



Florida School Finance Officers Association, Inc.

Dedicated to maintaining quality business management practices and securing uniform financial accounting and reporting to promote public interest in Florida public education.

June 16, 2020

Richard Corcoran
Commissioner of Education
Turlington Building, Suite 1514
325 West Gaines Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Commissioner Corcoran,

We would like to thank you for your support of the Finance Council and your willingness to consider our input regarding financial funds and reporting dates. The Finance Council has been meeting weekly since March 25, 2020, to help school districts address the myriad of challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for the reopening of school campuses in August.

Based on the numerous conference calls with the Florida Finance Council team and data collected from the participating school districts we are asking your assistance to consider the items listed below as waivers or deadline extensions for the upcoming 2020/2021 School Year.

Extend the deadline for the School District Cost Report and Annual Financial Report by ten business days.

Allow any Categorical funds that are not spent as of June 30, 2020, to be rolled forward and used to offset any reduction in state revenue.

Grant school districts flexibility regarding the spending or roll forward of unspent dollars.

Grant a waiver for the “Maintenance of Effort” requirement to cover any related grant (Title Grant or IDEA) - if the state is requesting a waiver for itself, may school districts be granted the same flexibility?

Grant a waiver of the Mental Health programs “in-person” live training. Allow the use of virtual training.

Instructional Materials – delay the change/update in standards and related textbook adoptions for one year.

Relaxation of student seat time requirement in “schools” and allow for various school board approved Blended Learning Models that reduce contact hours and increase the use of on-line learning.

Continue the distance learning attendance policy waivers.

Student Transportation

The period for school bus operator training and dexterity test results, as required by rule 6A-3.0141, Florida Administrative Code, be extended until December 31, 2020, for a school bus operator who held a valid school bus operator license and who met school bus operator training and dexterity test requirements on March 13, 2020.

Justification

School district staff are currently not able to provide school bus operator training and dexterity tests for bus drivers for which the time for meeting these requirements will expire in the next few months.

The date by which school bus operators and attendants, who were employed and transporting students on or before August 20, 2019, are required to have certified CPR and first aid training pursuant to rule 6A-3.0121, Florida Administrative Code, be extended from November 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021.

Justification

The pandemic has interrupted school district training schedules and some school districts are not able to provide this training to all bus drivers by November 1, 2020.

The time frame for school bus safety inspector certification be extended until December 31, 2020, for a school bus safety inspector who held a valid school bus inspector certification on March 13, 2020, pursuant to the State of Florida School Bus Safety Inspection Manual, 2017 Edition, as incorporated in rule 6A-3.0171(8)(d), Florida Administrative Code.

Justification

Some school bus safety inspectors are currently not able to renew their certification because they do not have access to district test proctors who administer the FDOE online recertification test. Furthermore, In the event a school bus inspector's certification lapses, the inspector is required to pass an online test, attend a two-day training session, and successfully complete a hands-on school bus inspection.

The requirement in rule 6A-3.0171(8)(c), Florida Administrative Code, to perform school bus safety inspections at least every 30 school days, be revised to 60 days, effective March 13 through September 30, 2020.

Justification

There is uncertainty as to whether "school days" include days in which children are scheduled to continue learning from home. School districts should not be required to inspect school buses when school buses are not transporting students and students are learning from home. District mechanics can use this time to perform larger maintenance items on school buses.

The recertification of any Hazardous Walking areas that were due to expire after March 13, 2020 will need to be postponed for an additional six months. The requirements of 1006.23, FS mandate that state funding for the transportation of students subjected to hazardous walking will cease upon the correction of the hazardous condition of upon the projected completion date.

Justification

It may not be practicable for local governmental entities to work together with school district officials to re-inspect and certify those areas that have been determined to be hazardous and whose correction date may have passed since March 13, 2020. School district should not be financially penalized by losing any funding associated with students transported in these areas.

Funds for student transportation should be based on the average ABO computed for 2018-2019 school year due to the impact of procedures and practices of distancing of students and lower ridership per bus to encourage student health and safety.

Justification

Florida Statute 1011.68, (2) requires the use of the Average Bus Occupancy as a multiplier in the funding formula and this will penalize districts who may attempt to reduce ridership per bus at any one time for health reasons.

The 8-hours of annual in-service training required in 6A-3.0141(7) (c, FAC) prior to the start of school annually should be extended to January 2021.

Justification

Many of our bus operators may not have the ability to access on-line training from home and live training may not be practicable for health and safety of our employees. Allowing an additional 6 months to complete this training would be helpful.

Extend the deadline in 6A-3.0171, FAC for conducting school bus evacuation drills and safety training from the first six weeks of school for an additional 90 days.

Justification

Many students may not ride a bus at the start of school for health considerations but they will become riders during the school year. This gives principals or designated school staff a greater opportunity to make this instruction a priority for all students.

We are asking your help to make this happen and continue the State of Florida's commitment to parental choice. We need to ensure all K-12 Public Schools can utilize a traditional direct instruction model via the brick and mortar schools; direct instruction through a virtual setting; or both models in the blending of traditional classroom and online instructional techniques without any unintended negative Full Time Equivalent reporting audit consequences.

F.S. 1003.498 School District virtual course offerings:

- (1) School districts may deliver courses in the traditional school setting by personnel certified pursuant to s. 1012.55 who provide direct instruction through virtual instruction or through blended learning courses consisting of both traditional classroom and online instructional techniques.*

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Waiver Requests

These recommendations will help schools best meet the needs of Florida's schoolchildren in this challenging environment. Please contact me at (813) 272-4383 or by email at Gretchen.Saunders@sdhc.k12.fl.us if you or your team have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,



Gretchen Saunders
Chair, Florida Finance Council

cc:

J. Alex Kelly, Chief of Staff
Eric Hall, Senior Chancellor
Jacob Oliva, Chancellor, Division of Public Schools
Suzanne Pridgeon, Deputy Commissioner
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