



Capital Office for Administrative, Accreditation & Legislative Services

January 7, 2009

TO: All Administrators
FROM: Dr. Howard G. Burke, FACCS Executive Director
RE: Capital Update

With the Legislature back in the Capital city for a Special Session the House and Senate Committees are moving forward with various pre-filed initiatives, especially those dealing with economic impact. The following will provide a flavor or the scores of issues impacting non-public and public schools and other items you will find of interest.

CORPORATE TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS STUDY COMPLETED

OPPAGA has released a new study, confirming two earlier studies, showing that the Corporate Tax Scholarships save the state money in a time of fiscal hardship. The minority leader in the Senate, Al Lawson, and the teachers union are challenging the report. They maintain that the Scholarship Program is hurting the public schools financially.

What is best for children? Surprising how seldom this question is asked. As for accountability, two things: first, Scholarship students are required to annually sit for approved national norm reference tests and universally register significant gains; second, if by accountability critics mean moving non public schools under the oversight of the public schools, forget it!

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT DOWN

The latest release provides public school enrollment dropped by 17,651 students from earlier calculations, a drop that results in \$89 million less in basic school funding. The Florida Department of Education figures show 2.6 million students remain in public schools at a cost to state and local taxpayers of \$11.2 billion. The recalculation estimates follows a trend in recent years of fewer students entering Florida public schools, a drop education officials blame on higher housing costs and a sluggish economy.

SENATE PANEL MOVES TO CUT HIGHER ED FUNDING

The Senate's Higher Education Appropriations Committee passed a \$184.3 million reduction in its budget, striking millions from community colleges and universities across the state. Community colleges, which have seen increased enrollment as the economy has soured, would lose \$43.6 million through a combination of general revenue and trust fund cuts. Public universities could lose \$88.1 million through general revenue and trust fund cuts. The bill passed along party lines, with Democratic Sens. Dan Gelber and Ted Deutch voting against the measure.

SENATE COMMITTEE PASSES EDUCATION FUNDING REDUCTION

The Senate panel that writes the education budget approved millions in cuts for public schools today (Wednesday). The total damage for public schools totals \$365,059,858. "We're not generating enough revenue to pay the bills," said committee chair Stephen Wise, R-Jacksonville. The bill also contains provisions to protect school districts that reach a financial emergency. Taylor, Miami-Dade, Jefferson, Gulf, Manatee, Columbia, Franklin and Dixie counties all have unreserved fund balances of less than 2.5 percent of their general funds. If an emergency were to occur, the school districts could find themselves in a very precarious financial situation. The eight school districts listed are under financial distress. Of those eight districts, Taylor is the only one in the red. The district is down about \$2.5 million, according to the Department of Education. Miami-Dade has a balance of \$7 million; Jefferson has one of \$28,000; Gulf

has one of \$265,105; Manatee has one of \$5.2 million; Columbia has one of \$1.2 million; Franklin has one of \$181,550; and Dixie has one of \$358,711.

BUDGET CUTTING MOVES TO COUNCILS IN HOUSE

Senate committees on Wednesday morning worked through proposed budget cuts, as the bills to reduce the budget moved to the full Appropriations Councils for votes today (Wednesday) in the House. The bills in the Senate next go to Ways and Means.

NEW MINIMUM WAGE: Starting January 1, Florida's minimum wage is \$7.21 per hour, up from \$6.79 in 2008. Also, there a new law took effect Jan. 1 requiring health insurance companies and HMOs to provide policyholders with cards that contain specified information that can be used to estimate the financial responsibility of the covered person.

KINDERGARTEN KIDS SHOWING GROWTH IN EARLY LEARNING

More Florida kindergartners are showing signs of literacy skills earlier than ever, according to the Department of Education. A department screening measures each student's readiness in language and literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, social and personal skills, physical health and fitness and the creative arts. Of 178,115 students screened in 2008, 76.6 percent were determined to be above average/low risk, up 5 percent from last year. Department officials also tested 172,976 students for sound recognition and determined that 67.9 percent were above average/low risk, up 3 percent from last year. Finally, of 178,917 students tested for learning development, 47.6 percent demonstrated grade-level learning development, down slight from 48 percent in 2007.

