

# Leaders

A Newsletter for Florida School Board Members

## Pickens: 'lean' budget year ahead; pain won't be felt as much by schools

**R**ep. Joe Pickens probably summed it up best: "What a difference a year makes," he said. Leading off the fifth year of the FSBA-sponsored Education Today weekly television program, the chairman of the House Schools and Learning Council was referring to, what else, money. The state was flush with dollars last year which led to record funding increases for education. But Representative Pickens assured viewers that while this will be a lean year, education isn't likely to suffer.

He had lots to say about another key issue, performance pay (see Special Report) but mostly, he dwelt on something always near and dear to educators: money.

This "lean year is something we haven't had for four or five years," he said. "All factors that affect our budget are down." Some of those "factors" include real estate taxes, tourism ("which is a little flat) and sales tax collections.

Hurricane recovery efforts, which led to a building boom, which subsequently drove sales tax collections upward, helped provide a flush budget over the past couple of years.

He projected a total education budget for 2007-08 of around \$19.2 or \$19.3 billion, although Gov. Charlie Crist's recommendations are near the \$19.4 billion mark, a 7.54% increase over the \$18 billion from last year.

The good news, bad news about student enrollment is that while student growth plummeted to 2,000 this school year and is projected to be only about 5,000 for the 2007-08 year—a far cry from the 30,000 to 40,000 increase in student growth of past years—it will mean less total FTE dollars but, he said, the "per student allocation will go up. It will also have a positive effect on class size. It's still not affordable but it becomes easier with fewer students." Gov. Crist is recommending \$7,341—a 7.32% increase—in total funds per student.

Added FSBA Executive Director Wayne Blanton: "We have 1,000 schools in Florida that are over 50-years-old that will eventually have to be replaced. This slow down in



*Rep. Joe Pickens, left, R-Palatka, is the first guest for Dr. Wayne Blanton, FSBA executive director and host of Education Today, a weekly TV program broadcast statewide with the assistance of the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium. Helping kick off the program's fifth year is Paula Lovett Waller, PAEC's executive director.*

growth will help us."

With required local effort, the governor has recommended a decrease of about one tenth of a mill from 5.1 mills to 4.9 mills. "We'll probably go along with that," said Rep. Pickens.

But with a property tax revolt underway in Florida from homeowners who have seen their property taxes skyrocket, changes will likely be forthcoming. The House has recommended a constitutional amendment that would take homes off the property tax rolls, while raising the sales tax by 2.5 cents. The sales tax revenue, explained Rep. Pickens, would go into a sales tax trust fund and redistributed to cities and counties to make up for lost property tax revenue.

"Holding schools harmless will be our No. 1 priority" if this comes to pass, added Mr.

Pickens. One selling point that backers of this proposal will make is that about 25% to 30% of Florida's existing sales tax revenue comes from people who don't live in Florida, i.e. tourists, he said.

This far reaching proposal—replacing sales tax revenue with lost property tax dollars—still must be approved by voters. Also, at least 60% of those voting must approve any new constitutional amendments, thanks to an amendment which passed last year. And since this one would involve taxes, it could take a two-thirds majority to approve the new structure.

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#### **Special Report**

**The many faces of Performance Pay**

# Leadership Calling

## Tune to *Education Today* to find out the latest legislative happenings

**F**SBAs popular *Education Today* television program will continue every Friday at noon through the end of the 2007 legislative session. Its purpose is to keep FSBA members and other educators updated on issues affecting education.

The program, hosted by FSBA Executive Director Wayne Blanton, is telecast statewide by the Florida Education Channel, a program initiative of the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium. *Education Today* can be seen on the Florida Education Channel 9418 (DISH Network 61.5), or state transponder 801.

Those with fast internet connections (broadband) can also view the program on their computers at [www.fec.tv](http://www.fec.tv). A link is also available at FSBA's web site, [www.fsba.org](http://www.fsba.org).

The Florida Education Channel/WFSU broadcasts over local cable channels throughout Florida.

## NSBA in San Francisco

**T**he 67th annual National School Boards Association conference, featuring former President Bill Clinton, is scheduled for April 14-17 in San Francisco.

Besides President Clinton, other key speakers include 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.

## Upcoming Events



### **April 14-17**

NSBA Annual Conference San Francisco, Calif.

