Strong public schools are the heartbeat of our communities. From the joy and energy of an elementary school cafeteria at lunchtime, to the camaraderie of sharing a school bus ride, to Friday night football with the grandeur of a high school marching band — school is where childhood happens. Our public schools are where children’s imaginations are sparked, where lifelong lessons are learned and where students gain the skills they need to thrive as they transition to adulthood. Our public schools are the best places to inspire students’ natural curiosity and their desire to learn. When we work together, we can build the world class education that we dream of. The Florida Legislature can demonstrate their commitment to ensure to every child by ensuring the resources are available to give every child the education they deserve, regardless of their race, income or ZIP code.

**5 CRITICAL PRIORITIES**

1. **Students deserve highly qualified and certified teachers and staff.** To attract the strongest teachers and support staff, Florida must increase average pay to rank in the top five nationally - for all teachers, not just new teachers. Florida is one of the wealthiest states in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world. Yet the teachers and staff professionals who are given the sacred trust to educate Florida’s children are paid 49th in the nation. Florida has the ability to pay fair, competitive wages to all educators. It’s time legislators found the will to do so.

2. **Provide qualified, experienced teachers the opportunity to enter into long term contracts so the best teachers stay in our schools and don’t seek jobs elsewhere.** Florida cannot recruit its way out of the current teacher shortage. Retention of highly qualified, certified teachers is just as important. The current system of annual contracts undermines stability and hurts students.

3. **Recognize and support the vital role of education staff professionals in students’ education by enacting policies to prioritize their retention to ensure that all students attend a school that is fully staffed with high-quality paraprofessionals, teachers aides, office and clerical staff, bus drivers and all of the other education support employees essential to make our schools strong.**

4. **Protect the Florida Retirement System without burdening employees with additional costs.**

5. **Prioritize teacher-led assessments and learning over state-mandated standardized tests.**