UNEMPLOYMENT CONTINUES TO RISE

Florida's unemployment rate continues to rise. Currently it is 7.3 percent, according to statistics released by the Agency for Workforce Innovation. The agency reported that 680,000 unemployment claims were filed out of a labor force of 9,311,000, more than there have been at any point since June 1993. The rate is 0.3 percent higher than it was in October, and 2.9 percent higher than it was in November 2007. That represents a loss of 206,900 jobs from a year ago. The agency also reported that the unemployment rate in Florida is rising faster than the national average, which was last reported at 6.7 percent. Unemployment in Florida has risen each month since September 2007.

FLORIDA TEACHERS MAKE BELOW NATIONAL AVERAGE

Florida public school teachers are 29th in the nation in terms of average teacher salary, according to the most recent research by the National Education Association. Florida teachers made an average of \$46,930 in the 2007-2008 school year, below the national average of \$52,308. California teachers topped the list, making an average salary of \$64,424; and South Dakota made the least on average at \$26,674.

APPELLATE COURT STRIKES DOWN CHARTER SCHOOL LAW

An appellate court on December 2, 2008 struck down a 2006 law that allowed a special state panel to approve charter schools, sidestepping local school boards.

Judge Edward Barfield wrote for a three-judge panel of the First District Court of Appeal that the state panel posed "a present total and fatal conflict" with the Florida Constitution. The decision could make it much more difficult for charter schools to gain approval from school boards who are often cool to the idea of charter schools.

Fourteen school boards joined together in a suit asking the court system to declare the "Florida Schools of Excellence Commission," in violation of the Florida Constitution. Prior to the enactment of the 2006 law, school boards were able to decide for themselves whether to approve charter schools.

After the law was passed, 31 school boards applied to the State Board of Education to retain their power to approve charter schools. However, only three - Orange County, Polk County, and Sarasota County - were granted that right. You can read the details of the case at: <http://opinions.1dca.org/written/opinions2008/12-02-08/07-6041.pdf>.

NEW NCES SURVEY SHOWS 1.5 MILLION HOMESCHOOLED CHILDREN in 2007

The National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education recently released, *1.5 Million Homeschooled Students in the United States in 2007*. This report, excerpted from the US Office of Nonpublic Education Newsletter, summarizes findings from the *National Household Education Surveys Program* (NHES) and provides estimates of the number and percentage of homeschooled children in the country in 2007, and compares them with 2003 and 1999 estimates.

NCES considered students to be homeschooled if their parents reported them as being schooled at home instead of at a public or private school, for at least part of their education, and if their part time enrollment in such a public or private school did not exceed 25 hours a week.

Highlights

The issue brief indicates that the number and percentage of homeschooled children increased from 2003 to 2007:

- There were 1.5 million homeschooled children in the U.S. in 2007, up from 1.1 million in 2003 and 850,000 in 1999; and
- Homeschooled children were 2.9% of the school age population in 2007, rising from 2.2% in 2003 and 1.7% in 1999.

The survey also provides insight into parents' reasons for homeschooling their children. The reasons that parents most commonly cited were:

- Concern for the school environment (reported by 88% of parents, an increase from 85% in 2003);
- Desire to provide religious and moral instruction (reported by 83% of parents, an increase from 72% in 2003); and
- Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools (reported by 73% of parents, an increase from 68% in 2003).

When asked the *most important reason* for homeschooling their children, parents indicated the following:

- Provide religious or moral instruction (36%),
- Concern for the school environment (21%), and
- Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools (17%).

The NCES estimates of homeschooled students include students who were educated in full time homeschools and students who were homeschooled while also enrolled part time in a public or private school for up to 25 hours per week.

- 84% of the homeschooled students were educated solely in a home school,
- 11% were enrolled in a public or private school for less than 9 hours per week, and
- 5% were enrolled in a public or private school for 9-25 hours per week.

THE ABOVE IS A CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION INTENDED ONLY FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF FACCS PARTICIPANT AND ACCREDITED SCHOOLS. THIS COMMUNICATION MAY NOT BE DUPLICATED, FORWARDED, OR OTHERWISE DISTRIBUTED TO ANY OTHER PARTY OR PERSONS THAN THE INTENDED RECIPIENT INDICATED WITHOUT THE WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE FACCS TALLAHASSEE OFFICE FOR ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEGISLATIVE SERVICES. No claim of originality for the provided commentary is made as items are gathered from multiple resources. If you have received this communication in error or would like to be removed from further bulletins, please click the reply button and request removal from the data base.