

Florida Association of District School Superintendents

State Board of Education

March 17, 2021

Tallahassee Community College

Student Union Ballroom

444 Appleyard Dr

Tallahassee, FL 32304

Comments

Welcome/Introductions

**Dr. Tim Smith, Superintendent
Escambia County School District**

General Comments

Let me start by thanking you Commissioner for your emergency orders. Together, they have been incredibly helpful for the financial and instructional stability of our districts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the educational interventions required by Emergency Order 2020-EO-07 prompted important conversations regarding remote learning and the best needs of the student. Also, we are elated that we are now able to expand the number of teachers and school employees who are eligible to receive COVID vaccinations. This expansion will ensure our teachers are available to provide the face-to-face instruction our students need to succeed.

I would like to begin today by addressing some budgetary issues and concerns. FADSS applauds the increase in the base student allocation and overall per pupil funding included in the Governor's recommended budget. These recommendations will help school districts address increasing costs in areas such as insurance and retirement.

The Governor's recommended budget includes a reduction of approximately 48,000 students, based on the most recent K-12 enrollment conference. School districts statewide have moved heaven and earth to find these "missing" students and we believe the next enrollment conference will show an increase in projected enrollment for the 2021-2022 school year. But as you know, the FEFP is a formula-driven model and one consequence of decreased enrollment would be a decrease in several funding categoricals, such as the ESE Guaranteed Allocation, instructional materials allocation, and transportation allocation. Regarding the instructional materials allocation, I would simply like to point out that school districts are headed towards

two enormous adoptions back-to-back with ELA and mathematics. School districts will spend far more than their allocation. The same is true for transportation, where annual expenditures routinely far exceed a district's allocation.

The Governor's recommended budget also recognizes the mental wellness challenges our students face. Providing an additional \$10 million for the mental health assistance allocation will help school districts provide needed mental health resources for our students including additional school counselors. School counselors often have more than 400 students assigned to them making it nearly impossible to provide necessary support for all students.

The second issue I would like to address today is accountability. The USDOE guidance from February 22nd stressed the importance of statewide assessments as a source of data for parents and educators to target resources and support, rather than for accountability purposes this year. The superintendents agree with this position. Dr. Mike Grego, on behalf of FADSS, sent the Commissioner a letter earlier this month requesting the department seek all waivers necessary and appropriate in response to the US DOE's invitation. Superintendents do not want to be taken off the hook for accountability. However, we do have concerns with receiving school grades considering the challenges our students, families, and teachers have faced this year.

On a related note, school districts need more flexibility to appropriately handle failing turnaround schools. Commissioner Corcoran - I appreciate the opportunity other superintendents and myself have had to work with you and your staff to explore ideas and additional options for helping these schools. In my district, Warrington Middle will have to close if it earns a grade of D this academic year, as we have yet to find a charter school which will take on the school. And while we recognize the school's academic problems and are doing all we can to address them, closing the school is an option hard for us to consider.

I appreciate your consideration of these points. FADSS is grateful for its strong relationship with the Commissioner and DOE staff. It is a great partnership working together to lift all of our students to greater heights.