

Rudolph F. Crew, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: ADOPTION OF A TRI-COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRI-COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD ADVOCACY ACTION PLAN TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE JANUARY 2006 TRI-COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

COMMITTEE: INNOVATION, EFFICIENCY AND GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

On Monday, November 28, 2005, the school boards of the tri-county area, Broward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties, met to discuss a common legislative platform for the upcoming legislative session. As a result, the following issues were identified for joint advocacy during the upcoming legislative session:

- Hurricane Relief;
- Adequate Funding for Education;
- Local Discretionary Millage;
- Class Size Reduction; and
- Lunsford Act/Fingerprinting

Additionally, the boards directed the superintendents to develop a strategic program of activities to advocate for the joint tri-county legislative platform and to seek a joint school board and delegation meeting prior to the legislative session to discuss the education needs of the tri-county districts. Activities related to the support of the tri-county platform will be coordinated by staff from each respective district to ensure optimum use of combined legislative resources including board member time. It is contemplated that as part of the strategic deployment of resources, one board member from each of the tri-county districts will travel to Tallahassee during the legislative session on a rotating basis to discuss priorities with legislators and maintain a visible presence in the capitol.

While education funding equity will continue to be a legislative priority of this District, it was mutually agreed upon by the tri-county representatives that funding adequacy should take precedence as a more realistic and executable legislative advocacy strategy. Seeking adequate funding would shift the discussion from equity to adequacy, which would most probably garner support from the other 64 school districts because it does not focus on the issue of the District Cost Differential. The premise of adequate funding supports the Board's legislative initiatives adopted on September 7, 2005.

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The Florida Constitution establishes “a paramount duty of the state to make adequate provision” for a “high quality system” of public schools. However, our state commitment to K-12 education, as measured by state funding, is well below the national average. As recently as 1990, Florida’s K-12 spending per pupil was slightly higher than the national average, ahead of 31 states. From 1990 to 2002, Florida’s increases fell short of inflation by nearly 5% while other states increased their education investment by 18% beyond the inflation rate. Pursuant to the US Department of Education, the National Public Education Financial Survey 2001-2002, indicates that Florida’s per-pupil expenditures declined in constant dollars from 1990 to 2002. More recently, a bi-partisan Constitutional Accountability Commission, established by the Florida School Boards Association, has analyzed the “adequacy provision” and “high quality” language of Florida’s Constitution and issued a report in August 2005 that found Florida’s national ranking is not only below average in three of four expenditure categories, but more significantly, Florida’s children rank in the lower quartiles in nine of ten student performance categories.

Adequate education funding is not a partisan issue. The implications of the shift of funds away from education are serious and the solution requires statewide, bi-partisan support. Therefore, the tri-county boards believe the “adequacy” position will be more likely to garner statewide support. It is also believed that issues relative to requests for financial support for hurricane recovery and revisions to the Lunsford Act/fingerprinting requirements are ripe for support from districts statewide, and therefore are included in the proposed tri-county platform.

Finally, tri-county staff will develop a joint advocacy action plan designed to support its legislative program and priorities that will be presented at the January 2006 Tri-county School Board meeting.

RECOMMENDED:

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida:

1. adopt the five 2005-2006 tri-county legislative priorities as follows:
 - Hurricane Relief;
 - Adequate Funding for Education;
 - Local Discretionary Millage;
 - Class Size Reduction; and
 - Lunsford Act/Fingerprinting; and
2. authorize the development of a tri-county advocacy action plan to be discussed at the January 2006 Tri-county School Board meeting.