

SCHOOL BOARD OF POLK COUNTY

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May 11, 2017

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The Honorable Rick Scott
Executive office of the Governor
400 S Monroe St
Tallahassee FL 32301

Dear Governor Scott,

On behalf of the Polk County School Board and Superintendent, please accept this letter as our plea to you for a veto of the education budget passed by the legislature in SB 2500 and of HB 7069, the education conforming bill.

The Polk County School District has supported your continued efforts to increase per pupil spending, including this year's request for a 3 percent increase, as the means to fulfill our mission of providing a high quality education for all of our students. This budget jeopardizes our ability to fulfill that mission by cutting the base student allocation; the only means districts like ours have to ensure we can continue to meet payroll, keep our schools operating and safe, and meet state expectations for student achievement in every school. While we are the 7th largest district in the state, our district cost differential continues to fall. When combined with below state average millage collections, this has left us 64th out of 67 districts in per pupil funding.

The additional \$2.4 million allocated to Polk over last year's funding will easily be eaten up by our growth of 500 students and a requirement to fund a retirement rate increase passed on by the legislature that will cost an additional \$1.4 million. Our total increased costs over last year are \$5.1 million, leaving us \$2.7 million in the red to serve our 101,500 students. This budget puts over 80 positions at risk or forces us to cut important programs and services for students in order to protect those jobs. As the largest employer in Polk County, our economic success is tied to other business sectors in our community and any financial recession will have a mushrooming effect.

There are a multitude of provisions contained within HB 7069 that will magnify the impact of the \$8 cut per student Polk will receive as a result of the budget. The changes to Title I alone put an additional 110 positions at risk of being reduced or eliminated, including academic coaches, curriculum specialists and paraprofessionals supporting our neediest students. Parent engagement resources, family literacy and programs that provide support for school improvement at low performing schools will

be decimated by a dilution of funding and a policy that removes the district's ability to focus taxpayer provided funds where the need is greatest. Funds will be further diluted under this bill when charter management companies become additional Local Education Agencies and begin funding additional administration and duplicative programs for their own schools.

While small bonuses are provided for teachers, the number of teachers statewide exceeds the funding provided and ensures a proration down to a much smaller number. Our Polk County teachers need and deserve raises that will count towards their retirement. The costs of providing for a family continue to rise, and unless their pay does also, teachers find it challenging to participate in a growing economy.

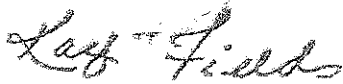
Sharing capital outlay with charters schools further depletes our limited resources to support our traditional school facilities. Our 5-year work plan documents \$904,602,669 in need for maintenance, renovation and new construction of facilities and an additional \$56,417,733 in technology, transportation and building maintenance needs. When all funding sources are combined, we have about \$68.1 million per year to put towards this deficit. Any policy that further depletes available resources impacts our ability to provide students with a safe and steady environment in which to learn. Polk County is continually faced with fending off charter applicants who want to build unnecessary facilities in areas of the county where there is no need for additional student stations. This policy will serve to exacerbate that trend and force Florida's taxpayers to fund multiple buildings aimed at serving the same students, while still on the hook for building facilities in areas of great need.

And finally, HB 7069 purports to offer "up to" \$2000 per student for "up to" 25 of the lowest performing schools in the state, should their application be approved by the State Board as one of the strongest in providing additional supports and wraparound services to the school's student population. Sir, allow us to assure you that if our district could afford to, we'd be doing that right now. To fund only 25 schools knowing there are 115 in need of these additional services is preposterous. Poor districts like Polk will be in no position to compete with richer districts and outside operators' private funding for these spots, thereby compounding the challenges these schools face. This policy is a charade designed to trick us into thinking traditional public schools will have additional funding for their neediest students.

When the facts above are taken as a whole, we are confident you will see the wisdom in vetoing the education portion of the budget or the entire budget, as well as HB 7069. Please send the legislature back to Tallahassee to craft a budget that funds the education and other economic priorities you have long held and outlined for them.

We thank you for your consideration of our respectful request for these vetoes and for your service to the citizens of Florida.

Most sincerely,



Kay Fields
Board Chair



Jacqueline M. Byrd
Superintendent of Schools