

October 30, 2020

The Honorable Richard Corcoran  
Commission of Education  
Florida Department of Education  
Turlington Building, Suite 1514  
325 West Gaines Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Commissioner Corcoran:

The issuance of DOE Emergency Order 2020-06 on July 6 enabled schools to successfully open the 2020-2021 school year. Key to this success were the provisions for fiscal and programmatic stability. The order provided a guarantee of “Full Florida Education Finance Program funding from state revenue based on General Appropriations Act (GAA) full-time equivalent (FTE) student membership forecast for 2020 fall semester.” Additionally, the order provided programmatic stability through the recognition of remote or innovative learning models. School districts were able to provide parental choice to families across the state of Florida because of the DOE Emergency Order. The innovative learning models allowed parents the option for their child to receive their instruction from home while maintaining connection with his or her local school.

With the current order expiring at the end of the fall semester, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS) recommends the issuance of a new Emergency Order which extends many of the provisions of the existing order while also addressing some of the educational challenges being experienced by many of our students during the opening of the 2020-2021 school year.

Specifically, FADSS recommends maintaining funding stability for school districts through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) based on the forecasted FTE for the 2020-2021 Fiscal Year. While student enrollment in many districts was initially down significantly, particularly in kindergarten and prekindergarten, through the diligent efforts of district personnel, enrollments have begun to increase with students returning to a brick and mortar setting.

FADSS requests that any funding adjustment based on current enrollment not detrimentally impact districts that have lost significant numbers of students due to the uncertainty caused by COVID-19. Even with lower enrollments, districts have planned for responsible COVID-19 protocols and the return of students to brick and mortar schools throughout the school year. This includes operational areas such as transportation. While bus ridership is down significantly, the number of bus routes continue and increased in many districts due to COVID-19 protocols. Funding stability, including for the Student Transportation Allocation, must be preserved.

As students continue to re-enroll or transfer back to brick and mortar schools, the personnel and programs necessary to serve those students must be in place to accommodate their return both in the second semester and in the 2021-2022 school year. The vast majority of districts have avoided reducing staff in key areas needed for the eventual return of these students, including instructional and transportation personnel. By maintaining a mitigated, forecasted funding level, prorated funding for student growth could be provided to affected districts, while protecting districts experiencing under-enrollment from having to make significant budget and staffing changes at the end of the fiscal year.

Although enrollments have not reached pre-COVID-19 levels in many districts, there are a few districts that have experienced student growth above their currently funded projections. To this end, any district that has an increase in actual FTE over forecasted FTE should receive prorated funding for the additional students through a fund shift shared proportionally by all districts with level or declining enrollment.

By providing the funding stability outlined above, districts will be able to support the academic progress and achievement outcomes for all students, particularly those students who are not achieving due to the pandemic. To this end, FADSS recommends that the innovative learning option be extended through the second semester of the 2020-2021 school year with district assurances and planning for remediation and intervention supports for students. This would preserve parental choice and allow students to receive continuity for both face-to-face instruction and virtual instruction for those families who need to remain remote due to COVID-19 issues.

In order for districts to receive continued financial support based on projected pre-COVID-19 FTE membership, superintendents would need to submit a plan for the second semester to address the assurances below for the Department's review and approval. Approval of the plans would be predicated on each district's ability to deliver the needed resources for robust spring and summer remediation programs to address any learning loss or lack of progress for students, including those students who are returning from options other than the traditional brick and mortar setting.

Each superintendent's plan would outline actions for student academic growth based on student data and the following assurances:

1. In-person remediation intervention plans for students in spring and summer of 2021.
2. Intervention with targeted outreach for students demonstrating COVID slide or the need for support to meet grade-level expectations, including:
  - ◆ Students enrolled, in traditional face-to-face settings;
  - ◆ Students enrolled in district innovative learning options (remote learning); and
  - ◆ Students previously enrolled in a district school who may have chosen a different option for the 2020-2021 school year due to COVID-19 concerns (e.g. Home School, Florida Virtual School, or District Virtual School Franchise).

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3. District outreach plans regarding efforts to keep students and faculty safe and all proactive steps being taken to encourage students to return to in-person learning.

We believe these recommendations will assist in crafting a new Emergency Order that will continue to provide stability for school districts, parental choice, and the best chance for academic success for our students. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations and other concerns with you and your leadership team.

Sincerely,



Michael Grego, Ed.D.  
Superintendent, Pinellas County Schools  
President, Florida Association of District School Superintendents

c: District School Superintendents