waiver is not granted, or is reduced until Florida performs certain elements, the Legislature may be back in Tallahassee much sooner, maybe as early as a month after adjournment because the budget won't be in balance.

Both the House and Senate budgets rely on \$865.5 million in Federal State Fiscal Stabilization (FSFS) funds and provide that the funds will be allocated in the FEFP based on each district's proportionate share of base funding. Federal stabilization funds are also used to support several other programs and services including Workforce Education, Prekindergarten Programs, and many of the non-FEFP programs. Although these funds will probably become available, Florida's eligibility has not yet been confirmed. Further, if and when a waiver is granted, additional conditions may be placed on the amount, release, and use of these funds.

"The first hurdle Florida needs to jump is to get the necessary waiver to qualify for all the funding we're entitled to," said Ruth Melton, FSBA's Director of Legislative Relations.

The most confusing piece and the part that's supposed to provide the most relief is in the budget stabilization fund. "These dollars are specifically intended for school districts and states to stabilize their budget during this downturn," said Ms. Melton. "One of the biggest obligations in state budgets is funding education, so during an economic down-

turn, it's education that typically gets hit the hardest."

Florida has \$2.7 billion available in this area. Again, this is for a two-year period, or about \$1.35 billion a year.

Here is where Florida might run into some problems. "There has always been a requirement that you use federal dollars to supplement not supplant state and federal funding," said Ms. Melton. The federal government looks at how much the state and school districts contributed to education funding to see if they've maintained that same level of funding that existed in 2006.

"To qualify for these stabilization funds there needed to be a maintenance of effort equivalent to 2006 funding. In other words, whatever you spent in 2006, you need to have spent this year," she said.

Since Florida usually feels the affects of a bad economy first, the state has been cutting its budget since 2007. "There has not been that maintenance of effort, so it appears we may not qualify under that provision," Ms. Melton added.

However, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan has the ability to grant a waiver. To qualify for the waiver, the state needs to show that education hasn't been cut to a larger degree than anything else in the state budget.

Because education funding makes up a large portion of Florida's budget, when state revenue drops, the major source of budget cutting is with education. "Then the real estate market went bust and the ability of school districts to meet their share was hindered," said Ms. Melton.

Bottom line? There is a question whether or not Florida can qualify for a waiver. It all depends on the ability of the state to maintain the same percentage of funding for education.

It's probable Florida will receive that waiver, but it could come with conditions. For example, one condition may go something like this: "We'll distribute your money at a slower pace to allow time to insure the funds are spent as intended," said Ms. Melton.

Legislators have planned to use \$865.5 million in stimulus money in 2009-10. If Florida doesn't qualify for a waiver or there is a delay in receiving the funds, the Legislature would have to return to Tallahassee to balance the budget.

Finally, remember that the stimulus package is for two years and it's non-recurring revenue. Which means if the state's economy doesn't significantly rebound in two years, Florida could be in worse shape.

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# Leadership Calling

## Broward named two-time finalist for \$2 million Broad prize

**B**roward County Public Schools is one of five urban school districts selected as a finalist for the 2009 Broad Prize for Urban Education sponsored by the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation.

The Broad (rhymes with road) Prize is an annual \$2 million award that honors the urban school districts that demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among ethnic groups and between low- and non-low-income students.

This is the second consecutive year Broward County Public Schools has been a finalist for the country's largest education prize. Broward was named a finalist again because new data analysis shows the district has continued to make student gains.

Broward will be competing against Aldine Independent School District, Houston, Tex.; Gwinnett County Public Schools, Atlanta, Ga.; Long Beach Unified School District, California and Socorro Independent School District, El Paso, Tex. The winner will be announced Sept. 16 in Washington, D.C. and will receive \$1 million in scholarships for high school seniors who will graduate in 2010. The four finalist districts will each receive \$250,000 in scholarships.

"While all urban school systems across this country face enormous challenges, Broward shows us what a successful public school district can accomplish," said foundation founder Eli Broad. "Broward's student-centered strategy has created the learning conditions that have empowered Broward students to make some of the strongest gains in the country, earning the district national recognition for the past two years."

