



**FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Chris Sprowls, Speaker

**To:** Florida's District School Superintendents

**From:** Chris Sprowls, Speaker

**Date:** February 11, 2021

**Re:** Student Membership Counts & Federal Funds

Dear Florida Superintendents,

As you know firsthand, COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges and unforeseen complications to the delivery of K-12 public education in Florida. I appreciate all that you have done to try to maintain the quality of education our schools deliver to our children. These have been extraordinary times, and we will be feeling the consequences of this pandemic for years to come. One of the areas that the pandemic will greatly impact will be the budget of the State of Florida.

The full-time equivalent (FTE) student membership count creates the foundation for building our K-12 budget. The October 2020 FTE survey revealed that the State's total FTE student membership decreased by an alarming 87,811 FTE students statewide; that is over 3% of our entire student population. The welfare of these children is of paramount importance. The Florida House strongly encourages you to work with every available State and local resource, including social services agencies and law enforcement, to locate these missing children and, if they are still residents of Florida, ensure that they are properly enrolled in a K-12 education option allowed under Florida law. We have a moral obligation not to allow any of these children to slip through the cracks in the system.

The FTE enrollment number has significant budget implications. Typically, the school district's Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) funds are adjusted to the degree the FTE counts diverge from the forecasted student enrollment estimates. However, given the unique challenges presented by the pandemic, Commissioner Richard Corcoran issued an Executive Order allowing school districts to keep the entirety of their estimated per-student funding even if the actual number of students being served is significantly less. This "hold harmless" provision has allowed school districts to retain \$700 million of taxpayer funds over and above what would otherwise be permitted under the law. However, this accommodation does not reflect a fundamental change in how Florida funds our school system. For the 2021-2022 State Budget, the Florida House intends to align the per-pupil funding of our K-12 schools to our actual enrollment in those schools.

In addition to the almost three-quarters of a billion dollars in extra state funds, school districts have and will continue to receive billions of dollars in new federal funding. While these funds are designed to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, this massive windfall also presents very

real risks to the sound management of our school districts. These federal dollars are one-time payments and should not be used to pay for or augment recurring obligations. I caution you in the strongest possible terms to align your recurring expenses with your recurring revenues. School districts should allocate their federal dollars to items that are non-recurring in nature, such as deferred maintenance projects that improve the health and safety of our students and teachers. With these resources, school districts have the opportunity to replace aging HVAC systems, retrofit older windows and doors, install air purification and cleaning systems, and complete other renovations that improve air quality and reduce the risk of viral and environmental health hazards.

I have been encouraged by the strong partnership between our State Department of Education and our School Districts. We must continue to work together to ensure that every child in Florida has access to the high-quality education they deserve. Thank you for your dedication and service.

Cc: Jay Trumbull, Chair, Appropriations Committee  
Chris Latvala, Chair, Education & Employment Committee  
Randy Fine, Chair, PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee  
Vance Aloupis, Chair, Early Learning & Elementary Education Subcommittee  
Stan McClain, Chair, Secondary Education & Career Development Subcommittee  
Richard Corcoran, Commissioner, Florida Department of Education