

Leaders

A Newsletter for Florida School Board Members

'Hold us harmless,' FSBA tells Legislature

By Wayne Blanton

In a few days, the Legislature will be back in town, attempting to solve a \$1.5 billion budget crisis. Of course, "solving" means cutting the 2007-08 budget by that amount. K-12's portion is expected to be about \$700 million.

FSBA has been working with other education groups and we've developed a few suggestions that would handle the K-12 budget shortfalls. More on that in a moment.

First, we believe that the Special Session will be a great way for lawmakers to show K-12 that they meant what they said about holding education harmless. That comment followed adoption during the regular session of a constitutional amendment proposal that, if it passes next January, would give property owners another option to determine how their property taxes would be figured. That amendment alone could cost education some \$1.8 billion over the next couple of years.

The House and Senate leadership said then education wouldn't feel the brunt of that amendment. But that was before our revenue estimating gurus predicted Florida would be collecting about \$1.1 billion less this fiscal year. Coupled with the \$400 million shortfall that last fiscal year brought, we are now at a budget crisis totaling \$1.5 billion. Still, holding education harmless must be our battle cry as we enter this special legislative session, which begins Sept. 18.

Second, we need to remind legislators about Article IX, Section 1 of Florida's Constitution that speaks to education funding:

"The education of children is a fundamental value of the people of the State of Florida. It is, therefore, a paramount duty of the state to make adequate provision for the education of all children. . ."

The two important phrases in that one sentence are, as I've underlined, "paramount duty" and "adequate provision." This is something we need to keep repeating in our meetings with lawmakers in the days to come.

With the special session just around the corner, we believe it's a great time for legislators to show us they do indeed intend to hold K-12 harmless. (Incidentally, this is the worst funding crisis since tourists stopped coming to Florida after 9/11 and the first time in three decades that we'll be generating less revenue next year than this year.)

Several education groups, including FSBA, have developed some proposals for legislators to consider that would minimize K-12's pain.

Here are our suggestions:

- ✓ Waive statutory, *proviso*, and implementing language to allow school districts total flexibility over use of all appropriated funds—including lottery, FEFP, categorical, and 2-mill funds—to meet these revenue shortfalls so long as school districts continue to meet student and fiscal accountability requirements. In other words, tell us how much we have to cut, then let us do it our way. After all, school boards know a lot better than lawmakers, where they might be able to shave their budgets that would affect the districts the least.

- ✓ Delay implementation of, and/or reduce appropriations for, all bonus award programs and redirect the funds to cover any education shortfall. Some of these bonus programs include:

- a) the unexpended balance from the 2006-2007 STAR Program appropriation;
- b) the Merit Award Program (MAP) currently funded at \$147.5 million;
- c) the School Recognition Program, which carries a \$157 million price tag.

- ✓ Reduce the distribution of lottery funds to School Advisory Councils to \$5 per FTE and redirect approximately \$53 million to cover any shortfall.

- ✓ Waive the penalty that redirects dollars from operating to capital accounts for any district that fails to meet class size reduction goals.

- ✓ Delay implementation of unfunded mandates. Some of these mandates scheduled for implementation in 2008 include:

- a) the development and administration of end-of-course exams for all grade groupings and subjects;



Wayne Blanton

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Leadership Calling

Donovan to address Sportsmanship Summit

The Florida High School Athletic Association will convene a Sportsmanship Summit Sept. 14 at the Wyndham Orlando Resort geared to coaches and school administrators. University of Florida head men's basketball coach, Billy Donovan, will be the keynote speaker.

Recent high profile bad sportsmanship incidents "along with some high-profile cases of rules-breaking in our own association point toward the need for discussion and awareness of sportsmanship," said Dr. John Stewart, FHSAA commissioner.

The summit will "promote awareness of sportsmanship and the association's expectations, as well as facilitate discussion about current issues in sportsmanship," said Dr. Stewart.

He said he hopes to see "at least one representative from each member school attend."

In June, FSBA sent school boards a suggested resolution they can adopt emphasizing the importance they place on sportsmanship.

State Board narrows education commissioner applicants to seven

The State Board of Education (SBE) recently voted to accept seven applicants from a pool of 24 to be interviewed for the Florida Commissioner of Education position at the board's September meeting in Tampa.

