

The President's

Solidarity Report



No. 67

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FEA Media Release

School Board Meeting Speech on February 26, 2019

Good Evening Madame Chair, Board members, Dr. Grego and Staff,

For nine months, the PCTA bargaining team worked with the District bargaining team, to negotiate a new contract. From the very first, PCTA's main concern was the stress level that our educators have had to endure. The amount of stress related illnesses that are plaguing those in our profession had reached a dangerous level.

Gradually, and thankfully, the District team started to understand our concerns and we should all be proud of the final results of our work together.

However, there are currently Principals that are finding ways to, perhaps not violate the contract, but certainly to bypass the intent for which this contract was built on, that is to reduce stress for educators and students.

Having a contract that does not mandate extensive and time-consuming lesson plans is of little use if Principals can require long extensive, and time-consuming remediation plans. Language that states that an academic coach is a confidential, non-evaluative resource for teachers is of little value if coaches are participating on team classroom walk throughs and being asked to help formulate the comments on i-observation.

I could complain of the daily disruptions to classroom sanctity that parades of evaluators marching through our students' classrooms present but I prefer to get to the root of the problem. Tonight, I would like to advocate for the folks who feel they have no choice but to violate the spirit of our contract and add to the stress level we have been trying to reduce.

I would like to advocate for our school-based administrators, who, like our classroom educators, have been asked to do the impossible and who carry so much stress upon their shoulders that they can't help but unload some of that on their staff before it buries them.

When the District demands that they perform twenty-five (25) walkthroughs a week with corresponding comments in i-observation, how much time is left to support teachers with discipline issues that prevent entire classes from learning? When the District schedules all of a Principals bosses to accompany them on a walk-throughs as if teachers and students were animals behind a glass enclosure at the zoo, with the exception that we can hear and then see the negative comments that proceed these visits, this is nothing less than intimidation.

The District's unreasonable demands on School Administrators has added to the climate of fear, of hopelessness and of stress. Yes, we want you to let teachers teach but that only works if you allow administrators to do their job and to support their educators.

My understanding of these visits is that upper management is making sure that the Principals are staying on top of the people that they lead. My wish, my hope and my expectation for Principals is that they support the educator who stands in front of students all day, in any way needed. Everyone, including all of you good folks up there, are here to support the educators. Teaching happens between a teacher and students, the rest of us are just the supporting cast.

Thank you for listening

If the taxpayer is paying for education, its public education!

The Governor says that "If the taxpayer is paying for education, it's public education" regardless of where the student attends. Common sense would dictate that this new definition would certainly clash with the Florida and US Constitutions. However, when you get to appoint three Judges to the Supreme Court that make Bill O'Reilly look like a left wing socialist, there are no real checks and balances to stand in your way. That is the reality of how they roll in Tallahassee.

So Public Education is now on the chopping block. No surprise here, they have been gunning for us for twenty years. But if we must go down, if thousands of kids are to miss out on the experiences of a well-rounded Public School education, can we at least go down swinging? Let's face it, educators will be OK. After all we are college educated professionals and the free market will certainly pay better. If we fight, it must be out of love for our students and a staunch belief

in an American Institution that has made our country great, a free Public School Educational System. Here are the results of twenty years of attacks on public education in Florida:

- Florida ranks 42nd in total education spending per pupil *and* 51st in public school revenue for every \$1,000 of in-state personal income. In other words, no other state collects less to support public schools than Florida – even though Florida has the 7th largest economy in the country!
- Student performance is among the best in the nation, yet Florida ranks 45th in teacher salaries and 47th in pay for education staff professionals.
- Florida's average teacher salary is over \$10,000 less than the national average. Average salaries are \$8,000 higher in Georgia and \$3,000 higher in Alabama.
- No wonder Florida started this school year with more than 4,000 teacher vacancies statewide and the DOE projects over 10,000 teacher vacancies at the end of this school year.

The 2019 Legislative Session begins in Tallahassee on Tuesday, March 5th. Education stakeholders and community partners are engaging in statewide collective actions to urge the governor and Legislature to **fund our schools, fund our students, *Fund Our Future!*** In every county, local unions are informational pickets, social media blitzes, leafleting and letter writing.

