

The President's

Solidarity Report



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Simplify, Don't Horrify!

In sports, in the workforce, and in life, when things begin to go awry, we regroup and return to the basics. Education in Pinellas seems the exception to the rule. As the tower that is education begins to teeter, we continue to build higher and add more complex levels atop a foundation that is in need of repair. If we continue to ignore the voice of professional educators who cry out to secure our foundation, the tower will certainly continue to wobble and eventually collapse.

Of course, this scenario plays into the hands of a reform movement that has been eyeballing public education as their next big cash windfall. In their free market plan, supported by a school voucher system, competition would eliminate low performing schools because they would be unable to attract customers. Low income families would shop for a school of their choice and they would get what they pay for, whatever the value of the voucher. The wealthier the family, the better able they will be to add as much money as they can to their assigned vouchers to pay for the school of their choice. The wealthiest families will send their children to the most elite private schools and use their voucher to offset some of the cost, courtesy of the American taxpayer. Say goodbye to an equal playing field.

Our Union has been the largest obstacle to the privatization movement. However, we are rookies in the area of propaganda and we are up against professionals. It is their message that is getting to our parents and communities:

- Teachers' unions are greedy and don't care about children.
- They point to poverty to make excuses for bad teachers and failing public schools.
- Monopolies do not go away willingly, unions defend the status quo.
- We know what works: Testing, accountability, charter schools closing low performing schools, performance pay, online instruction, cutting costs, and crippling teachers unions.
- Teachers Unions are "Evil" for fighting against a parent's right to choose.

The corporate reform movement has adopted language that resonates with parents, such as their use of the phrase "parental choice". That is the nature of propaganda, to blur the truth, embellish facts, and to create a message to convince listeners of the righteousness of a cause, while hiding its true motivation.

Educators across our nation are speaking out as the rightful experts in education. Teachers Unions are the collective voice of educators; eliminating them would eliminate the strongest advocate for public education. Stripping teachers of their job protections limits academic freedom. Evaluating teachers by the test scores of their students undermines professionalism and encourages teaching to the test. We must find a way to educate the public and offset the propaganda that is used against us. They fear us and they want to eliminate us because we stand in the way of their profits.

Our District should be lock and step with us. We are fighting for its right to serve every student in our community. If schools are having issues with test scores, it is because our whole school system has been set up for failure. The more schools that fail, the stronger the argument against public education so the hurtful mandates and testing requirements are accomplishing exactly what they were intended to do.

As we become more and more disenchanted by what is happening in our schools, we need to gather our collective voice and tell our School Board that we need to stop with the chants of rigor and testing. We must get back to basics. It is wrong to take instructional time away from our students in order to put them through bi-weekly assessments. Kindergarten children, who need to learn the social skills necessary to function and be successful at school are instead having their lessons replaced by assessments and test preparations. It is disturbing to hear teachers say that they do not have the time to read to their students. It is unsettling to see teachers spending hours analyzing reams of data and troubling to see the endless pages of lesson plans required by teachers at our most

challenging schools. It is horrific to see a generation of students leave our classrooms, never having learned how to behave in a civilized society because referrals were suppressed to create the false picture of a safe learning environment.

Those of us who care deeply about public education understand that what has been forced on us is indeed horrifying. However, we are the professionals in education and if we push back with a collective strength, we know how to fix this. We do not continue to add layers upon layers upon an already taxed structure. We stop, reflect, and get back to the basics; we begin to repair the foundation upon which our institution is founded. In other words, we simplify and we use common sense along with our skills and knowledge. We use the tenets we know to be true:

- Every child can learn.
- Without discipline, there can be no learning.
- Building relationships and trust is of paramount importance.
- Every teacher plays a part in the 12 year educational journey of a child.
- Great teachers teach a love of learning.
- We teach what a student needs to pass, but also what they need for life.
- Teaching happens between teacher and students, everyone else is part of a supporting cast.

Dear Board Members, let's get back to basics; "Just Let Us Teach".

Governor considers Richard Corcoran for Florida Commissioner of Education

Former House Speaker Richard Corcoran is being considered, by Governor DeSantis, for appointment as Florida Commissioner of Education. Richard Corcoran has not been a friend to Public Education and has overseen the passage of HB 7069 and HB 7055 into laws that benefit charter schools, at the sake of public schools, and seek to decertify teacher unions. He has starved our public schools of funding and destabilized the teaching profession by denying annual contract teachers any expectation of continued employment.