## FSBA's Spring Conference in June

**D**r. Yong Zhao, a professor in the Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education at Michigan State University, and Sports Illustrated associate editor Don Yaeger are two of the keynote speakers scheduled for FSBA's Spring Conference June 10-12 at the Grand Hyatt in Tampa.

Dr. Zhao, who is also Director of the Center for Teaching and Technology at the university as well as the U.S.-China Center for Research on Educational Excellence, which is housed at MSU, will speak at the opening general session June 11 on "Catching Up or Keeping the Lead: American Education in the Age of Globalization."

Mr. Yaeger, billed as an author, media coach and entrepreneur, will speak at the Friday breakfast on "What Makes the Great Ones Great."

Concurrent workshops include: Education Issues Facing You; One Less Teen Fatality, Take the Teen Driver's Challenge; Strategic Questions for your Director of Technology; Adequacy Lawsuit: Now, Later, or Never?; Impasse: Timing is Everything; and Education Foundations can become successful.

The conference will conclude with a review of the 2009 legislative session and a discussion about implementing the federal stabilization stimulus.

The conference will also feature installation of FSBA's 2009-2010 officers and presentation of Board Development awards and FSBA's technology awards.

For registration information, contact FSBA at 850-414-2578.



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# Parents, teachers make their voices heard

**T**housands—teachers, administrators, parents, students, school board members and superintendents—were on hand at the Florida PTA-sponsored Rally in Tally last month to encourage the Legislature to keep education funding stable. As with earlier rallies around the state, the mantra was the same: “No more cuts.”

“Education has taken too many hits. We’ve cut as far as we can,” FSBA President Beverly Slough, St. Johns County School Board, told the gathering. “We must have more funding streams.”

She also encouraged the crowd to continue sending e-mails to “keep up the pressure” and to let legislators know that “we mean what we say, no more cuts and stable funding for education.”

“Legislators told us they hadn’t heard from our parents. Well you’re here now,” Karin Brown, Florida PTA president, said. “The needs of our children need to be met now, not next year, now.”

Here are some other comments from superintendents who spoke at the rally:

“Isn’t it time our leaders stood up and told the truth about education funding in this state? If we’re hit with another five percent cut, how many teachers or administrators will lose their jobs?” Jackie Pons, Leon County superintendent.

“A high quality education system equals a high-performing state. We’ve gotten great results with mediocre funding.” Ed Pratt-Dannals, Duval County superintendent.

“It takes leadership to do the right thing when times are tough. Let this be a wake-up call...let’s step up for our children today.” Alberto Carvalho, Miami-Dade County superintendent.

*One of the more creative signs at the Rally in Tally last month in Tallahassee was this one from the Marie Antoinette-garbed Donna Greene, a parent of two Hollywood high school students.*



**FSBA’s Wayne Blanton, left, and Bill Montford, CEO, Florida Association of District School Superintendents, right, meet with Duval Superintendent Ed Pratt-Dannals prior to his speech at the rally.**



**Thousands of sign-waving parents, teachers, and more were on hand for last month’s Rally in Tally sponsored by the Florida PTA.**

## FSBA members convene for legislative day

The rally was a fitting opening to FSBA’s Day in the Legislature, which began minutes after the rally ended.

Amy Baker, Office of Economic and Demographic research, gave somewhat dour predictions about Florida’s economy and added that while it will rebound, that’s likely not to happen for at least a year.

FSBA Executive Director Wayne Blanton gave members what he called “The Bottom Line,” talking points they could use when visiting their legislators. These points included: No more cuts, more local control and flexibility over how funds are spent, flexibility on class size, no new programs, and don’t limit or reduce state and local revenue or impose expenditure requirements.

Sen. Steve Wise, R-Jacksonville, chair of Education Pre K-12 Appropriations, called school board members “heroes. I can’t even imagine what you folks are going through.”