All of Florida's children deserve an outstanding education, from early childhood through college. We are at a crisis point and too many of our children – ***Florida's future*** – are not receiving the educational opportunities promised to them.

Even though costs and demands have risen, our state invests less per student now than before the recession of 2007. At the same time, the Legislature has restricted how much money school districts could raise to support our local schools. This one-two punch leaves too many school districts struggling to meet the need.

- The systematic drain of funds from our public schools to private, unaccountable charter management companies ***must end.***
- The burdens that have driven educators from the profession and created an unprecedented teacher shortage ***must be lifted.***
- The protections stripped from educators that allowed them to advocate for their students without fear of reprisal ***must be restored***

FEA is running an intensive multi-faceted campaign to advocate for the needs of public education called Fund Our Future Florida. Victory in this struggle is not certain. The deck seems stacked against us but I can think of no better cause to spend my effort fighting for than the right of every child to have a free, quality public school education. By that I mean the old definition, not the

definition where businesses take tax payer dollars without any accountability and get to toss kids out of their school if they are too hard to educate.

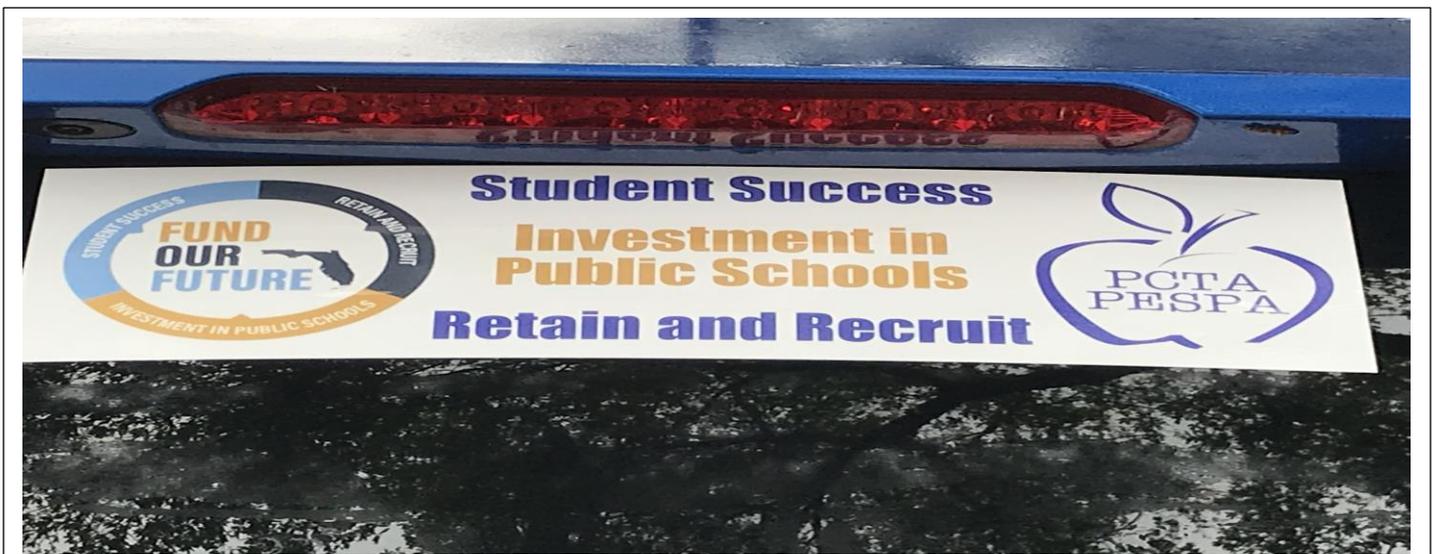
No Union – No Contract

Every day, we get new members and our local gets stronger. Our veterans are retiring as soon as they can, without a second thought to staying, but yet our numbers slowly continue to climb. Settling the contract brought in a stream of new members and I am always thrilled to see a new name cross my desk. However, every so often I see a self-proclaimed unionist that drops their membership claiming to be disenchanted by the raises we negotiate.

While no one brags about the size of the raises negotiated, the reality is that we squeezed over 14 million dollars out of a District that saw only 47 cents per student in additional funding. The real question for those who drop their membership, and those who choose not to be members, is how much do they think they would get if no one is sitting at the bargaining table opposite the District? Anyone who believes that raises, benefits and working conditions will continue to improve because they are good employees, is a fool. If we were to fall below 50% density, your union would be decertified and the contract that we negotiate and enforce, will cease to exist.