### **April 19-20**

FSBA's CBM School Finance Forum, Tampa

### **April 26-27**

FSBA's Certified Board Member' Boardmanship Forum, Ocala

### **May 3-4**

FSBA Master Board Forum, Tampa

### **May 4**

Florida Legislature adjourns

### **May 31-June 1**

FSBA Master Board Forum, Panama City

### **June 13-15**

FSBA Annual Spring Conference, Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay, Tampa

### **July 11-14**

NSBA Southern Region Conference, San Antonio, Texas

### **October 8-12**

FSBA School Board Academy, Gainesville



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# Ensuring No Child Is Left Behind in our rural and small schools

By Andrea Messina

**When it comes to education reform, one size does not fit all.**

**T**he goal of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is to ensure that all children, regardless of where they attend school, attain proficiency in core subjects. Achieving that goal is essential for every student in the United States, regardless of whether his or her community is urban or rural, large or small. Young people in Charlotte County, Florida, are competing in the same global economy as those in Chicago, Illinois, and Bangalore, India.

Yet, achieving that goal will require different strategies in different parts of the country. Federal policies should recognize the unique needs of small rural school districts.

A third of our nation's schools are classified as rural, and their characteristics are far different from schools in large urban centers. Rural schools are often in isolated communities with limited resources. In rural and small communities, there is often just one high school. Small and rural communities struggle to attract and retain effective teachers, particularly in math, science, special education and other specialized subjects.

It is now time to provide all districts with the flexibility they need to truly improve instruction and equip every child with the skills they need to succeed in school and in the workplace.

As a member of the Commission on No Child Left Behind, a bipartisan independent effort to improve NCLB, I worked hard to ensure that the voices of our small schools were being heard. As a school board member in Charlotte County, I know all too well the challenges the thousands of small and rural school districts face in implementing NCLB requirements. And that is why, in our final recommendations, the Commission called on Congress to give districts like mine the flexibility to make necessary improvements and the means and opportunity to measure

their effectiveness.

What exactly does this mean? It means that teachers should be judged by whether they are effective in the classroom, not just by the credentials they hold. It means that districts should have the option of providing tutoring for children in low-performing schools when transferring to other schools is not feasible. And it means that districts should be able to apply a range of approaches to correct persistently low-performing schools.

Providing such flexibility does not mean holding small and rural schools to a different standard. On the contrary—these changes will allow small and rural communities to meet the same standards as those in the rest of the country. The goal of NCLB—proficiency for all—matters just as much in small towns as it does in large cities. That goal must not change. Nor should

the approach the law takes toward meeting that goal—high standards, accountability, teacher quality and options for students.

But applying those approaches

means different tactics in different parts of the country. A size-6 suit will not fit everyone, yet everyone can wear a suit. Tailoring suits to meet everyone's needs will only make everyone look and perform better.

*(Andrea Messina is Chairman of the Charlotte County School Board and a member of the Commission on No Child Left Behind.)*



**Andrea Messina**

## Gov. Crist names his 11 appointees to Taxation and Budget Reform Commission

**G**ov. Charlie Crist recently named his 11 appointees to the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, rounding out the 14 that had already been named by the House Speaker and Senate President, plus the four non-voting legislators. The commission, which last met 17 years ago, has the authority to put constitutional amendments before voters without legislative approval.

Gov. Crist's appointees are: Barney Barnett, vice chairman of Publix Super Markets, Lakeland, who served on the previous TBRC; R. Mark Bostick, president of Comcar Industries, Winter Haven; Martha W. Barnett, Tallahassee attorney, former president of the American Bar and a previous TBRC member; Roberto Martinez, Coral Gables attorney and a member of then Governor-Elect Crist's Transition Team; Former Senate President John M. McKay, Bradenton real estate broker who led the unsuccessful fight for a constitutional amendment that would force the Legislature to revisit sales tax exemptions;

Also, Robert McKee, Lake County tax collector; Nancy J. Riley, Clearwater real estate broker, current president of the Florida Association of Realtors; Darryl E. Rouson, St. Petersburg attorney and immediate past-president of the St. Petersburg NAACP; former Senate President Jim Scott, Fort Lauderdale attorney and member of the 1998 Constitutional Revision Commission; William Gregory Turbeville, Tallahassee governmental consultant who served as policy director for Governor Jeb Bush; and Ken Wilkinson, Lee County property appraiser and former member of the TBRC.