Regardless of the slow start to the budgeting process, he said he was “optimistic we’ll do some revenue enhancements,” Sen. Wise added.

Finally, at the FSBA board meeting following the Day in the Legislature, directors unanimously voted to delay filing an adequacy lawsuit against the state, deciding the time wasn’t right.

“We’ve not abandoned the idea, we’ve just tabled it,” said Ms. Slough.

**FSBA President Beverly Slough greets Sen. Steve Wise, who spoke to FSBA members during the Day in the Legislature last month in Tallahassee.**



# From the President

By BEVERLY SLOUGH



Beverly Slough

## Grass-roots efforts have made a difference; keep it up

**I**f ever there were a time to build a bridge over troubled – no, turbulent – waters, that time is now.

Your leadership, as demonstrated by your advocacy and your encouragement of grass-roots participation in this battle, is making a difference in Tallahassee. I have had reports from legislators that the rally in Tallahassee March 16 caused an increase in funding in the House budget, and the visits from FSBA members and parents, teachers, children, and community members is making a difference in legislators' thinking concerning education funding.

We must not let up on our advocacy efforts. Continue to keep letters, calls, and e-mails coming. Visit your representatives when they are home. Come to Tallahassee often so that your legislators see your face and understand your continuing concern. Keep building that bridge, plank by plank, for the benefit of our children.

The Nominating Committee met during the Day in the Legislature and developed a slate of officers for your consideration at our Annual Meeting in June. They include President-Elect Candace Lankford, Volusia County; Vice President Lee Swift, Charlotte County; and Treasurer Beverly Gallagher, Broward County. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor during our membership meeting June 11.

The Board of Directors also met during FSBA's Day in the Legislature. After much healthy debate, it was decided to lend FSBA's support to the Seminole Indian Gaming Com-

pact. While we do not advocate the expansion of gambling, the Seminole Tribe does not need the State of Florida's approval for their gaming. They can apply to the U.S. Department of Interior. However, they are offering education 95% of the agreed upon percentage of profits from their gaming endeavor, which, if approved by the Legislature, will provide a huge influx of money for education. We also considered support of parimutuel gaming, but the Board decided not to support this because it would expand gambling throughout the state.

The Board of Directors also heard from our attorney, Ron Meyer, who shared with us the pros and cons of filing an adequacy lawsuit. After hearing his presentation, the Board voted unanimously to delay filing at this time.

As you are aware, the FSBA Executive Committee drafted a letter to the NSBA Board of Directors, expressing concern about an increase in dues for the coming year. We outlined the dire financial conditions Florida, as well as the majority of other states, is facing and urged them to follow Florida's lead by freezing, not increasing, dues for 2009-2010. I am happy to report that NSBA's Board voted unanimously to do just that: dues are frozen for next year. I applaud the leadership of NSBA for listening to the needs of its membership.

Our spring conference is fast approaching. It will be June 10-12 at the Grand Hyatt in Tampa. Make plans now to attend this vital meeting. In addition to challenging speakers and relevant breakout sessions, you will not want to miss the Legislative Update. Because the budget process is delayed, it is becoming increasingly probable that we will not hold our normal regional updates this year as complete information may not be available ahead of our conference.

Sponsorships are even more important than ever this year. Please forward names and contact information for your vendors to Wayne Blanton so that he can contact them for possible sponsorships. Please also remember to thank our sponsors. Their support is more vital than ever in these challenging times.

Keep building your leadership bridge in these troubling times. If I, or any of the FSBA Executive Committee, may assist you in any way please feel free to contact us.

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

## Upcoming Events

<b>April 30- May 1</b>	Master Board Forum, Panama City
<b>May 1</b>	Legislature adjourns
<b>May 7-8</b>	Master Board Forum, Ocala
<b>May 13-15</b>	Florida Education Negotiators Conference, Daytona Beach
<b>June 10-12</b>	FSBA's Annual Spring Conference, Grand Hyatt, Tampa
<b>July 8-10</b>	NSBA Southern Region Conference, Little Rock, Ark.