So the next time someone tells you they are going to give themselves a raise by dropping the union or a non-members talks of never joining, set them straight to the fact that they are jeopardizing everyone's chances of having contractual rights, continued benefits and regular raises. With all that is going on in public education, there is no middle ground and there is no room for bystanders. You are either for us, or against us!

Let them know that we are the “Defenders of Public Education” and ask them: Where do you stand?



REMEDIATION PLANS

It has come to my attention that teachers are being required to turn in remediation plans. In some cases, these plans are on suggested templates and complaints have come in about deadlines and being asked to make revisions to the plans.

During bargaining, PCTA was able to secure contract language that reduced the time and effort required for detailed lesson plans. We cannot allow any backdoor attempts to undermine the spirit of the contract.

As professional educators, we are all familiar with and already plan for re-teaching students who have not mastered a standard. We are professionals and know what we need to do to help our students. It is unnecessary and insulting to assume we need administration breathing down our necks to ensure we are doing our job. Our plans are for our benefit, and according to the new contract language, plans on a piece of paper are not evidence of good planning and should not be used for evaluation.

I have met with Dr. Grego on this topic and he agrees that some Principals may have become too zealous in their implementation of what should be a resource for teachers. We agree that District provided data about any academic deficiencies our students have is helpful and a resource we welcome. We value discussions within our regularly scheduled Professional Learning Communities to discuss ways of helping students reach proficiency of standards. We are, however, opposed to teachers writing detailed remediation plans and being forced to turn them in.

The meeting with Dr. Grego went well and he has promised to clarify our mutual expectations with his Principals. PCTA is not opposed to remediation as it has always been a part of what teachers do. However, PCTA is an organization of professional educators. As professionals, we appreciate the tools and resources offered by the District, while reserving the autonomy to decide how, when, or if, to use them in the best interest of our students. If this continues to be an issue at your school, please contact me at (mike.gandolfo@floridaea.org).

In Solidarity,

Mike



PCTA-PESPA

Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association
and Pinellas Educational Support Professionals Association



March 5, 2019

FEA: Funneling more public dollars to private schools is not in the best interest of our students or our state

TALLAHASSEE — While Gov. Ron DeSantis continued to call Tuesday for a new and unprecedented level of taxpayer support for private schools, educators throughout the state rallied Monday in support of Florida's students and neighborhood public schools.

"Pouring more public tax dollars into vouchers for unaccountable, often religious, private schools is simply misguided," Florida Education Association President Fedrick Ingram said Tuesday. "Our students need strong neighborhood public schools. If the governor and Legislature want to do what's best for this state, they must [fund our future](#). We need to invest in the neighborhood public schools that educate the majority of Florida's children, invest in the success of our students, and invest in the teachers and staff who work in our schools."

Thousands of teachers and education staff professionals, most wearing "red for ed," came out Monday in counties throughout Florida to demand that state leaders support public education. At rallies and marches and on social media, they were united in delivering one message during the March 4th Day of Action: For the sake of our students and our state, fund our future.

For more than a decade, Florida has failed to prioritize our students' success. We spend less on public education today than before the Great Recession — in inflation-adjusted dollars, more than \$1,000 less per student. We have one of the largest economies in the nation, but we are in the bottom 10 states in per-pupil spending.

Anemic funding affects Florida's students in a myriad of ways, and districts statewide frequently struggle to maintain school facilities and meet safety mandates. Inadequate funding also affects schools' ability to recruit and retain qualified teachers and staff. Florida's public schools had more than 4,000 teaching vacancies at the start of this school year and are projected to have more than 10,000 at the start of the next school year. As with per-student spending, we are near the bottom nationally for educator salaries, ranking 45th in teacher pay and 47th in pay for our education staff professionals.

Instead of improving salaries, Gov. DeSantis proposes a revamped bonus program for teachers.

"A one-time bonus is not the same as a fair salary," Ingram said. "Teachers and education staff need paychecks they can count on. If we want to get and keep more teachers in our classrooms, we need to pay teachers like the professionals they are."

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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 staff professionals, students at our colleges and universities preparing to become teachers and retired education employees.