



Florida School Boards Association

The voice of education in Florida.

May 18, 2017

Governor Rick Scott
The Capitol, Plaza Level 05
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0011

Dear Governor Scott:

On behalf of the members of the Florida School Boards Association, we are writing to urge your veto of Specific Appropriation 91 relating to the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) in the 2017-2018 General Appropriations Act (SB 2500). We believe the legislature can and should do better to commit the resources necessary for school boards to deliver high-quality education to all of their students.

Despite the availability of ample funding from both state and local revenue sources, the Florida Legislature chose to adopt an austere K-12 education budget that is insufficient to sustain current public school operations. Since this bill passed, our members have tried to find ways to support it. However, projections all point to a detrimental effect on the quality of the educational programs and services for Florida's 2.8 million public school students. This level of FEFP funding is a stark departure from the K-12 education budget that you recommended in your own proposed budget. Further, it is inconsistent with the duty of the state that is enshrined in the Florida Constitution.

The budget approved by the Legislature provides total FEFP funding of \$20,428,201,731 – an increase over the current year of \$241,431,317 or 1.20% on a statewide basis. Of this increase, approximately \$173 million must be applied to serve student enrollment growth and approximately \$54 million must be provided to the Florida Retirement System to cover required contribution rate increases. This leaves about \$24 million that would be further consumed by increases in necessary basic operating expenses for items such as health care, workers compensation insurance, and utilities. After these off-the-top deductions, an insufficient amount remains to adequately serve our students and to prepare them to succeed in post-secondary education and/or their chosen careers.

The effect of this scant increase in overall funding reverberates in several other areas of the FEFP. As examples:

- The budget reduces the Base Student Allocation (BSA) by \$27. A reduction in the BSA is virtually unprecedented in a non-recession year. This reduction in the BSA severely limits the ability of school districts to offer competitive salaries which are proven to recruit and retain highly qualified and effective teachers, school administrators, and other personnel. Any stagnation in salaries of school district employees, the largest single segment of employees in most counties, will lessen state and local economic prosperity as the purchase of goods and services will be compromised.
- The budget fails to make significant progress to fill remaining post-recession funding gaps for programs such as the ESE Guarantee (\$50 million below 2007-2008 levels), Supplemental Academic Instruction (\$9 million below 2007-2008 levels), Safe Schools (\$11 million below 2007-2008 levels), and Student Transportation (\$44 million below 2007-2008 levels). These funding gaps are magnified by the fact that school districts are serving about

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180,000 more students than were served in 2007-2008, thus increasing the deleterious effects on associated services.

- The budget provides \$7,220.72 in total FEFP funds per student – an increase over the current year of \$24.49 or 0.34% on a statewide basis. This leaves Florida's per-student funding levels firmly mired in the nation's bottom quartile and well below the national average.

What makes the meager FEFP funding level most alarming is that it was avoidable. Legislators chose, for the second year in a row, to reduce the Required Local Effort (RLE) millage rate from the current 4.638 mills to 4.322 mills to maintain the total RLE contribution at the current year level. This roll-back rate ignores the fact that some portion of the increase in property values is directly attributable to new development – new homes, new businesses, property improvements – which require the provision of new or additional services. There is no credible reason why these property owners should be excused from sharing in support of our education system which is tasked with shaping Florida's future citizenry. The result of this roll-back is the removal of more than \$500 million in potential local funding for education programs and services which this budget makes no significant effort to replace with state funding. We cannot support this practice of freezing the RLE revenue as it will echo forward into succeeding fiscal years a dangerous and unsustainable funding structure. To make matters worse, legislators chose to invest more than \$400 million in questionable, unproven, non-FEFP policy initiatives such as Schools of Hope and the Best and Brightest Teachers and Principals program, programs about which we have significant doubts regarding their efficacy and appropriateness.

With ample funds available in reserves, with potential funds available from a reasonable Required Local Effort millage rate, and with funds available from the redirection of non-FEFP funding, we believe that legislators can and should do a better job of fulfilling the state's duty to make adequate provision for a high quality system of free public schools. We urge you to veto the FEFP line item, and thus allow the legislature the opportunity to provide evidence of their commitment to deliver high-quality education to all Florida's students.

Sincerely,

Tim Harris, FSBA President
Polk County School Board

Andrea Messina, FSBA Executive Director

cc: Kim McDougal, Chief of Staff
Ashley Spicola, Education Policy Coordinator

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