



## Florida School Boards Association

*The voice of education in Florida.*

May 5, 2020

Governor Ron DeSantis:

Florida has taken a strategic and methodical approach in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Florida's School Board members believe that the same approach must be taken when reopening our state's public schools.

We wish to extend our sincere appreciation for the extraordinary efforts of families, school district staff, and communities. The structural changes to traditional public school days and calendars has been swift and considerable. Witnessing the transition to distance learning throughout the state has been inspiring.

Providing a safe environment for every student and staff member must be the starting point as it is the foundation upon which learning opportunities can be maximized. We believe Florida's reopening of schools must begin with the provisions of Article IX, Section 8 of Florida's Constitution calling for a "safe, secure, and high-quality system of free public schools..."

The essential importance of Florida's public school districts to Florida's economy cannot be ignored. According to Florida TaxWatch's April 2020 *Florida's Top Public Employers By County* briefing, in 61 of Florida's 67 counties, public employers are the largest employers. District school boards are the largest employer in 49 counties and one of the 10 largest employers in 66 counties, employing over 337,000 full-time employees across the state.

However, public schools influence our state in ways that extend beyond economic. Public schools capture a space in American society where they influence and help define a community's identity and pride. Ensuring Florida's public school districts are healthy and strong is critical to keeping local communities healthy and strong. The vitality of Florida's public schools is imperative; they are a linchpin of our communities.

As we approach the 2020-2021 school year, Florida School Boards members realize that we will encounter similarities to the final quarter of the 2019-2020 school year, where successes for students and families relied heavily on flexibility. We maintain that as we plan for and respond to changing needs during this upcoming school year, further flexibility must remain a guiding principle in all we do as we interact with our students, families, employees, communities, and state.

We recognize daily operational decisions for Florida's school districts are the role of the Superintendent and his/her professional staff. We recognize parents/guardians are the best decision-makers regarding their child's best learning environment. We recognize our health care professionals are the experts



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when it comes to dealing with COVID-19 and some decisions will need to be made in conjunction with them and other outside agencies and experts.

We also recognize our responsibility as Florida's Constitutionally-elected school board members and the authority found in Article IX, Section 4(b) of the Florida Constitution which reads "the school board shall operate, control and supervise all free public schools within the school district..." Accordingly, Florida's 358 Constitutionally elected school board members take their oath of office very seriously and are laser focused on sound decision-making for their school districts as we ensure student learning occurs within today's and the foreseeable future's unstable and uncertain reality. Florida's school boards are committed to ensuring that all Florida's students have a healthy and supportive environment in which to learn and thrive.

Sincerely,

### **The Florida School Boards Association**

Tim Weisheyer (Osceola), President  
Jane Goodwin (Sarasota), President-Elect  
Chris Patricca (Lee), Vice President  
Cindy Stuart (Hillsborough), Treasurer  
Jerry Taylor, (Suwannee), Immediate Past President

Andrea Messina, Executive Director

CC:

Commissioner Richard Corcoran  
Chris Spencer, Director of Policy, Office of Governor Ron DeSantis  
Brandi Gunder, Policy Coordinator, Education Unit, Office of Governor Ron DeSantis, Office of Policy and Budget

*(FSBA Recommendations for Re-opening Florida's Public Schools on following pages)*