If appointed, he will need to be confirmed by the Board of Education. Our only chance at stopping this is if we let the Board know how parents and professional educators would feel about having an unqualified and openly hostile Commissioner of Education. Please consider writing the Board. Their contact information and a sample letter is below. If not us, then who?

Dear Member of the Board of Education,

I am writing to you as a concerned parent, educator and citizen. Florida has had four new commissioners in three years! The most recent name floated for the position causes great concern. Former House Speaker Richard Corcoran is a trial lawyer. Florida's students need a leader of our public education system who knows public schools, who understands how our students learn and the needs of education staff.

Our students, parents and taxpayers deserve more than out-of-office politicians, wealthy campaign donors, trial lawyers or bored business executives to head the third largest public education system in the United States.

If we're serious about making sure our kids have a world class public education, let's make sure the leader of our public education system is a highly qualified education professional who is dedicated to our public school students. So please, take some time and find an education professional who understands our schools and our kids.

Thank you for your consideration,

Respectfully,

John/Jane Doe, Concerned Educator

State Board of Education contact information:

Chair, Marva Johnson - Marva.Johnson@fldoe.org

Vice Chair, Andy Tuck - Andy.Tuck@fldoe.org

Gary Chartrand - Gary.Chartrand@fldoe.org

Ben Gibson - Ben.Gibson@fldoe.org

Tom Grady - Tom.Grady@fldoe.org

Michael Olenick - Michael.Olenick@fldoe.org

Joe York - Joe.York@fldoe.org

**Mailing address for SBOE
Members**

Member Name

State Board of Education
c/o Department of Education
Turlington Building, Suite 1514
325 West Gaines Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Important information: Humana Spending Account(s)

The e-mail below was sent out by Melinda Sutton, Managing Officer of Employee Benefits for the District. Some of you may have overlooked it so I have copied it below:

Effective January 1, 2019 Humana will no longer be the third-party administrator of the spending account(s) for Pinellas County Schools. For 2019 accounts, Aetna will be administering the Flexible Spending Accounts and the Health Reimbursement Account (CDHP Plan). However, you should be aware that Humana is migrating its spending accounts to a new technology platform known as Humana Access® that will take effect in their system on January 1, 2019.

This transition does impact Pinellas County School employees who have any type spending accounts in 2018 including the healthcare flexible spending account (FSA), the dependent care flexible spending account (DCFSA) and the personal care account (PCA) associated with the Humana CDHP plan.

*Humana has notified us there will be a black-out period in order for them to reconcile account balances and move the data to their new platform. You will NOT have access to certain features of your spending account(s) from **December 14 through December 31, 2018**.*

Attached is a Notice from Humana as well as Frequently Asked Questions. Please read these notices to see how it will impact you.

Also attached is the Claim Form that you will need if you need to submit for reimbursement.

*If you have any questions, **please contact Humana** at 800-604-6228 between 8:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. or select 'Chat' on MyHumana.*

Melinda

Melinda Sutton, PHR Managing Officer, Employee Benefits, Health & Workers' Compensation Risk Management

Phone: 727-588-6282 Fax: (727) 588-6182 suttonmel@pcsb.org

The e-mail above was sent to PCSB employees on December 7th at 12:28pm Subject: Humana FSA/PCA cards Black-Out Period

The Pinellas County School District has voiced their objections to Humana concerning the timing on the information below. Because of the switch to Aetna, Humana needs this transition period. It is our hope that most of our members have already spent all of their FSA dollars as it must be spent by the end of the year or it is lost. However, if you have money on it, you will be reimbursed if you use your own credit/debit card by using the reimbursement form. For any additional information, call the Humana number in the above e-mail or call Risk Management.



PESPA TOY DRIVE



We are looking for your help again this year to fill our tree with wonderful gifts for those children that are less fortunate. You may donate gift cards, clothes, and toys for all ages from newborn to teenagers. We will deliver them unwrapped to the Juvenile Welfare Board and R'Club by Tuesday December 18, 2018.

Unwrapped toys can be dropped off at the PCTA-PESPA (Jade T. Moore) Building. Monetary donations can be sent to PESPA prior to Tuesday December 18, 2018.

Please help us provide the best holiday ever for these children. Set up a plan at your work site/school to advertise and collect for the toy drive.

Thank you for your support.

For more information please contact us at (727) 585-6518

Drop off location 650 Seminole Blvd, Largo Florida 33770

