



Florida House of Representatives

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 8, 2010

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HOUSE PASSES TRANSFORMATIONAL EDUCATION REFORMS TO REWARD EXCELLENT TEACHERS, RAISE STANDARDS AND RIGHT SIZE THE CLASS SIZE AMENDMENT

TALLAHASSEE, FL – The Florida House today passed a transformational education package that right sizes the Class Size Amendment, raises standards for Florida students to better prepare them for the careers of the future, and rewards Florida teachers for excellence in the classroom. Representative Will Weatherford (R-Wesley Chapel), Representative John Legg (R-Port Richey) and House Majority Leader Adam Hasner (R-Delray Beach) issued the following joint statement on the passage of the education reforms:

“In order to provide a first-rate learning experience for our children, we must have policies that are practical and applicable. Our proposal provides school districts with the flexibility to do just that as it relates to the Class Size Amendment,” said Representative Weatherford. “By right sizing the Class Size Amendment, school districts will have the flexibility to focus on student gains and reward excellent teachers as we endeavor to provide our children with a world-class education taught by world-class teachers.”

“The most important factor that we can control in education is the quality of a teacher at the front of the classroom. By financially rewarding educators for their expertise and excellence, we will be better positioned to attract and retain the best and brightest teachers here in Florida,” said Representative Legg. “Providing financial incentives for teachers who make the decision to serve in high priority schools and critical shortage areas is a quantum leap forward toward continuing to decrease the gap between the highest performing schools and the lowest. I commend my House colleagues for making the right decision to the benefit of our children.”

“If we really mean what we say about transforming Florida’s education system for the challenges of 21st century, then the status quo is unacceptable,” said Representative Hasner. “The education reforms passed today in the Florida House will raise the bar for our teachers and reward those who excel in the classroom. The reforms will create a classroom environment that provides Florida’s school districts with the flexibility they need to free up critical funding to be spent in the classroom at a time when money is scarce,” concluded Hasner.

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Right Sizing the Class-Size Amendment (SJR 2):

The House budget continues funding of the Class Size Reduction with an additional \$2.9 billion, bringing the total estimated cost to implement the amendment including new construction and operational costs to a total of \$18.7 billion.

Since the Amendment passed in 2002, Florida has achieved great success in reducing our class throughout the state:

- In 2002, the average classroom for prek – 3 was 23, today it is 16.
- In 2002, the average classroom for grades 4 – 8 was 24, today it is 19.
- In 2002, the average classroom for grades 9 -12 was 24, today it is 22.

This legislation allows voters to review what progress has been made, but give necessary flexibility to the school districts to avoid unintended consequences of the hard caps.

Such flexibility includes:

- Establishing the school level average number of students per teacher which may not exceed the following limits:
 - PreK - grade 3 at 18 students;
 - Grades 4 – 8 at 22 students; and
 - Grades 9 - 12, at 25 students.
- The maximum number of students who can be assigned to a teacher in any individual classroom shall not exceed the following:
 - PreK – grade 3 at 21 students;
 - Grades 4 – 8 at 27 students; and
 - Grades 9 -12 at 30 students.

Rewarding Teacher Performance (SB 6):

House Republicans advocate a common sense approach that recognizes and rewards excellent teachers while promoting greater accountability within our schools. This legislation is focused on making sure that we encourage our best teachers to stay in the classroom and not feel that to move up they need to become administrators or leave teaching altogether.

Performance Pay

This legislation requires districts to adopt salary schedules that determine salary increases based on performance, while currently salary increases are based on seniority. These performance appraisals will be based on two categories: 50 percent will be based on student learning gains and the remainder on other factors regarding classroom practices including classroom management and knowledge of subject matter.

Educators who teach in lower performing schools, in subject matters such as science, technology, and mathematics, or teach students with special needs, or those who take on additional responsibilities such as mentoring other teachers deserve to be rewarded for doing so.

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The bill:

- Allows education degrees to be considered in setting the salary schedule.
- Prohibits the use of years of service in setting the salary schedule; however, a district may provide raises based upon the “years of student progress” when determining pay.
- Requires districts to award differentiated pay based on high-priority locations, critical teacher shortage areas, or additional academic responsibilities.

Performance Appraisals:

The legislation rewards our great teachers who prepare students for the careers of the future. House Republicans’ focus in education reform is to better our students’ learning.

The bill:

- Requires administrators and non-classroom teachers to be evaluated on the average student learning gain schoolwide.
- Requires at least half of the annual evaluation be based on individual student progress, also called student learning gains (essentially how much a student learns during the school year), beginning in 2014 – 2015 school year. Currently, no data on student learning is required as part of a teacher or administrator evaluation.
- Allows districts to use three consecutive years of data to measure learning gains. Three years of data being used ensures that one year does not affect the
- Establishes more meaningful assessments based on four levels of performance – highly effective, effective, needs improvement and unsatisfactory– which will be defined by the Department of Education in collaboration with teachers and compensation experts.
- Last year, 99.7% of teachers in the state earned a “satisfactory” evaluation, yet 50% of our high school students, 35% of our middle school students and 30% of our elementary students did not make a year’s worth of educational progress. Clearly the current evaluation system is not measuring what really matters: student learning. If our students are not receiving the knowledge they need, then we must consider other ways to help them achieve success.

End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments

By the 2013-2014 school year, school districts must develop or acquire valid and reliable EOCs for grade levels and subjects not assessed on FCAT, AP, IB, AICE or industry certification assessments. District EOCs will be used to measure student learning gains in these subjects and grade levels.

Current law requires local districts to have EOCs in place. In 1999, school districts were directed to develop end-of-course examinations, for every course that meets Florida standards. Despite that statutory requirement, few school districts have put these assessments into place. The legislation allows school districts three years to collaborate and develop these evaluations.

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Performance Fund:

The House has budgeted nearly \$18 billion in total PreK-12 education funding in next year's budget. That investment includes funding for teacher salaries and assessment development, as it did in years prior. SB 6 requires school districts to change their current teacher salary schedule and assessment system to a new, better salary system and assessment methods.

The legislation establishes a Performance Fund equal to five percent of the total FEFP funds received by a district or charter school. Prior to the legislation going into full effect, this funding helps districts improve their current testing system and fill in any existing testing gaps. To the degree districts have been working to comply with current law, the performance fund dollars not needed to complete the districts testing program may be used for other operating expenditures.

Teacher Contracts:

Of the nearly 175,000 teachers who currently have tenure status or hold a professional services contract, none will lose their status because of this legislation.

The legislation sets forth standards in eligibility for new teacher contracts after July 1, 2010 in order to provide the highest quality in education for Florida's students. By shifting non-tenured teachers to a new annual contract system based on student progress, school districts can reward their teachers with raises based on classroom success, as well as remove those teachers who are not providing a meaningful learning opportunity for their students to learn.

The legislation requires a district school board, when making staff reductions, to base decisions on the employee's performance as determined by annual evaluations.

Professional Certification and Preparation

The legislation requires out-of-state certified teachers and temporary certificate holders to demonstrate subject-area mastery. The legislation also requires teachers to be evaluated as effective or highly effective in four of five annual evaluations to earn recertification. It also requires approval of teacher preparation programs be based upon demonstration that program graduates produce student learning gains.

The Majority Office has created a website that includes more information regarding these common sense reforms. The website- RewardingExcellentTeachers.com – hosts many of the documents released by the Majority Office and information from other sources regarding the legislation.

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