



SCHOOL BOARD OF POLK COUNTY

P.O. BOX 391
BARTOW, FLORIDA 33831

1915 SOUTH FLORAL AVENUE
BARTOW, FLORIDA 33830

(863) 534-0521 • FAX (863) 519-8231

March 5, 2009

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Superintendent

Dear Staff Members,

As the State Legislature has convened this week and the Governor has presented his budget plans, there is much discussion about the effect of the final State Budget on education. All of this is complicated because of the federal Stabilization Money that is part of the Stimulus Package.

Presently Florida does not qualify for the Stabilization Money because the current funding of education is below the funding level of 2005-06 which is a requirement to receive these funds. Consequently, the Governor has submitted a request for a waiver in order for the State to access these funds. Last week, Florida Education Commissioner Eric Smith returned from a meeting in Washington, DC with the US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, and he was optimistic that Florida will be able to receive the Stabilization funds. Please keep in mind that only 84% of those funds can be used for education and it includes Pre-k – 12, community colleges and four year colleges.

If we are fortunate to receive the Stabilization Funds, these funds are only provided for two years. There are many unanswered questions as to how the money can be spent. It may be at the discretion of the legislature and governor and/or it may come directly from Washington with restrictions. Governor Crist has indicated that he wants to use it to fill the gap in the budget to avoid further cuts to education. Some members of the legislature are concerned that if the money is used for recurring costs that the problem will continue at the end of the two years.

Regardless of the controversy over the Stabilization Funds, the school district will receive an additional \$18,412,000 over two years for Title I and an additional \$20,725,000 over two years for IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). This money will become available on a yearly basis, starting July 1, 2009. However, as most of you know, there are many restrictions that are attached to these two sources of funding. The Florida Department of Education has been told that we should receive guidelines sometime in March. The biggest question to be answered is whether districts can use these funds regardless of the supplanting issue it raises. Can we spend them to employ a teacher if that person was previously paid from local dollars?

My goal and the goal of the School Board is to keep as many people employed as possible given the spending guidelines. However, even if we receive the Federal Stimulus and Stabilization Money, it is predicted that Florida will still experience a \$2 billion shortfall for next year. Consequently, the district must plan for a way to reduce our existing budget this year. With the Federal money, the estimated reduction for 2009/10 could be reduced from 15% to 10% as originally predicted a few weeks ago. The district will need to reduce another \$62.5 million in next year's budget. Given our previous cuts from July 2007, there is no way to do this and not affect the staff and services to students and parents.

We are continuing with meetings around the County to explain the budget situation to parents, staff, and interested citizens. Without a funding source to make up for the shortfall, we must proceed with developing a budget that, unfortunately, we will have to put into place.

Unfortunately, the legislature does not conclude until May 1st and tentative plans have to be in place for next year prior to that date. We, along with PEA, PTA, the Central Florida School Boards Coalition, and other groups throughout the State, ask that you contact your legislators. Most of all, we need flexibility in dollars that we will receive, flexibility with class size requirements for next year, and a funding source or sources so that these severe measures will not have to be implemented.

I know this is a most unsettling and stressful time. As the district receives additional information regarding the status of funding, you will be informed. On the district's website is our budget information, frequently asked questions and answers, plus contact information.

Education must be a priority!

Sincerely,



Gail F. McKinzie, Ph. D.
Superintendent