THE DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF COLLIER COUNTY
25-26 Draft Florida Legislative Platform
October 8, 2025

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Provide local control and flexibility for constitutionally elected school boards to meet local community needs and expectations through an agreement with the State Board of Education
- Increase in the Base Student Allocation and state categorical programs to cover enrollment increases, workload changes and inflation.
- At least one-year lead time for effective date and implementation of new programs or program changes
- Focus on deregulating mandates that impose unequal expectations on school districts, charter, and private schools that receive taxpayer dollars.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

1. Provide sufficient funding increases in the Base Student Allocation (BSA).
2. Restoring the Local Capital Improvement millage cap to 2.00 Mills for Florida School Districts.
3. Ensuring transparency for Family Empowerment Scholarships by establishing a separate "FES District" within the FEFP.
4. Remove home school students from the accountability calculation for a minimum of two years.
5. Provide the flexibility to Districts to extend the lifespan of a locally voted referendum from four to eight years.
6. Waive audit finding penalties for Out-Of-Field Teachers who are certified and teaching in related subject areas.
7. Differentiate funding for high quality full-day Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) programming that employs teachers with current Florida educator certification and increases the funding per student FTE (Full Time Equivalent). Include VPK teachers employed by the school district in any state teacher incentives and/or bonuses.
8. Maintain current funding levels for the Academic Acceleration Options Supplement within the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) which is essential for supporting student participation in advanced academic opportunities.

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RATIONALE FOR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Provide sufficient funding increases in the BSA (Base Student Allocation)

The Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) Base Student Allocation increased by only $42 per student in the current year compared to

the prior year. This represents a 0.78 percent increase, which is far below the 2.7 percent inflation rate experienced over the same period. As a result, school districts are struggling to balance their budgets while meeting state mandates and maintaining essential services. Operating costs continue to rise significantly. State-mandated employer contributions to the Florida Retirement System (FRS) have increased, along with costs for health insurance, utilities, and other essential services. These factors, combined with inflation, create a substantial and ongoing budgetary strain for districts across the state.
At a minimum, the BSA should increase annually by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to ensure it keeps pace with the actual cost of providing education. Without tying funding adjustments to CPI, the purchasing power of the BSA will continue to erode, forcing districts to make cuts that directly affect students and classrooms.

Restoring the Local Capital Improvement millage cap to 2.00 Mills for Florida School Districts
Florida's public schools are facing unprecedented capital funding challenges. Since 2009, the maximum Local Capital Improvement (LCI) property tax levy has been reduced from 2.00 mills to 1.50 mills. This change was originally intended to provide property tax relief during the Great Recession. In the 16 years since, construction costs, maintenance needs, and technology demands have soared. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Construction Cost Index shows school construction and renovation costs have risen more than 60 percent since 2008, with essential materials such as steel, concrete, HVAC systems, and roofing experiencing double-digit inflation in recent years.
This half-mill reduction has cost Florida's school districts hundreds of millions of dollars annually. The loss has forced districts to delay critical projects, divert funds from other priorities, and rely increasingly on costly borrowing. To bridge the gap, many districts have turned to voter-approved sales surtaxes, bond referendums, or additional millage measures. These campaigns require significant time, funding, and public outreach, often undertaken simply to finance projects that could have been covered if the 2.00 mill capacity were restored.
Restoring the LCI cap to 2.00 mills is not a mandated tax increase. It is a restoration of local control that would allow elected school boards, in partnership with their communities, to determine the appropriate levy based on local needs. The current 1.50 mill cap, unchanged for more than a decade, no longer reflects today's economic realities. By restoring the cap, the Legislature would give districts the flexibility to meet pressing capital needs, maintain safe and modern learning environments, and reduce dependence on costly referendums.

Ensuring transparency for Family Empowerment Scholarships by establishing a separate "FES District" within the FEFP
The Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES) programs have expanded rapidly and now serve hundreds of thousands of students across Florida. Under the current FEFP funding model, voucher payments and student full-time equivalent (FTE) counts are integrated into the same framework that funds public school districts. This means FES voucher students are included in each district's reported FTE totals, which can mislead the public into believing those counts represent only public-school students. This structure reduces transparency, limits accountability, and creates funding inequities by diverting both state and local tax dollars away from public schools.
Establishing a separate "FES district" within the FEFP would make both the program's cost and student counts clear to policymakers and taxpayers. It would also help ensure that public school funding remains stable and predictable, protecting districts from sudden and disruptive revenue losses. Most importantly, it would strengthen public trust by ensuring taxpayer dollars and reported enrollment data are transparent, accurate, and used in a fiscally responsible manner.

Home School Accountability – (Alves please add rationale)
With the advent of the Family Empowerment Scholarship, many families are enrolling their students in home education where students may not be provided with high quality instruction aligned to Florida Standards. Often these students who have experienced interrupted formal education return to the public school district significantly behind their grade level peers. This proposal would provide districts with time and opportunity to "catch up" these students before being penalized for their low performance under the school and district accountability model.

Extend Duration of Referendum to Eight Years
Extending the time frame for voter-approved tax-neutral referendums would enhance stability in financial planning. Referendums demand significant district resources and holding one every four years strains both resources and focus. Moving to an eight-year approval cycle would reduce the frequency of these efforts, allowing the district to allocate resources more effectively.

Certification Flexibility
Due to teacher shortages, overwhelming requirements of endorsements for ELL and reading, in addition to scheduling difficulties, school districts desire flexibility in certification so they can provide a certified teacher for all the courses offered. Currently, if a certified teacher is assigned to a course without holding the proper subject area certification, the teacher is considered out of field. The teacher is then required to pass the subject area exam even if they never teach that course again. A 6-12 certified science teacher should be able to teach for one year in any area of science without penalty to the teacher or the District. Districts face penalties/fees if the out of field issue becomes an audit finding.

Funding for VPK Services
High-quality full-day early childhood programs have proven long-term benefits for student achievement, especially for children from low-income and non-English-speaking families. Collier County Public Schools (CCPS) seeks differentiated funding to expand Pre-K offerings, including full day VPK funding, incentives for certified VPK instructors, and to use capital funds to grow access across the district. With over 1,100 children currently lacking access and only 60% of four-year-olds enrolled in VPK, expanding these programs is essential to improve kindergarten readiness and support CCPS's vision of becoming a PreK–12 district.