

Budget Talk



April 11, 2008

Slashing the budget

The \$65 billion question is: Where won't the money go?

From schools and social services to the court system, arts and environmental programs, Florida is facing a stark new reality this spring. No money.

Tax collections have plummeted as the state's once red-hot housing market fades into memory. And lawmakers once giddy with cash

from a booming economy instead are struggling to stitch together a \$65 billion state budget that's almost 10 percent less than what they approved last May.

You can't spend money you don't have," said Rep. Joe Pickens, the House's education budget chairman.

Orlando Sentinel, April 7



Will the budget crisis impact Lake Wales Charter Schools?

During the current school year (2007-08), we "lost" about \$740,000 in funding midway through the year. For a small system like ours, losing nearly three-quarters of a million dollars is a huge shortfall to absorb.

This happened for two main reasons:

- 1) The State cut the amount of money it had promised to spend on K-12 education (because of the poor economy).
- 2) We had about 70 fewer students system-wide than we projected for 2007-08. The State provides funding on a per-pupil basis, and we built our budget and hired staff based on the higher projection. (We were not alone. Many school systems in Florida were caught off-guard by stagnant or falling student enrollment.)

For the upcoming 2008-09 school year, we face even more serious budget challenges:

- 1) We are building our budget based on 0% growth.
- 2) State per-pupil funding will be cut back drastically – we may get less money than we received three years ago, yet our expenses (for utilities, insurance, health care, and of course salaries) continue to rise.

We have compiled information from around Florida to put this situation in better perspective. We hope you find this information useful.

News from around the State of Florida

Legislators feel pain on budget cuts

TALLAHASSEE – As House and Senate leaders begin one of their most painful budget negotiations in recent history, one thing is clear: Floridians will see the deepest cuts in government services in decades.

On Thursday (April 10), the House voted 72-41 for a \$65.1 billion budget – \$5 billion less than the current year. The Senate on Wednesday approved a \$65.9 billion budget for the budget year that begins July 1.

Now, lawmakers must use the remaining three weeks of their annual session to negotiate a final budget bill before their May 2 deadline, knowing that it will mean significant reductions for nearly every state program, impacting everything from public schools to prisons to health care programs for the poor...

Lakeland Ledger, April 11

Senate passes \$65.9 Billion budget

A Legislature divided down party lines spent most of the day debating steep budget cuts ... The Senate voted 26-12 earlier in the day to approve a \$65.9 billion spending plan, more than \$3 billion less than the current spending ... The Senate would cut per-student spending in K-12 by \$115, the House, \$86...

Tallahassee Democrat, April 10

Lottery projection indicates schools will suffer

TALLAHASSEE – Just when lawmakers thought the state education budget cutbacks couldn't get worse, they did.

Blame it on the dip in people who buy scratch-off lottery tickets. Lottery income, which usually accounts for about 5 percent of the state's education budget, won't be as much as lawmakers had expected this year when they first crafted the school spending plan.

Rep. Joe Pickens, the House education budget chief, is bracing for about a \$40 million to \$100 million drop in funds, he said Tuesday (April 8).

The potential shortfall is grim news to lawmakers already reeling from record budget cutbacks in almost every area of state spending....

Tampa Tribune, April 9

South Florida school districts fear cuts

Even as South Florida's school districts await final word on how much the state Legislature will shrink their budgets for the coming fiscal year, administrators say they are already planning for the situation to get worse a few months down the road.

The Legislature is working on the 2008-09 budget, but at a School Board workshop Tuesday (April 8), Broward Superintendent Jim Notter

said he is bracing for even less to work with than whatever lawmakers decide this spring.

"The Senate has been reluctant to use any rainy day funds," Notter said. "If they are unwilling to use them for the 2008-09 year, that tells me something that's not good: Their economists are giving them information that we're going to continue in an economic downturn."

He said he doesn't yet know what he would trim if the state mandates additional cuts later, but will bring a plan to the School Board in the coming months.