The seven remaining candidates are:

- Dr. William Harner, deputy to the chief executive office of Philadelphia's school district;
- Dr. Earl Lennard, former Hillsborough County school superintendent;
- Dr. Joseph Marinelli, a district superintendent in Newark, N.Y., who once served as an assistant to Orange County's school superintendent;
- Dr. William Moloney, Colorado education commissioner;
- Dr. Eric Smith, a senior vice president with the College Board in New York City, who once was a Volusia County school administrator;
- James Warford, former K-12 chancellor and now executive director of the Florida Association of School Administrators;
- Dr. Cheri Pierson Yecke, current K-12 chancellor.

SBE interviews will be conducted Sept. 17 and 18 in Tampa. The State Board is expected to select Florida's next education commissioner sometime this fall.

Orange County awarded grant to help at-risk youth

The United States Department of Labor recently announced that Orange County Public Schools will receive a \$4.8 million grant to help youthful offenders successfully finish high school, provide employability training and job opportunities and prevent crime.

It combines investment in the education and development of career skills of students in grades eight through 12 identified as those who are at-risk of becoming involved in criminal behaviors.

Orange County, along with the school districts of Baltimore, Chicago, Milwaukee and Philadelphia, were awarded \$24 million overall in funding from this grant.

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Planning for the year ahead

Upcoming events of interest to FSBA members

2007

Sept. 18	Special legislative session convenes, Tallahassee
Sept. 19-20	FSBA's "mini" Day in the Legislature, Tallahassee
Sept. 20	FSBA Legislative Platform Committee meeting, Tallahassee
Oct. 5	Special session scheduled to adjourn
Oct. 8	Florida Education Alliance, Tallahassee
Oct. 24	FSBA Committee Day, (1:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m.) Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay
Oct. 25	FSBA Legislative Committee (9 a.m.-12:30 p.m.) Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay (Adoption of 2008 Legislative Platform)
Dec. 4-7	FSBA/FADSS/FSBAA/FEN/FERMA/FELL/SUNSPRA/FASA Annual joint conference, Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay



2008

Jan. 10-11	FSBA Long Range Planning Committee, Mission Inn, Howey-in-the-Hills
Feb. 1-3	NSBA Leadership Conference, Grand Hyatt, Washington, D.C.
Feb. 3-5	NSBA Federal Relations Network, Grand Hyatt, Washington, D.C.
March 4	2008 Legislature convenes
March 28-April 2	NSBA Annual Conference, Orlando
April 9-10	FSBA Day in the Legislature, Doubletree Hotel, Tallahassee
April 11	FSBA Board of Directors meeting, Tallahassee
May 2	2008 Legislative Session adjourns
June 11-13	FSBA/FADSS Spring Conference, Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay

Harmless

From Page 1

b) operating and capital costs relating to the establishment of school concurrency.

✓ Redirect the \$490 million worth of allocations that were vetoed this year to cover some of the shortfall.

The next few weeks will be some of the most important in your school district career. You **MUST** contact your legislators prior to the start of the special session. Re-emphasize the "hold harmless" promise and give them our suggestions.

We're also planning a "mini" Day in the Legislature Sept. 19-20 (a day after the special session convenes) to give school board members and superintendents a chance to travel to Tallahassee to meet with their legislators. We'll have a briefing session to supply you with the ammunition you need before you sit down with your representative and senator.

If you can't make it to Tallahassee, I strongly encourage you to meet with your legislators in their local offices. Every school board member should attempt to communicate with them. We must come out of this special session relatively unscathed because we don't know what the future holds both in terms of revenue the state will generate over the next couple of years, and how people will vote in January on the property tax reform amendment.

Remember: The key words that you must get across to your legislators are: "Please hold education harmless."

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

Some suggestions to deal with the budget crisis in K-12

✓ Give school districts more flexibility in determining how—and where—their budgets will be trimmed.

✓ Delay implementation of bonus award programs, such as MAP.

✓ Waive the penalty for districts which fail to meet class size requirements.

✓ Delay implementation of unfunded mandates.

