

Florida Association of District School Superintendents
State Board of Education
May 11, 2022
Tennessee Williams Theatre
CFK Campus
5901 College Road
Key West, FL 33040

Mrs. Theresa Axford
Superintendent, Monroe County School District

Good morning, Commissioner Oliva and Members of the State Board. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you this morning on behalf of my colleagues and the Florida Association of District School Superintendents. I am especially honored to be here with a former superintendent serving as Commissioner, even if only on an interim basis, and I know I speak for all 67 superintendents when I say that we are ready to work with Commissioner Diaz when he starts in June, as we strive to bring the best education possible to Florida's children. Just let us know how, when, and where we can help.

As we meet here this morning, students, teachers, and staff in our district and across the state are completing the final weeks of another difficult year. However, as our students sit for their final FSA assessments and start thinking about their summer plans, I am amazed at the resiliency they have demonstrated over these last two years with the help of some truly dedicated professionals within our districts. You have all heard about the devastating staffing shortages we have faced, the supply chain issues, inflation, changing rules for federal dollars, contentious school board meetings, and more, and yet every day I see people who have dedicated their lives to serving children show up to work with the resolve to put our children first no matter the obstacles.

Two examples of putting not only students but staff first are happening in Monroe this year. One is the Monroe Vocational and Occupational Experiences (MOVE) program which pairs local businesses and students in internships and the other is Grow Our Own (GO²) which provides scholarships for paraprofessional employees in Monroe County to get their teaching degrees. Each of these programs has a partnership with the College of the Florida Keys as a component. We are also engaged in delivery of instruction using the BEST Standards and are excited to have these new standards being used in the classroom. Teachers are very happy with them. They are easily accessible for parents as well.

We remain thankful of our partnership with the Department of Education and the Legislature. Next year, all district employees will make at least \$15/hour, and the increase to the Teacher Salary Increase Allocation in next year's budget appears to give districts a bit more flexibility. There is additional funding for reading, mental health, and school safety too.

Finally, there are also numerous new laws that have passed the last two years that need to be implemented, including the change to progress monitoring and a more formalized process to establishing media center collections. This is where the districts need the State Board's and Department's assistance. With so many challenges facing districts already, the last thing students need is 67 different interpretations and implementations of new laws that sometimes lack clarity. For many years, the Department provided incredibly helpful technical assistance papers to help districts navigate changes in the law. These helped create a more uniform approach across the state and allowed districts to

collaborate more easily using the same language and terminology in their efforts to carry out the legislative intent. A return to that practice would help districts move forward quicker and more consistently and ease some of the confusion and concerns felt by our teachers and staff members as they prepare for the next school year.