

PCTA ACTION

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STATE CONFRONTS HUGE BUDGET SHORTFALL

Pinellas schools have received word that their budget for this year will be cut by an additional \$10 million with additional cuts coming next year. This, despite the promise that education would be “held harmless.” The process unfolded in Tallahassee last week as state economists met to “predict” the future in the quarterly Revenue Estimating Conference. Budget woes are tied to a decrease in tax revenue due to the slowdown in new construction; documentary stamp revenue and property tax collections. It is estimated that it will be three years before the budget returns to 2007 levels.

The legislature acted quickly enacting over a half billion dollars in budget cuts led by a decrease in funding for education, the largest piece of the state discretionary spending. While this was happening, lawmakers were informed that the revenue estimate for this year would be down by nearly a billion dollars, with anticipated income for next year down by \$3.9 billion. “The eight years of Jeb’s ‘prosperity’ have come crashing down with a state ill-equipped to deal with revenue shortfalls of this magnitude,” said PCTA Executive Director Jade Moore. “We couldn’t count on property taxpayers and sales tax from hurricanes to bail the state out forever. Now, we must find new revenue, quickly, to get this ship righted.”

PCTA is working with the legislature to come up with additional resources. However, the climate for tax increases in Tallahassee, while fine with a majority of Pinellas lawmakers, does not enjoy widespread support throughout the state. “For example, Senator Dennis Jones has proposed an expansion of gambling for dog and horse tracks but the issue appears ‘dead’ in the House,” Moore added. “What we need to do now is pressure the Legislature to provide the resources to maintain a minimal level of support in these tough economic times. Two things they can do is to postpone (eliminate) pay for performance and A+ bonuses and delay implementation of class size. These, alone would ‘free up’ fifteen to twenty million dollars for Pinellas.”

MIDDLE SCHOOL REFORM CONTINUES TO MOVE

The Legislature has backed off a controversial decision requiring daily phys ed for middle schools opening up the discussion as to what is the best curriculum for Pinellas students. At present, the requirement stands at three semesters with plenty of opportunities for reducing that. “Now we can get back to our conversation about what’s right for kids,” said PCTA President Kim Black. “I know what isn’t right and that’s having our teachers teach 7 of 8 periods!” The latter was taken off the table by the Superintendent. “Nevertheless, we still have a career requirement, the new phys ed requirements, remediation requirements and a feeling that our middle school doesn’t prepare some kids for high schools.”

The 6-12 Redesign Committee has inherited the work of the middle school task force which has been studying the issue for the last three years. “What our teachers have told us is that they want flexibility,” said Black. “I believe that is what the District wants as well.” To that end, there will be a series of meetings held with Dr. Wilcox and the Middle School Team with teachers and administrators shortly to reassure them of that flexibility. “We have great models out there that will work for all students. We just have to get past this notion that one size will work for every child,” Black said.

ON THE BACK – THE RESOLUTION, IBC, AND MORE....

FACULTY REP COUNCIL APPROVES RESOLUTION

Members of the Faculty Representative Council of PCTA approved a sweeping resolution condemning the 'micro management' of teachers by Administrators at the regular monthly meeting March 6. Kim Black, PCTA President, presented the resolution to the School Board at their meeting on Tuesday, March 11th. Reaction was quick as Dr. Wilcox sought to assure PCTA that he would address the concerns. In solidarity, Hillsborough teachers approved a resolution supporting Pinellas teachers. Here is the resolution:

A RESOLUTION OF THE PINELLAS CLASSROOM TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Whereas, the Contract between The School Board of Pinellas County and The Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association states:

Each teacher is to be treated in a professional manner at all times, and

Whereas, there are increasing frequencies of complaints by teachers of unprofessional treatment by leadership, which are demoralizing by their very nature and have a negative impact on teacher productivity, and

Whereas, unprofessional treatment is often related to specific activities such as over-burdensome requirements for lesson plans, walk-throughs that are intimidating and void of any constructive feedback, abuses of planning time for class coverage, all in addition to cases of direct, personal, unprofessional treatment during meetings, conferences, and other public occasions, and

Whereas, the Contract also requires, in multiple references, collaboration between the parties in planning, innovating, and implementing programs and procedures both at the district and school level, and

Whereas, there are alarming increases in the frequency of mandates that impose upon teachers' time and stifle their creative talents, and

Whereas, the Contract requires that "innovative" programs be tested for a reasonable period of time on a limited basis before being implemented district-wide, and

Whereas, there are current initiatives, with far reaching implications, that have had substantially less collaboration between teachers and administration than is required by the Contract, or that would be needed for successful implementation, and

Whereas, the Contract requirements in all of these areas exist because the parties have recognized that collaboration and mutual respect are necessary to have a vibrant and progressive school system, and now, therefore, be it

Resolved, that the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association asks the Pinellas County School Board to address these serious issues by immediately returning to the principles of "Quality" as adopted in 1991, and direct Administration to operate in the manner necessary to build and maintain a true "Quality Culture." Only in this way will our school district be able to properly engage all of its employees and achieve its full potential for highest student achievement.

Adopted unanimously by the Faculty Representative Council of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association – March 6, 2008

INDEPENDENT BENEFIT COUNCIL'S (IBC) MOVE TO HAVE NO EFFECT ON PINELLAS

A coalition of FEA, the School Boards Association and Administrators has produced a model plan document designed to improve the yield of Tax Sheltered Annuities. Unfortunately, 60% of Pinellas employees have Annuities with other vendors. The Risk Management Department will allow vendors to continue to market in Pinellas as long as they meet the same criteria as IBC. This should alleviate concerns by those who have annuities offered by NEA and others.