

Florida Association of District School Superintendents

State Board of Education

January 13, 2021

Daytona State College

Event Center

1200 W. International Speedway Blvd.

Daytona Beach, FL 32114

Comments

Welcome/Introductions

**Diane Kornegay, Superintendent
Lake County School District**

Lake County Public Schools

Provide general comments about the district and district response to COVID-19.

General FADSS Comments

School districts are preparing for, or just beginning, the spring semester. EO-07 provided certainty for school districts to continue the innovative learning models, while also emphasizing the importance of progress monitoring and timely intervention for students who were not succeeding in those models. Districts are focusing resources on struggling students to stop and reverse the learning loss caused by COVID-19 and its impact on families.

School districts across the state are thinking about the lessons we have learned and will continue to learn this year. Many issues that school districts have dealt with over the years have been moved to the forefront because of COVID-19. Issues such as the digital divide; community reliance on the school food service system; innovative learning models; and the importance of school for the mental, physical, and educational well-being of children have taken center stage. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the food service issue that school districts have faced. While this issue does not fall under the direct purview of the State Board of Education, it has affected the general finances of districts at a time when resources are already stretched thin. FADSS wanted to make you aware of the issue and let you know we intend to seek the assistance of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

An estimated 16% of Florida families with children reported not having enough to eat in a recent KIDS COUNT Report. When schools closed in March 2020, school districts throughout Florida took on the critical task and responsibility of providing meals for our children – using the Summer Meals program and finding creative ways to distribute food into our communities. This continued with the start of school in August, which brought new logistical dilemmas and additional costs, as many students across the state opted to begin the school year using a remote learning option.

Despite these extra efforts, the number of meals school districts have been able to serve has declined, which has led to declining revenues during a time when food service programs are incurring additional costs while also trying to maintain full employment of our personnel.

These issues have caused many of our food service programs to deplete their reserves and rely upon their district's General Fund to continue operations. This is leading to difficult decisions, including layoffs in some districts, at a time when we are already struggling to keep our food service operations sufficiently staffed to meet the new demands and safety protocols and while more and more students return to the brick and mortar setting every week.

I would also like to take this opportunity to clear up a misconception regarding the status of unspent CARES Act funds. Many stakeholders are of the perception that the funds are not being spent, and therefore, school districts do not need the money. Nothing could be further from the truth. Superintendents developed plans to utilize these funds to meet immediate needs and longer term needs over the 2 years in which these funds have been authorized. Between expenditures and encumbrances, districts have obligated most of their original allocation. The remainder of these funds will be spent according to the plans developed by the superintendents, for items such as intervention services and programs, professional development, equipment, and part-time nurses and other personnel.