
Monday, November 9, 2020

The Honorable Richard Corcoran
Commissioner of Education
Florida Department of Education
Turlington Building, Suite 1514
325 West Gaines Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Commissioner Corcoran:

The Florida Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) appreciates and supports how the Florida Department of Education Emergency Order 2020-06 made possible locally developed innovative learning models for successful, safe opening of schools in all our districts. A uniform opening of schools was not possible due to the varied impact of COVID-19 across our state. The Emergency Order 2020-06 has ensured that parents across Florida have the option of ensuring that their child continues to have the connection with their local school while receiving instruction from home. In addition, schools have become a resource center to assist families in meeting the needs of the whole child, including health, connectivity, and food needs. Florida COVID-19 cases are once again on the rise and impacting our state disproportionately.

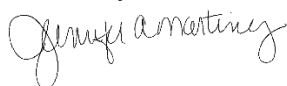
While innovative models and safety protocols continue to be adjusted by superintendents, school boards, and local health officials, Florida PTA asks you to continue the Emergency Order to the spring semester with consideration of the following:

- **Parental choice should not be restricted nor schools financially penalized for parents who wish to continue virtual or hybrid-virtual instruction.**
- **Schools should continue to be held harmless from any budget cuts this school year due to the fluctuation of enrollment numbers and type of instruction.** School budgets are already approved and approaching one third of the year. Any cuts are proportionately greater than just the percentage as teachers and other district personnel are under contract for the year; supplies and instructional materials have been purchased and at least 90-95% of all state and local funds have been committed, encumbered or spent. Any final decision on funding and FTE should wait until at least the fourth FTE count in February to determine whether there is truly a decline in enrollment and to give the state and school districts time to accurately track students who may have not shown up in any education model. If financial considerations are necessary, district superintendents should be able to submit their plans for the rest of this year and document their needs as part of allowable waiver requests.
- **The state should review the number of required assessments and limit them only to those required for graduation or promotion and come into compliance with the minimum requirements of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of the Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) statutes.** Uniform and continuous instruction was disrupted in the later portion of the second semester of the 2019-2020 school year and continued the first nine-weeks of this school year. This fact significantly impairs any closure of a learning gap as measured by state assessments.

- **Assessments should be helpful to meeting the needs of our students and families and regarded appropriately in the current environment.** While state-required assessments are scheduled for 2021, use of those results should hold students, teachers, schools and school districts harmless from any penalty or reclassification. The waivers granted in 2020 should be continued for the rest of the 2020-2021 school year. Any required assessment results should enable districts to determine the level of need and resources -- funding and instructional time - to catch all up to 2019 levels and beyond over the next 1-2 year. The state should give districts flexibility in the use of state, federal and local dollars to provide for increased instructional time--e.g., length of school day or year--so that students can bring any deficient skills or knowledge to state standards and close the achievement gap. There are system wide changes coming to standards, curriculum, and assessments that will be executed in full in the 2022-2023 school year. Many decisions are being made in an ever shifting environment. Policies should encourage innovation, increase statutory timeframes for decisions and flexibility through the 2021-2022 school year, at a minimum.
- **Increase transparency and empower stakeholders through timely reporting.** The state should provide at least quarterly reporting through the EduData Portal on district funding, enrollment, and attendance data. This will enable increased parental understanding of district decisions and financial positions, how they are meeting the needs of our students, and how equity issues exacerbated by this crisis are being addressed.

As part of the Florida educational family, the Florida PTA recommends the above for our schools to be the educational partner for our Florida families and meet the needs of our students to make their potential a reality. We welcome any opportunity to discuss these points with you.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Martinez
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