

(A response to a parent from our school board chair, Dr. Jane Kuckel)

Thank you for your e-mail. Yes, the benefits of art education to a student's academic success are well-documented. For that reason, we are endeavoring to keep any cuts to a minimum; however, the reality is that reductions will need to be made.

If the projected budget shortfall at the State level for 2010 comes to pass, the Lee County School District will be in crisis and we will face budget reductions that will both devastate our educational program and exacerbate the already difficult economic times in our community. Therefore, we must be prepared for a 6-10% reduction in FEFP revenues, amounting to \$30-54 million in lost FEFP revenue for the 2010 fiscal year. This comes on top of previous budget reductions over the last two years of \$67.7 million. If the aforementioned projected reduction figures hold, the Lee County School District will have no other choice but to:

- Lay-off 300-400 employees when the unemployment rate in Lee County is at a 10% level. I am already receiving calls from frantic employees whose spouses are out of work and who fear losing their own jobs.
- Reduce and/or eliminate sports, electives, music, arts, and many other curriculum offerings K-12.
- Reduce and/or eliminate our career tech programs in a global job market, which only supports high-tech, highly skilled employees.
- Reduce our IB offerings, a program which has continually brought national recognition to our District.
- Reduce and eliminate many of the support services that provide the continual growth for teaching improvement resulting in 87% of schools in Lee County graded with an "A" or "B" designation on state testing.

As you can see, we are trying to be as equitable as possible by applying reductions in a number of areas rather than targeting just one specific area.

Now it is time for our legislators to meet their obligation to their constituents and do what is right for our students, parents and community. The students in Florida deserve what the State Constitution clearly states as their responsibility. Specifically, the legislature has a "paramount duty to provide a high quality education." There are no qualifiers in that language to indicate that their responsibility to do what is best for our students would only apply in good economic times. The reality is that in good economic times, Florida still ranked 46th out of 50 states in per student funding. Doing what is right for our students and communities should be a first priority.

And there is statewide funding available to do just that by:

- Eliminating special interest group sales tax exemptions (sports sky boxes, ostrich feed, charter fishing boats, etc.) There are over 300 of these exemptions dating back to the 1940's, which total over \$35 billion. Some, we would all agree, should be there, such as food, prescription drugs, health services, and utilities. The travesty is that they all stay on the books year after year without ever being reviewed for viability or accountability. If all were eliminated and only the applicable ones voted back, billions of dollars could be put back into the state coffers. It is inexcusable that these special interest groups are being funded on the backs of our students.
- Applying a sales tax to Internet sales which is estimated would generate approximately \$1 billion statewide annually.
- Applying an additional 1 cent sales tax for the next 2-3 years which would generate approximately \$3.8 billion annually.
- Increasing the alcohol and tobacco tax could realize an approximate annual revenue gain of \$25+ million annually.
- Defining the Class Size Constitutional Amendment requirement at the school level, rather than class-by-class. This would save statewide costs of approximately \$850 million per year. Aside from the additional expense of having to hire another teacher when the 19th student enters a first grade classroom thereby creating two classrooms with 9 and 10 students respectively, defining class size requirements on a class-by-class basis would be an administrative nightmare. We would continually be adding and reducing teachers and changing students from one classroom to another. To date, the cost of implementing the Class Size Amendment in Lee County alone totals over \$310 million.
- And, most importantly, finding an on-going stable revenue source for education. Interestingly, we spend approximately \$40,000 per person per year in our jails and only approximately \$7,000 annually per student.

We greatly appreciate the fact that you are contacting our state legislators and would ask that you encourage others to do the same. You are correct that we have limited control over the budget situation, for we can only do so much with the funding we receive from the state.

Again, thank you for taking the time to contact us. We appreciate your comments and your continued support.

Sincerely,

Jane E. Kuckel, PhD

Board Chair