

FEA President Andy Ford's statement on SBOE-commissioned report on K-12 education

TALLAHASSEE – Andy Ford, president of the 140,000 member Florida Education Association, issued the following statement about “Sustaining Progress in Times of Fiscal Crisis,” a report commissioned by the State Board of Education that was released today:

“It seems ironic that the report released today, ‘Sustaining Progress in Times of Financial Crisis,’ comes at a time when conservative members of the Florida Legislature and right-wing policy analysts are attempting to pass legislation that would attack class-size and teacher tenure while seeking to expand funding for unaccountable voucher programs like the CTC Scholarship program. There is a saying that ‘a crisis is a terrible thing to waste’ and the political motives of those championing this report are transparent. This report seeks to serve as an academic validation of a purely partisan attempt to undermine the foundation of Florida's public education system and ignore the established will of the electorate with regard to class size implementation. Further, the utilization of ‘policy experts’ from outside Florida is further proof that the elected officials supporting this type of so-called ‘education reform’ have lost credibility within Florida's academic community as university professors, classroom instructors and parents from across Florida have witnessed the negative impacts of the Legislature's willful neglect of public schools, community colleges and universities.

“FEA supports high standards and accountability for our public schools, community colleges and universities. In fact, the teachers and education staff professionals in our public schools have done an outstanding job in improving student performance and academic achievement with little or no financial support from the Legislature. We further agree that the federal stimulus funds provide an opportunity for elected leaders to deploy resources in a manner that strengthens our public education system and protects students, staff professionals and teachers from the pending budget cuts that threaten to devastate Florida's schools. Rather than argue about bonus compensation, shouldn't we focus on retaining the outstanding teachers that we already have who will become the victims of draconian budget cuts in the coming weeks unless the governor and Legislature find new sources of revenue? Instead of focusing on who should be fired first, shouldn't Florida focus on retaining the teachers that have worked so successfully in raising student achievement and test scores? Instead of attempting to alter the Florida Constitution, shouldn't legislators focus on actually attempting to fully implement the class size amendment passed by a majority of voters? Instead of expanding ‘school options’ that are

unproven and unaccountable, shouldn't our elected officials invest in public schools that are among the top tier nationally in academic performance and student achievement?

“With all due respect to Commissioner Smith, the State Board of Education and the professors from outside Florida, isn't it time to invest in the public schools that are already doing a terrific job of preparing students? It's time for Florida's appointed and elected leaders to support Florida's public schools, community colleges and universities by making the investments necessary to make our schools a priority.”

The Florida Education Association is the state's largest association of professional employees, with more than 140,000 members. FEA represents pre K-12 teachers, higher education faculty, educational support professionals, students at our colleges and universities preparing to become teachers and retired education employees.

The complete report, “Sustaining Progress in Times of Fiscal Crisis,” is available online at: www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg