

THE DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF COLLIER COUNTY

Final 2023 Florida Legislative Platform

Approved at the October 11, 2022, Board Meeting

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Increase in the Base Student Allocation and state categorical programs to cover enrollment increases, workload changes and inflation
- At least one-year lead time for effective date and implementation of new programs or program changes
- Provide local control and flexibility for constitutionally elected school boards to meet local community needs and expectations through an agreement with the State Board of Education

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

1. Request that high performing Districts be allowed to establish their own progress monitoring plan and be exempt from the FAST Progress Monitoring 1 and Progress Monitoring 2 assessments.
2. Realign the state instructional materials (textbook) adoption timeline to ensure that the state review process and the publication of the official state adoption list occurs a full year prior to the district adoption timeline.
3. Provide flexibility to Districts by allowing Florida certified teachers to teach out of field for one year without the requirement of taking the subject area exam, (example: a certified economics teacher would be allowed to teach math for one year without the requirement of taking the subject area exam.) Also, to waive the District's penalty/fee if an out of field issue became an audit finding. In addition, remove the requirement that a master's degree must be in an area of certification on their teaching certificate. This requirement is a deterrent for some teachers looking to transfer to Florida or within Florida.
4. Provide PreK-12 funding (Florida Education Finance Program) increase in the BSA (Base Student Allocation) to allow for regular salary increases commensurate to inflation, cost of living increases, and retirement benefits such as increases to FRS (Florida Retirement System) contribution rates.
5. Provide differentiated funding for Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) programming that employ teachers with current Florida educator certification and increase the funding per student to at least \$2550 per FTE (Full Time Equivalent). Include VPK teachers employed by the school district in any state teacher incentives and/or bonuses.
6. Continue the investment for mental health services by providing funding to increase mental health personnel (such as school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists and school nurses) to expand and enhance mental health services available through school and community-coordinated services, and to provide enhanced wrap-around services.
7. Provide funding for increased professional development for teachers who are hired outside a traditional education program as they enter the field.

For additional information, please contact:

Kamela Patton, Ph.D.
Superintendent
patton@collierschools.com
239-377-021

Valerie Wenrich
Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources
wenriv@collierschools.com
239-377-0351

RATIONALE FOR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

FAST Progress Monitoring 1 and Progress Monitoring 2 Assessments

CCPS is a high performing district and has successfully implemented a quarterly benchmark assessment program for the past eleven years. District-created assessments are aligned to state standards and district pacing guides providing teachers and administrators with invaluable information about the extent to which students learned the content that was taught each quarter. Data at the individual, classroom, school, and district level is available to teachers and administrators through the District's data warehouse and is analyzed and discussed during quarterly Data Dialogues. As a result, instructional adjustments are made each quarter at the classroom, school, and district level. While the District understands the state's purpose and use of the new FAST assessments for progress monitoring, the data gleaned from these assessments cannot be used in the same way to drive instructional adjustments and district level support, particularly in the area of mathematics. Therefore, in order to avoid assessment redundancy, CCPS would like to be able to continue its successful benchmarking practices that have contributed to its designation as a high performing district and an A-rated district since 2017.

Instructional Materials

Historically, the state and district instructional materials adoption processes occur simultaneously. The state typically publishes the short bid list in the fall prior to the year of implementation of new instructional materials and concludes its process with the publication of the official state adoption list in the spring. Because this state timeline occurs the year prior to implementation of new instructional materials, the district timeline and process must occur simultaneously in order to have materials identified, ordered, and received prior to the start of the next school year. This presents challenges, such as those experienced this year, where districts reviewed materials from the short bid list and made decisions about those materials only to learn in mid-April that many of the titles that districts had selected were not on the official list. This resulted in significant delays for districts as they waited to see if the publishers would appeal, and the state would ultimately adopt titles not on the original state-adopted list. It further delayed the 30-day objection period following school board approval and ensuing objection hearings. The result has been a significant delay in the final approval and purchasing process, further delaying curriculum development, teacher training and receipt of materials prior to the state of school. Therefore, it is recommended that the state adoption process take place two years prior to the implementation of new materials in order to allow districts to engage in the local process the year prior to implementation.

