



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.

September 15, 2020

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

Commissioner Corcoran,

The Florida Finance Council, including members of your Florida Department of Education staff, have been meeting weekly since March 25, 2020, to help school districts address the myriad of challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. We thank you for your continued support and willingness to consider our input on K-12 Public Education topics.

Your Executive Order (No. 2020-EO-06) issued July 6, 2020 had many facets regarding the 2020-2021 school year. Critical among them were those granted under section III – Reporting Flexibility and Financial Continuity, including the guarantee of “Full Florida Education Finance Program funding from state revenue based on General Appropriations Act (GAA) full-time equivalent (FTE) student membership forecast for 2020 fall semester.” As the school year is now well underway for Florida school districts, including in-person instruction for all but the South Florida districts still under Phase I restrictions, your guarantee of financial continuity appears to have been especially prescient since an informal survey among our districts is revealing a disturbing trend in enrollment statewide. Specifically, a majority of school districts are reporting a decline in enrollment levels, including charter school enrollment as part of the district totals. School District personnel are aggressively trying to locate these students to ensure they will receive instruction but we do not know when or if they will return.

The financial protection you have provided by holding us harmless in the July and October surveys for this drop in enrollment is critical to our continued success both educationally and economically. As the majority of our school districts are the economic engines or drivers of their counties workforce, the ramifications of dealing with a financial loss that large would be crippling not only to public education, but the Florida economy as a whole.



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In further reading of the Executive Order, these economic safeguards are not yet guaranteed for the February survey or the remainder of the 2020-2021 fiscal year. As the enrollment data is now being reported it has become clear that the hold harmless provisions you instituted are vital. We request that you extend the time you base districts' fiscal year 2020-2021 funding on estimated membership through June 30, 2021. By allowing districts funded FTE to remain at FEFP 2nd Calculation levels for the entirety of FY 2020-2021, you protect not only our finances, but the classrooms we are attempting to keep open, COVID-19 free, and available for those students who return. If the financial guardrails you put in place do in fact expire mid-year, our collective financial obligations as Chief Financial Officers will force us to recommend to our School Boards that we take the necessary actions to appropriately respond to the substantial monetary loss our organizations will suffer, including any reductions to staff and programs, or increases in class size that may be necessary.

Until the time we have all our students back into the classrooms, we need to ensure K-12 Public Schools can utilize both a traditional direct instruction model via the brick and mortar schools and direct instruction through a virtual setting. This can be accomplished by

- Allowing the forecasted FTE for FY 2020-2021 to remain as our funded FTE in the FEFP through all 2020-2021 calculations, in lieu of the traditional FTE actual counts for Survey 2 and Survey 3, through June 30, 2021, including all FEFP funding.

Please consider these recommendations to best meet the needs of Florida's schoolchildren in this challenging environment. The longer we wait after the school year has begun in making the types of reductions necessary to grapple with such FTE loss the more difficult for the community to digest, so we ask that you please consider our request in an expedited a manner as possible. We recognize the state of Florida is making a comeback from the COVID-19 pandemic and we want to be one of the players to help you and Governor DeSantis keep the economy moving ahead.

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



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cc:

J. Alex Kelly, Chief of Staff
Eric Hall, Senior Chancellor
Jacob Oliva, Chancellor, Division of Public Schools
Suzanne Pridgeon, Deputy Commissioner
Mark Eggers, Assistant Deputy Commissioner
Finance Council Members
Joy Frank, FADSS

About the Council - The Florida School Finance Council serves as an advisory committee to the Commissioner of Education on school funding and business issues. The Council is comprised of 18 members representing small, medium and large school districts and 3 ex-officio members. All representatives are active finance officers responsible for the financial operations of their respective school districts. The Council represents a diverse mix of school districts across the state in terms of size, student demographics, population density, and region.