See February *FSBA Leaders* for a list of appointees by the Senate President and House Speaker.

# From the President

BY SUE HERSHEY

## Boardmanship, legislation go hand-in-hand at orientation



Sue Hershey

**D**ozens of new school board members were in Tallahassee in February for your association's New School Board Member Orientation Conference. It was one of our best attended yet and, more importantly, most educational, both for new board members and veterans.

It was also a time for your executive committee to touch bases with Florida's Education Commissioner Jeanine Blomberg who was named to replace retiring Commissioner John Winn while the State Board of Education conducts a nationwide search for a new commissioner.

Joining us at that meeting was K-12 Chancellor Cheri Yecke.

After walking us through how the board will conduct the commissioner search—it will be narrowed down to three which the board will then interview in depth—we jumped into some of the key issues facing us this year.

To no one's surprise, performance pay topped the list. That is, in fact, "our No. 1 priority," said Ms. Blomberg. (See this issue of Leaders' Special Report for a look at the various performance pay plans currently under consideration.)

"We don't use STAR anymore," she said. "We had to throw away e-comp (STAR's predecessor) and now we're throwing away STAR." So, performance pay it is.

"It's very important that we move forward with performance pay this year," she said. "If we back off this year,

we would have to start all over."

Ms. Yecke said the department is concerned with two performance pay issues: getting through this year and then implementing it in the future. "We've told school districts to continue working past the March 1 deadline (which the Legislature has also taken into consideration)," she said. But, she added, performance pay is here to stay. "It's a national issue," adding that "20 governors mentioned performance pay in their state-of-the-state addresses. We just have to work it out."

We also touched on several other issues including:

- Class size, "2010 is approaching very quickly," said Ms. Blomberg. Along the same line is that the new student deluge ended rather abruptly this year. "That raised all kinds of red flags for us and we're working on a method to better identify" how many new students will be enrolling each year, she added.

- Teacher recruitment and retention: "We need to bring more teachers into the workforce," said Ms. Blomberg. She mentioned looking at alternative ways to locate new teachers, including using the expertise of those formerly in the military. "We're also looking at ways we can offer more teacher support."

- Text book adoption. "Our goal is to shorten the time line" that it takes to get a book approved. "You will see some changes here," added Ms. Blomberg.

Overall, it was a very good meeting. It gave us better insight into DOE's decision-making process and we hope to have more meetings like this.

One major thing I took away from the new board member orientation conference was the rather large legislative agenda facing us. It's something on which we all must work together.

Probably Bill Montford, CEO for the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, put it best when he welcomed us to the conference.

"I'm not sure there has been a time when we've had more important issues affecting us or a better time for school boards and superintendents to stand together. If we don't, no one else will."

*Ms. Hershey, a member of the Martin County School Board, is the 2006-2007 president of the Florida School Boards Association.*



*FSBA's officers met with top DOE officials during the New School Board Member Orientation Conference in Tallahassee in February. From left: K-12 Chancellor Cheri Yecke; Beverly Slough, FSBA vice president, St. Johns County School Board; Education Commissioner Jeanine Blomberg; Sue Hershey, president, Martin County School Board; Joy Bowen, treasurer, Leon County School Board; and Jeanne Dozier, president-elect, Lee County School Board.*

## Special Report

# Performance pay is down to the details

*Major legislative surgery is under way for the teacher performance pay program now saddled with the STAR (Special Teachers Are Rewarded) acronym. While STAR will still be around, at least until June 30, the deadlines originally given to school districts are very likely to change.*

*That's almost a given since some STAR deadlines have already passed and not a dime has yet gotten to teachers.*

*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 had 45 days after a district's STAR plan was submitted to approve it. If fault is found with the plan, the State Board must spell out specific areas that need revision. Districts then had until March 1, 2007 to submit their final plan. STAR money is to reward the top 25% of high performing teachers in each district with 5% bonuses.*

*Several districts have since decided not to participate in STAR and just a handful have received State Board of Education approval. With the March 1 deadline past, both bills proposed this year have extended the deadline to give districts a chance to receive—and pay out—the \$147.5 million the Legislature allocated for STAR.*

*Obviously, the March 1 date is not a "drop dead" date, K-12 Chancellor Cheri Yecke told school board members recently. She then quoted Rep. David Simmons, R-Altamonte Springs, chair of the 21st Century Competitiveness Committee: "The Legislature can be very forgiving." That same committee passed a bill in March creating the House version of a performance pay plan.*

*Ms. Yecke mentioned that 20 governors talked about performance pay in their state of the state addresses in the last year. "It's here to stay. The question is how can we do it with objective measurements? We're trying to craft a plan that has that objectivity built in."*

### **FSBA's plan**

Early on, the Legislature asked for input from the state's major education groups, including FSBA and the Florida Association of District School Superintendents. Both offered very similar solutions.

