

## THE DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF COLLIER COUNTY

### *Preliminary 2022 Florida Legislative Platform*

*Approved by the Board on July 27, 2021*

#### 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. Reduce the number of state-required exams— Florida State Assessment (FSA) and End of Course Exams (EOC)—to not exceed the minimum required under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act; for FY21, and waive the use of WIDA (World- Class Instructional Design and Assessment) as an accountability tool using it only as an exit exam for English Language Learners (ELL) services.
2. Provide PreK-12 funding (Florida Education Finance Program) no less than that recommended, particularly for instructional personnel compensation, by the State Board of Education to the Governor for the 2022-2023 school year.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Identify means to assure governance oversight of charter schools that is consistent with that required of public agencies; examples may include electing charter governing board members by school parents, authorizing sponsors with Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) approval to remove board members for violation of Florida laws, misfeasance, malfeasance or nonfeasance in office.
6. Provide funding for increased professional development for teachers who are hired outside a traditional education program as they enter the field.

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## **RATIONALE FOR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

### **Reduce Assessments**

CCPS has been systemic and thoughtful in reducing local assessments significantly since 2017. The state assessments have not been reduced during this same time, with the exception of the elimination of Algebra 2 and the planned elimination of Geometry. The State of Florida currently exceeds ESEA assessment requirements by two (2) exams (Civics EOC and U.S. History EOC). WIDA is an extensive exam administered once per year, in addition to other state and local assessments, to students identified as English Language Learners (ELLs). The administration of WIDA reduces learning time for ELLs due to being pulled from instruction to take the assessment. Additionally, the administration of WIDA is a significant stressor on school staffing due to the extensive time and individual administration. Ongoing progress monitoring and use of local and state assessment data is sufficient to gauge the needs of ELLs.

### **FTE Funding**

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% and from FY21 to FY22 by 1.24%. At the same time, the FRS rate has increased from FY18-FY21 4.29%, 2.54%, 18.06% and 8.2% respectively. Inflation rates have also increased by 1.9%, 2.36%, 1.4% and 5.4% respectfully. As a result, School Districts are finding it increasingly difficult to balance the budget. While it is true that total student funding has increased in prior years by 1.82%, 3.18%, and 6.35% respectfully, the FY22 amount is decreased by (2.4%). 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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. Current legislation mandates are as follows: Students referred for a mental health screening assessed within 15 calendar days of referral, school-based mental health services initiated within 15 calendar days of identification and assessment, and Community-based mental health services initiated within 30 calendar days of referral coordinating mental health services with a student's primary mental health care provider and other mental health providers involved in student care. 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.

### **Governance Oversight of Charter Schools**

Charter schools are public schools receiving public funds, both state and local. While a charter school's governing board and school management are required to follow various regulatory requirements, they are not subject to the same sanctions as public agencies for acts of misfeasance, malfeasance and other civil or criminal violations of state law. State law concerning charter school governance should be clarified to assure equal application of requirements and consequences if those requirements are not met or are violated.

### **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.