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Educators and Supporters Rally to Demand Special Legislative Session and an Increase to Florida Public Education Funding and Educator Compensation

On Monday, April 23rd a grassroots group of educators, parents, students and public education supporters will rally outside the North Beach Bandshell in Miami Beach at 4pm in support of Florida Education Association's and multiple Florida superintendents' call for legislators to convene a Special Legislative Session to increase the currently-proposed education budget. This action is part of a larger grassroots educator call for a Statewide Day of Action for 4/23 on the issue, including wearing red, contacting the Governor and state representatives, and engaging in other local actions.

Many educators were upset with last year's meager increase of the base allocation funds- funds provided for operational costs including pay raises- of \$43 per student. But this year's base allocation increase was reduced almost by ten times the amount to only \$0.47 per student. This means that they effectively paid for needed security features in schools by taking from funding used for cost of living adjustment pay increases for teachers and other education staff. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, inflation increased by 2.3% for the Southern region, including Florida. The Miami-Ft. Lauderdale-West Palm Beach greater area had an even higher inflation rate of 3.2% according to the most recent BLS report. This means education funding and teacher pay is being eroded by insufficient funding combined with rising prices.

The National Education Association ranks Florida among the 10 worst states in the country in per pupil spending with a rank of 42nd. WalletHub ranked Florida as the 5th worst state in the country to be a teacher due to stagnant nominal pay (and declining real pay). Currently there's a teacher shortage, as close to half of new teachers leave within the first five years citing difficult working conditions for inadequate pay. According to Politifact, Florida is over \$1,000 per student short from catching up to its peak year of per pupil education funding from 2006-2007 when inflation is taken into account.

A variety of revenue sources have been proposed: from the \$64 million worth of funds that Governor Scott has vetoed, to a tax on the sale of assault rifles. Some educators have suggested proposals for a tax on large businesses that benefit from Florida's natural resources, including larger businesses based in tourism. Others have argued that a state income tax for all income (including investment income) over a certain income level (such as \$200,000 for individuals and \$250,000 for families.) With the 4th largest state economy in the United States- or if Florida were its own nation would be ranked as the 16th largest economy in the world-, opportunities to bring in revenue to fully fund public education are numerous.

Educators, parents, students and public education advocates argue that we are undermining our future and our state by failing to adequately fund public education. They support FEA's and Superintendents' statewide call to convene a Special Session to increase Public Education funding. This per pupil base allocation level should exceed the cost of inflation to catch up and surpass our inflation-adjusted 2007-2008 funding levels and move towards fully-funded public education. Multiple research studies have shown that the teacher is the most significant factor in the success of a student. To invest in quality education in Florida, our elected representatives must dramatically increase funding to provide the educational resources, working conditions and compensation that recruits, retains and rewards the highest-quality educators for our students.

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