

2021

LEGISLATIVE POLICY AGENDA

FLORIDA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Unprecedented challenges to our communities, especially our public-school families, have strained Florida's ability to respond to the health crisis and economic instability across the country. As the pandemic continues to spread, **we must ensure a safe and effective PreK-12 and higher education system** to meet the challenges required for the 21st century learning environment and workplace, protect taxpayer investments, and treat educators and education staff professionals with respect and dignity. Our state's educators continue to provide the education and services our students need amid the greatest public health crisis our country has ever faced.

We believe the path to economic recovery depends on a world-class education system, rooted in public trust and grounded in three principles: **investment in our neighborhood public schools, student success, and recruitment and retention** of educators. The Florida Education Association continues to advocate for all three principles built on one underlying message: **Fund Our Future – A Decade of Progress.**



5 CRITICAL PRIORITIES

- 1. Preserve and expand the financial investments** in public school employees and schools that are required to **keep our students and staff safe and able to learn**, particularly during the pandemic.
- 2. Create a more stable workforce** through opportunities to earn multi-year contracts.
- 3. Protect the Florida Retirement System** without burdening employees with additional costs.
- 4. Promote the use of formative assessment and learning** over time spent on standardized testing as the disruptions caused by the pandemic invalidate the already questionable accountability system.
- 5. Reaffirm the need for local decision-making.** School boards and affiliates must have the freedom to negotiate fair and equitable salary plans and working conditions that will best serve the school community. Districts must also be able to determine the best way to minimize the impact of Covid-19 on our schools and communities.

OUR CONSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATION: ENSURING ACCESS TO FREE AND HIGH-QUALITY SCHOOLS

WE MUST:

- Uphold the constitutional authority and obligations of local elected school boards with respect to collective bargaining and supervision of tax-funded private and charter schools.
- Increase public engagement in all schools.
- Hold all schools, colleges and universities receiving public funds (including charter and private schools) to equitable, high standards.

THE ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

SAFE, HEALTHY AND EFFECTIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Provide full access and funding for effective methods for preventing, tracking, and responding to potential spread of Covid-19 and transparency in reporting impacts on our schools, colleges, and communities.
- Ensure school campuses (Pre-K through higher education) are secure, safe, and well-maintained, and can provide student and family support and interventions.
- Require non-discriminatory practices in employment, enrollment, and instruction for all schools receiving public funds.
- Eliminate overcrowded classrooms including virtual, hybrid, and brick and mortar models of instruction.

SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

- Support expansion of high-quality prekindergarten programs including access to full day programs with professionally certified teachers.
- Emphasize formative assessments and rapid return of student assessment results rather than delayed high-stakes accountability.
- Revitalize teacher evaluation to focus on improving effective teaching and learning strategies.
- Incentivize retention in the teaching profession by restoring extended and multi-year contracts after a probationary period.
- Promote meaningful professional development for instructional personnel and non-instructional staff professionals.

FAIRNESS IN FUNDING

- Ensure all public-school classrooms prioritize equitable learning environments for all students regardless of the student's personal and societal circumstances.
- Continue full funding and flexibility of restricted use funds for Pre-K through higher education for both normal educational costs and emergency response.
- Capture annual increases in property value for all properties, not just new builds, through the Required Local Effort, ending rate roll backs that decrease purchasing power of local school districts.
- Ensure school district resources are adequate to implement the phase-in to the \$15 minimum wage.
- Require needs assessments to drive funding priorities for all capital projects.

STAFF QUALITY

- Provide incentives such as loan forgiveness, grants, scholarships, and program support for pre-service teacher programs.
- Strengthen alternative certification preparation to require instruction and supervised practice before a new teacher assumes responsibility for student instruction, along with time and funding for structured mentoring support for all new teachers.
- Include professionally certified prekindergarten teachers in the statutory definition of classroom teachers.
- Design streamlined certification pathways and incentives for instructional aides to become teachers.
- Grant fee waivers along with tuition waivers to graduate assistants and university employees.
- Protect Florida's existing retirement system including all current retirees and fully vested employee benefits and maintain the defined benefit and defined contribution options for all education (regular class) employees.

