

**Florida Association of District School Superintendents
State Board of Education
February 9, 2022
Tallahassee Community College
Student Union Ballroom
444 Appleyard Drive
Tallahassee, FL 32304**

Sandra "Sam" Himmel
Superintendent, Citrus County School District
President, Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS)

Good morning, Commissioner Corcoran and Members of the State Board. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you this morning on behalf of my colleagues and the Florida Association of District School Superintendents.

Across the state and the nation, our superintendents remain committed to providing our students with a high-quality education in a safe learning environment. Unfortunately, the issues that have arisen with the COVID-19 pandemic – from lost instruction time due to student and teacher absences and illness, supply issues, inflation, and critical worker shortages – continue to plague us. Superintendents and district staff have been substituting for teachers, bus drivers, and other personnel to keep our schools open and available for our students.

We are pleased to see the proposed amendments to Rule 6A-1.09422 on the agenda today, as we think it will benefit this year's high school graduates who have endured so much over the last two years. It is a great sign that the Commissioner, department, and this board remain committed to the compassion and grace approach that has guided so many decisions during the pandemic.

We have currently implemented and found significant success with innovative programs in my district, like Men Building Men, a program that focuses on building positive relationships with our most at-risk male high school students. More than ever before, we must provide opportunities for our students to connect and feel supported if we want to increase success rates. After extensive training and resources, male community members are paired with students who are our most at-risk students of graduating. They meet regularly to build a positive and consistent relationship. These mentors provide the unique support our students need, and I'm proud to say that 100% of our seniors in the program graduated with a high school diploma in the Spring of 2021. Citrus County's community support and knowledgeable staff were the ingredients that made this program such a success. We plan to continue and expand this program by adding a Women Building Women program so more students benefit from the expertise and compassion of our community.

Finally, as we are currently in Survey 3 week and getting ready for the spring assessments, I urge you to continue showing compassion and grace to our students and staff. On top of all the obstacles they have faced from the pandemic, the State has started the transition to the BEST standards. We look forward to a system of detailed progress monitoring that will help inform both teachers and parents in a timely manner, and I know that I speak for all of my fellow superintendents when I say that we are always ready and willing to help in our shared effort to provide Florida's children with the best education possible.