



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

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GAIL F. MCKINZIE, PH.D.
Superintendent of Schools

*Polk County Schools-
an equal opportunity
institution for education
and employment*

May 15, 2009

Dear Staff Members,

It was the perfect storm; dire economic struggles throughout the nation and beyond our borders, our state's revenues dwindling daily and our local property valuation declining. Since I have begun communicating with you in January regarding the budget crisis, it has been a rough ride. Waves of unfavorable, unpredictable and conflicting news kept coming and kept us all continually facing rough seas ahead. However, thanks to the ground swell of support from you and our community members who communicated with our elected officials, we were thrown life rafts – at least for a short time – from the federal government and state legislators. We won't be cruising safely for years to come but we will be drifting and able to stay afloat due to the federal funding we've received for the short term. That's good news, particularly when you consider that as recently as February we were facing a \$90 million cut to our operating budget on top of an already \$75 million reduction since 2007.

The 2009 Florida Legislative Session ended last week and by law, legislators were required to pass a balanced budget. They did. However, they based the entire state budget around two sources of income: non-recurring money (funds not expected to be received in the future) and projected revenue. Here are the non-recurring money sources: 1) \$3.7 billion in Federal stimulus funds, 2) \$1 billion from the state's rainy-day trust fund and 3) \$1.6 billion from state trust funds. The balance of the budget was comprised of projected revenue from: 1) \$800 million from raised fees for items such as drivers' licenses, hunting licenses and traffic tickets, and 2) \$900 million in cigarette taxes.

As a result of this year's Session, we are currently assessing the impact the new laws and rules will have on the way we deliver instruction to our students. What does the budget mean to our district in terms of dollars? The legislature's budget reflects state and local funding at a reduction of \$33.1 million or 5.36% of our operating budget. We thank our legislators who fought to keep funding public education a priority by applying for the stimulus funds and for not further reducing our budgets, however, the battle is far from over. You may hear from politicians that they actually increased the spending per pupil. However, there have been four budget cuts to education since July 2007 when per pupil spending was \$7303. This year's budget figure of \$6,892 represents a reduction of \$411 per student from two years ago. Until our state elected leaders identify a permanent and consistent source of revenue for public education which would not be subject to major dips and slips neither in the economy, nor subject to transfer for any other purpose, we will not be on solid ground. We must continue to keep a vigilant eye on how our state elected leaders deal with our revenue sources.

The life boat that has ultimately saved us from huge staff layoffs and further reduction and/or possible elimination of student programs was the Federal Stabilization funding. These monies of \$31.1 million will offset most of the reduction from the State and Local revenue sources. With this money, we are able to retain qualified and effective staff, hire new teachers and other critical positions throughout the district, and keep the majority of student programs whole. This money is a two-year only life preserver so we will spend it judiciously while planning for the future when we will no longer receive it. That's why education funding reform at the state level is so critical and we must keep it on the forefront of legislators' priorities.

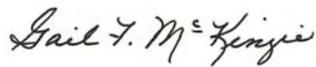
The mission of Polk County Public Schools is to ensure rigorous, relevant learning experiences for our students that result in high achievement.

Even with the assistance of the federal dollars, we will need to operate differently than in past years but there are other practices that will remain the same. One difference will be that all operating budgets will be further reduced by 5% for the 2009-2010 and only those positions that were previously frozen but deemed critical will be filled. We will continue to keep an eye on our utility costs and with everyone's help, we will look for ways to further reduce those expenses. Fuel costs, a major portion of our budget, are always an unknown factor but we will do the best we can to purchase fuel at the lowest prices. Another way we will be conserving fuel is by requiring all drivers of district-owned vehicles to not exceed 55 mph. These are just a few examples of savings and we'll continue to look at other ways to get us through these rough waters. To those of you who sent suggestions for budget reductions over the last several months, all have been reviewed and considered and we thank you for your responses. We will maintain the address of budgetquestionsandsuggestions@polk-fl.net so please keep those ideas coming. Our collective thoughts and ideas will produce the best results.

Now that we have final dollar numbers from the federal, state and local levels we are developing our budget for the upcoming year. For your convenience, we have posted "A Year in Review" PowerPoint presentation which includes budget figures, demographics and some of our recent accolades. Please take a moment to review the presentation on our website at <http://www.polkfl.net/districtinfo/departments/officeofthesuperintendent/communityrelations.htm> We will keep you posted with further updates. Again, thank you for your efforts to communicate your concerns and thoughts with elected officials; it made a big difference in the outcome of funding.

In the coming months, once again, I ask for your patience and support as we collectively try to piece things together and provide as smooth a sailing as possible in order to deliver the level of education that our students deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gail F. McKinzie".

Gail F. McKinzie, Ph.D.
Superintendent