✓ Redirect the \$490 million worth of budget vetoes to cover some of the shortfall.

Attorney general seeks schools' help in fighting cybercrime

Florida Atty. Gen. Bill McCollum wants to take his cybercrime and sexual predator fight directly to the classroom. That's just one of the goals he hopes to accomplish since the Legislature gave him the tools—an enhanced cybercrime law plus more money to help him beef up his investigative unit—to fight an escalating threat.

"We can save a lot of kids if they just learn how to use the Internet," said Atty. Gen. McCollum. "I think we're literally going to save lives by simply touching some of these kids." The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Nancy Argenziano, R-Dunnellon and Rep. David Rivera, R-Miami, gives the Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution jurisdiction to prosecute child pornography and Internet child sexual abuse cases. It increases the penalties for possession and distribution of child pornography and for those who travel to meet children. It also increases penalties for offenders who misrepresent their age to seduce a child over the Internet.

Called the *CyberCrimes Against Children Act*, and already signed by Gov. Charlie Crist, the bill requires all registered sex offenders to register their email addresses and chat room screen names with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. With this information, online social networks, including the popular Web site, MySpace, will be able to coordinate with Florida authorities to ensure that the registered offenders are not able to join or use these online social networks, said Mr. McCollum.

The Attorney General's Child Predator CyberCrime Unit, created in 2005, currently has just six members. With the extra money the legislature gave the unit this year, it can hire another 50 investigators and educators.

According to the Federal Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, Florida ranks fourth in the nation in volume of child pornography. Nationally, one in seven children between the ages of ten and 17 has been solicited online by a sexual predator.

In just under two years, the Florida unit has been responsible for the arrests of 40 men who possessed, created or distributed child pornography or who sexually solicited children online and then traveled to meet them. Current statistics show that more than 77 million children use the Internet every day.

One of the top priorities of the attorney general's cybercrime unit is educating kids. "We think we'll save more lives this way by making school children aware about how to protect themselves," said Mr. McCollum. That's where school boards come in.

"They can assist us in encouraging their principals to host these (educational) programs (designed for students)," said Mr. McCollum. "We're training people now to go into all these schools. We'll go in at a time each principal sets. It's a 50 minute program, but if the principal says we'd like you to come in and do this for a week, we can do that," he added. "Or if they want an assembly of their middle-schoolers so we can do it at one time, we can do that too. We just want school boards to encourage their principals to get involved and do this."

Mr. McCollum's office is in the process of setting up a Web site, safeflorida.net where principals can go to request dates and formats.

The attorney general's office even has a MySpace site, www.myspace.com/florida_cpcu.

While the age limit for MySpace.com is 14, "many of the children in these programs were under 13 and they all have MySpace accounts. They lied about their age. Parents who think they can keep their kids off these venues, are mistaken. They can't. A lot of parents in the audience were shocked too. Kids just don't realize what they're doing. When they put their picture up there, they believe they're only sharing it with friends. One of the most dangerous three letters in the English alphabet are 'asl' (age, sex, location) and they give out their own and don't even think about how they're giving away too much information. If you post a picture and your asl, you don't know who's going to be looking at it."

He said there "are thousands of bad guys out there surfing for kids. Every time we go undercover we find people who have never had a history as a sexual predator."

He added: "We're asking kids to be partners with us to help us find the bad guys."



Bill McCollum

Teacher misconduct Web site launched by DOE

The Florida Department of Education has announced a new Web site that allows the public to check if disciplinary action has been taken against a Florida educator's certificate. Using an online database, visitors to the site are able to obtain information on teacher misconduct cases brought to the state level. Currently, the available information includes action dates, complaint summaries and descriptions of final outcomes, including any penalties that may have been applied to an educator's certificate.

In order to view the disciplinary information, interested individuals should visit www.myflorida.teacher.com, where they can enter the name of the educator in which they are interested. Searches can be refined to include the whole state or specific school districts. A search yielding no results indicates that no actions have been taken against that specific educator's teaching certificate on or after January 1, 2007.

Disciplinary action against an educator's certificate can range from a letter of reprimand, to a suspension or revocation of the certificate. The Web site will not display information on current investigations, which is confidential.