One of the major changes proposed by FSBA 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. FSBA's 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.

*Continued on back*

## ***The House plan***

Like STAR, the proposed bill adopted by Rep. Simmons' committee would base bonuses mainly on student performance gains determined by FCAT or other exams, but would not limit the bonuses to just the top 25% of the state's teachers as STAR does now.

The House bill also sets a performance formula without any limit on how many teachers can qualify. It would provide bonuses of up to \$10,000 that would be awarded to instructional personnel and school-based administrators. The awards would be determined based on an assessment of professional practices and improved student performance.

The school recognition program would be revised to reward more schools and to recognize teamwork, something many teachers—including the teacher's unions—fought for since, they say, teaching is a team exercise.

At least 60% of teacher or administrator assessment would be based on learning gains as determined by standardized tests. The remaining 40% would be based on the "principal's or principal's designee's assessment of that personnel." Some of those criteria would include how well discipline in the classroom is maintained, etc. Some of these same criteria are mentioned in the Senate version below.

Finally, the House proposal revises the STAR program deadlines and requirements, giving districts more time to get their STAR program in order. They'll have until June 30 to finally adopt their STAR plans (they must submit their revised plan, if necessary, to the State Board by May 1). STAR plan funds allocated for districts that fail to adopt approved STAR plans by June 30 would be redistributed to districts with approved plans in place.

## ***The Senate plan***

The Senate creates what it calls a "Merit Award Program" that, like the House, covers both teachers and school-based administrators. The Senate Prekindergarten-12 Education Committee passed its bill also in March. It abolishes the 25% limit, but said that districts can create their own performance pay plans covering at least 20% of teachers—and school-based administrators—but no more than 80%. The "merit-based pay supplement" can amount to at least 5% of the teacher's/administrator's salary. In addition, each "supplement" will be considered compensation for retirement benefits calculations.

Any state-allocated merit pay not disbursed to teach-

ers would be refunded to the state, according to the Senate plan.

Determining eligibility for merit pay will be based on student performance—in the case of teachers—as measured by standardized tests. Administrators would be graded based on student performance school-wide.

The Senate plan also allows school boards to adopt other performance criteria, such as the teacher's ability to maintain discipline or to plan and deliver "high-quality instruction," and how technology is used in the classroom. Other criteria mentioned in the bill include the teacher's "ability

to maintain a positive collaborative relationship with students' families for the purpose of increasing student achievement."

Other factors that can be used to measure administrators is the "ability to manage human, financial and material resources...for direct instruction" and "the ability to recruit and retain high-performing teachers..."

Finally, the education commissioner, not the State Board of Education, would be responsible for approving a school district's merit pay plan.

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## ***The Governor's plan***

Governor Charlie Crist's performance pay plan would increase bonus amounts to 10% of salary. To make that happen, he has proposed spending nearly \$300 million on performance pay next year, double what was budgeted for STAR this year. The State Board's proposal mimics that offered by the governor, increasing the bonus to 10% of the educator's salary. The bonus would go to at least 25% of the district's outstanding educators.

## ***And now....***

It's obvious the House, Senate and Governor are on the same page, although with slight differences in how much will be spent on performance pay and who will get it.

"We've supported performance pay for years," said Dr. Wayne Blanton, FSBA executive director. But STAR wasn't the way to do it, he added.

With the House and Senate rapidly moving forward with their proposals, it's not a matter of if, but when a new performance pay plan will pass.

"Can we get this bill to the governor by the end of the session?" asked Rep. Joe Pickens, R-Palatka, chairman of the House Schools and Learning Council. "We hope to get it to him by April 1 so it will have a positive effect on the (STAR) deadlines," he added.