Miami-Dade expects to have \$54 million to \$64 million less than last year's budget, while Broward's could decrease by between \$47.7 million and \$54.5 million....

Miami Herald, April 9

Education: Less spending per student – first reduction in 37 years

Education spending – from kindergarten to graduate programs – consumes about half of the state's "general revenue," money from sales tax and other state levies that can be spent at the Legislature's discretion.

K-12: The proposed House cut is \$86 per student, or 1.2 percent per child. The Senate cut is \$116 per student or 1.6 percent. An average \$7,126 is spent to educate each of Florida's 2.6 million school children.

[Note: On average, charter schools in Florida receive approximately 11% less in per-student funding than district public schools.]

It's the first year-to-year reduction in school spending in 37 years.

The result: Orange County schools are cutting 6 percent in staff, materials and other costs, and notifying as many as 1,000 teachers they may not be rehired. Seminole County is considering eliminating 181 teaching jobs and making other cuts. Volusia County loses almost three times the average cut because of its declining enrollment. Growing Osceola and Lake counties change little, but funding won't keep up with growth...

Orlando Sentinel, April 7

Osceola school programs could see even deeper cuts

The Osceola County school district is seriously tightening its financial belt, officials said recently.

Next year, the district is poised to cut about \$11 million – on top of about \$21 million already trimmed this year from the district's \$409 million operating budget ... Among changes expected next year:

- Math and science coaches will no longer exist. They will be asked to take other teaching positions elsewhere in the district...
- Reductions of 2.5 percent to school budgets, or a total of \$5.3 million. Principals will be charged with deciding how best to do that.
- Administrative reductions of \$1 million, or about 3 percent of the budget.
- Visions and Project Future, two alternative



programs for at-risk students, will end.

- Summer-school offerings will be reduced and most summer school will be gone next year, with students who need remedial help expected to receive it during the regular year.

- Field trips funded by the school district will be eliminated...

Orlando Sentinel, April 6

Duval arts program facing cuts

GAINESVILLE – Two supplemental teaching positions are facing the ax at Duval Elementary Fine Arts Academy, and parents fear this will mean the end of the school's successful fine arts program.

Jackie Johnson, public information officer for Alachua County Public Schools, said due to budget cuts, two of four supplemental units (teaching positions) at Duval have been cut for the 2008-2009 school year...

...the cuts are preliminary projections as the district continues to review with school principals each school individually. She said the district doesn't tell the school which positions to cut. That is decided by the school's principal...

Gainesville Sun, April 4

School district braces for cuts

The Palm Beach County School District will have to ax between \$25 million to \$30 million next school year under proposals released Wednesday (April 2) by the Florida House and Senate.

It was no surprise for the district, which had expected next year's \$1.5 billion operating budget to be the worst it's seen in more than a decade, but it comes at a time when the district has already made cuts to its budget and faces rising costs for utilities, fuel and health insurance.

"We have a challenge," Superintendent Art Johnson said at a school board discussion on the budget ... Johnson ... previously has indicated that raises for the district's 12,000 teachers next year will be small, if anything...

Palm Beach Post, April 3

Teachers may bear brunt of cutbacks

PENSACOLA – Fewer teachers and longer work days for the ones who remain.

More school consolidations and closures.

Cutting the school day from seven to six periods a day, thus eliminating many extracurricular activities.

Numerous options, including these, are under consideration as Escambia School District officials grapple with an anticipated budget shortfall of up to \$10 million.



"Everything is on the table," district spokesman Ronnie Arnold said.

Discussions are under way between members of the Escambia Education Association and senior district staff about the possibility of requiring high school teachers to increase the number of classes they teach each day from five to six.

If that occurs, the district would lose 61 teaching positions and save about \$3 million a year, Arnold said...

...Last year, Woodham High School was closed ... Three middle schools were also closed, and two more moved as part of a school closure and consolidation plan by Superintendent Jim Paul to save the Escambia School District \$2.5 million a year...

