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Florida PTA Legislative Priorities

Talking Points

Adequate Public Education Funding

- A quality education system is the key to driving the economic engine
- There was no funding increase for education in 2009-2010
- Funds for the 2009-10 budget came from federal stimulus dollars
- The 2010-11 budget will again be funded with federal stimulus funds that run out at the end of the year
- The Florida Legislature needs to make provisions to secure education funding through a stable source of revenue beyond 2011
- The United States census ranks Florida as 50th in education spending.
- Education Week in its 2008 "Quality Counts" rankings of U.S. education gave Florida an "F" in K-12 spending.

Assessment and Testing

- A valid assessment does not consist of only a single test score, and that at no time should a single test be considered the sole determinant of a student's academic or work future.
- Support multiple measures which are performance based reflecting the different kinds of knowledge and skills that a student is expected to acquire, eg, written examinations, portfolios of student work, group projects, and open ended test questions.
- Assessments should be used to increase the opportunities for students

Class Size Reduction

Statutorily remove the funding penalty that school districts will face next year if they fail to meet the rigid class-by-class size reduction mandate.

Statutorily provide flexibility for districts to meet the class size reduction mandate.

Florida Tax Structure

- We support comprehensive tax restructuring that will increase tax revenue through tax structure reform, in order to adequately fund the services necessary to meet the educational, health, safety, recreational and other basic needs of Florida's children.
- The legislature has identified over \$23 billion in exemptions that Florida does not collect.
- The legislature should begin their work at tax restructuring by repealing unnecessary exemptions that will realize added revenues to the state, before proposing further cuts that will hurt the children of Florida.
- Closing existing loopholes will generate needed revenue without adding a tax burden to average Floridians
- Florida PTA supports reforming Florida's system of sales and use taxes. Exemptions for products and services should be retained only where they meet an overriding public policy interest.

Use of Hands Free Device and Texting While Driving

- Eighty percent of collisions involve some form of inattention.
- According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 974,000 vehicles on the road at any given daylight moment are being driven by someone who is using a handheld cell phone.
- A study by the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis estimates that 6 percent of crashes are due to cell phones, resulting in 2,600 deaths and 12,000 serious injuries per year

Vouchers and Tax Credits

- Vouchers divert money from public schools, which are accountable to the public to private schools, where there is no public oversight of how the dollars are spent, while doing nothing to improve public education
- There is no strong evidence that voucher programs improve student achievement.

- Vouchers, which divert public dollars to private schools, do nothing to raise academic standards for all children, provide safe learning environments, improve teacher quality or increase parent involvement in public schools
- Proposals to expand the Florida Corporate Scholarship Program and John McKay Scholarship Program for Exceptional Education Students ultimately take revenue away from school districts. These programs have no accountability components and should not be expanded until: more funding is available for all public education programs and accountability measures are required for private programs receiving state funds.
- **State economists estimate that the expansion would cost \$31 million in the coming year and would grow to \$65 million in 2011 and \$107.8 million in 2012.**

Budget

Reject Any Education Proposed Legislation that Has an Additional Cost

- Bills with great sounding titles and impressive goals such as “Teacher Quality”, “Virtual Education,” and more rigorous “High School Graduation Requirements” may make sense in a time of healthy budgets but school districts experienced major funding cuts this year and will experience them again next year. Costly improvements should be held in abeyance until the state can adequately fund them.
- Reject any additional shifts of capital outlay funds which already are at a dangerously low point and are threatening school districts’ ability to meet their existing bonding obligations much less maintain and refurbish their existing facilities.