

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Update
January 16, 2019

SUBJECT: K-12 Public Schools Update

PROPOSED BOARD ACTION

N/A

AUTHORITY FOR STATE BOARD ACTION

N/A

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mr. Malcolm Thomas, Superintendent, Escambia County Public Schools will provide an update on behalf of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS) on items relating to K-12 education initiatives.

Supporting Documentation Included: Talking Points

Facilitator/Presenter: Mr. Malcolm Thomas, Superintendent, Escambia County Public Schools

Florida Association of District School Superintendents
Comments
State Board of Education
Pensacola State College
Pensacola Florida
January 16, 2019

Malcolm Thomas, Superintendent
Escambia County Public Schools

Opening Comments

Superintendents welcome Commissioner Corcoran and look forward to working with him.

The Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS) represents the 67 district school superintendents in Florida. Florida's school districts are diverse and range from districts with less than 1200 students (Lafayette) to the largest district (Miami-Dade) with 350,000 students. Yet, we all have the same goal – to graduate well rounded citizens ready for work and postsecondary education.

As the education leaders in our districts we stand ready to be your allies in continuing the successes that we have achieved – increased student performance as indicated by NAEP scores, improved school grades and a record graduation rate - 86.1% for the 2017-2018 school year.

Superintendents have a long-standing history of working collaboratively with all stakeholders and specifically the Department of Education (DOE). In particular, we have worked with DOE and other experts in providing technical assistance to school districts in order to increase school safety and mental health services to students.

We look forward to being your partner in meeting the needs of all Florida students. You will find that superintendents are passionate about their students and schools and work tirelessly to provide innovative programs and opportunities for students. Please visit our schools – your schools – and see for yourself.

Accomplishments/Achievements

Escambia County Public Schools – a few quick facts:

Escambia has 40,000 students and 5,500 full time employees. We allow choice throughout the district wherever space is available. Additionally, there are magnet schools at each level (elementary, middle, and high). The magnet schools do not have an attendance zone and students all over the county are able to apply to attend.

Escambia's on time graduation rate has increased every year in the last decade. Every middle and high school has multiple career academies to help students select an area of interest. Each academy has an advisory council that includes business partners in the career cluster.

The Pensacola area is thriving. A local option sales tax provides funds to build and renovate school buildings. Five new schools have been built in the past 6 years.

Challenges

School Safety continues to be a major concern as superintendents wrestle with the requirements of SB 7026 and providing school safety officers (be they school resource officers or guardians) at every school. As an association we have held numerous meetings on school safety and have scheduled a safety summit early in 2019. We are working with DOE and welcome your advice and participation.

The need for mental health services for students and our teachers is increasing. Again, FADSS has held two major conferences on mental health. We have brought together all stakeholders on the state and local levels to assist schools and communities in expanding mental health services to students. The DOE was instrumental in the success of these conferences and we are continuing to meet to keep the momentum going. Another conference or convening is being scheduled in the near future.

The recovery from Hurricane Michael is major and seemingly unending. It will take years for these communities to recover economically. The impacted school districts - Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty and Washington – will need ongoing fiscal support to replace and rebuild schools. In addition, statutes and rules will need to be waived or modified in order to accelerate recovery. I urge you to meet with the superintendents in the affected districts as soon as you are able.

Teacher recruitment and retention is a major concern for superintendents. There are just not enough teachers on the bench and the bench is not deep. Enrollment in Colleges of Education is down. Superintendents have to use substitutes to fill the gaps. Ultimately, the education of our students will suffer. We must work together to address this critical teacher shortage. There are no easy answers.

Choice – Superintendents embrace choice. As the new Commissioner, I think you will be amazed at the choice programs being offered (with waiting lists) and celebrated in public schools. We would like to work with you in eliminating the barriers to providing choice in the public school setting.

Closing Comments

We have achieved much over the last several years, yet challenges remain. We look forward to working together to meet these challenges.