Certification Flexibility

Due to teacher shortages, overwhelming requirements of endorsements for ELL and reading in addition to scheduling difficulties, school districts desire flexibility in certification so they can provide a certified teacher for all the courses offered. Currently, if a certified teacher is assigned to a course without holding the proper subject area certification, the teacher is considered out of field. The teacher is then required to pass the subject area exam even if they never teach that course again. A 6-12 certified science teacher should be able to teach one year in any area of science without penalty to the teacher or the District. District's face penalties/fees if the out of field issue became an audit finding. In addition, remove the requirement that a master's degree must be in an area of certification on their teaching certificate. This requirement is a deterrent for teachers looking to transfer to Florida or within Florida and obtain higher education.

FTE Funding To be updated with new financial information

The Base Student Allocation (BSA) has had minor increases in funding over the last few years. From FY18 to FY19, it increased 0.01%, from FY19 to FY20 by 1.79%, from FY20 to FY21 by 0.93%, from FY21 to FY22 by 1.24%, and from FY22 to FY23 by 4.9%. At the same time, the FRS rate has increased from FY18-FY22 4.29%, 2.54%, 18.06%, 8.2%, and 10.07% respectively. Inflation rates have also increased by 1.9%, 2.36%, 1.4%, 7%, and 9.1% respectively. As a result, School Districts are finding it increasingly difficult to balance the budget. This is occurring while at the same time an increase in categorical funds which are restricted in use and come with further requirements. At minimum, the BSA should increase by the increased rate in FRS in order to be sufficient to cover actual costs and inflation.

Funding for VPK Services

Given evidence that high-quality early childhood programs have positive effects on cognitive development, and long-term effects on school achievement and completion, a differentiated funding is requested for early childhood programs employing VPK instructors with current Florida Educator's Certificate to teach children any age from birth through 6th grade. Pre-K teachers should also be included in any state incentives and/or bonuses as they are critical to setting a great foundation for learning for our students before they enter kindergarten. As the state's prekindergarten program is voluntary over 100,000 children remain unenrolled annually which creates a significant disparity in readiness. Parents need encouragement to enroll their children.

Continue Investment and Funding for Mental Health Services

Students and families continue to have significant stressors and needs for support in mental health. First Lady DeSantis's Hope for Healing Florida initiative is intended to "help young people reach their full potential and lead healthier lives". To do so, additional categorical funds should be provided for needed staff. Currently, school health is an unfunded area that all school districts must creatively address; the result is typically not realizing the optimal ratio to support students' physical and mental health needs. The front line for averting crisis with students is often vigilant and caring school counselors, licensed mental health professionals and school psychologists. With a local increase of 26% in Baker Acts for children (year-to-year from August-October as reported by David Lawrence Center) the needs are significant. Relationships with qualified and credentialed staff are essential for students to reach their full potential and lead healthier lives. Increasing mental health services remains a strong priority for all districts. Beyond the mandates we continue to see significant increases in involuntary psychiatric examinations among CCPS students and community providers have three month waiting lists to see students that often are in crisis. The shortage of resources requires the public-school system to become the primary mental health provider for children and adolescents. There was a marginal increase in categorical mental health funds for SY22, but not enough to make any significant impact in hiring staff like we received from the department of health grant.

Funding for Professional Development

School Districts continue to strive to recruit highly qualified, certified teachers to their classrooms. Many of those teachers are becoming teachers through non-traditional means. Teacher development programs across the country are seeing significant reduction in enrollment, causing schools to hire teachers who are alternatively certified. Alternatively certified teachers face a tremendous learning curve with lesson planning, classroom management and instructional strategies. Districts are bearing the cost of providing professional development and new teacher induction programs with mentorship support to supplement and assist these non-traditional teachers, in effort to develop their instructional skills, ensure their success in the classroom and retain them as long-term career educators.