...Another possibility, one that many are reluctant to consider, is eliminating the seventh period and all high school teacher planning periods ... Such a move would save the district more than \$5 million a year, said Barbara Linker, assistant superintendent for finance and business services.

"It would be a death blow to band and other student programs," she said...

Pensacola News Journal, April 2

Creative cutting: schools getting lots of advice

All eyes will be on our public schools to break out of what some budget analysts describe as an inertia-ridden system of governance. The K-12s may suffer the most from the current economic crisis in Florida.

In Leon County, officials are looking at anywhere from \$8 million to \$12 million in budget cuts ...

...How to respond to this grim-and-grimmer scenario will take resourceful but also realistic thinking indeed.

In Leon County, leaders are looking at a list of some 40 vulnerable positions plus an array of programs they're involved with: reading coaches, instructional aides, assistant principals and elementary art, music and physical education teachers.

All such cuts run counter to the emphasis on more physical education, greater reading skills and a well-rounded education...

Tallahassee Democrat, April 2

Budget crisis prompts Volusia's OK to close 7 elementary schools

The Volusia County School board will close seven schools in three years in an attempt to avert a budget crisis.

The five board members overwhelmingly voted to close the schools, saying they had no choice because they were "held hostage" by a lack of state funding...

... "I would love for there to be an alternative," Judy Conte, chairwoman of the School Board, said in an interview before the meeting. "But they [state officials] came sucking money right out of our budget."

... By closing the schools,





board members hope to save \$4.6 million in an effort to stave off a cash crunch caused by a drop in state funding, partly because of declining enrollment, and by an anticipated loss of revenue from the Amendment 1 property-tax measure....

Orlando Sentinel, April 1, 2008

Budget crunch forces school district cuts

SEBRING – Faced with a current budget shortfall and a looming tight budget year, the school district might resort to layoffs, Superintendent Wally Cox said.

The school district is short \$2.1 million this fiscal year due to an unexpected drop in student population, and lower revenue is expected from state sales taxes.

The district had estimated an increase of about 200 students this school year. Instead, there was a decline of about 17. Part of the district's funding from the state is based on the student count...

Highlands Today, February 28

Community Voices

On a daily basis, we are reminded of the budget crisis in Tallahassee, of our declining population growth and our declining revenues and the resulting dramatic budget reductions. Education, as usual, will be the hardest hit, and things are just starting to get ugly.

Parents in Volusia County, after working for weeks, gathering petitions and crafting alternative proposals, learned Monday that the seven schools they were trying to save from closing would be closed anyway.

In Seminole County, more than 180 teachers will lose their jobs, and Orange County must come up with a way to run its massive school district on a budget that will be more than \$28 million less than last year.

Then we must all be reminded that the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) will not be curtailed as a result of our budgetary crisis. Schools will still be expected to make federally mandated Adequate Yearly Progress toward the idealistic goals of NCLB and will continue to be expected to find ways to guarantee children with disabilities a free and appropriate public education in a least restrictive environment. Further, there is no sign the class-size reduction amendment added to the Florida Constitution in 2002 will be repealed any time soon.

The teachers of our children must accomplish these monumental tasks without the help of teacher assistants because they, too, are being laid off.

One might very well ask exactly how Florida's education system can survive under such diametrically opposed conditions. One might also ask whether there is any one of us who wants any less of an education for our children. Yet the majority of the voting population of this state voted to approve Amendment 1, for further cuts in property taxes. By putting an extra \$20 a month in our pockets, we guaranteed less revenue for a state budget already in deep trouble.

The Volusia County School Board, in responding to angry parents about the planned school closings, told it like it is: "We did not tell you how to vote (on Amendment 1)." That says it all.

As an educator, I will tell you that I will continue to do all I can to ensure the students I teach receive a quality education. I will also tell you that with each budget cut the probability of any teacher being successful in that endeavor becomes less. If we want to ensure a quality education for our children, we Floridians must find a way to change the course of these events.

Perhaps it is time for responsible decisions in Tallahassee, decisions none of us is going to be very happy with, but decisions that are fiscally sound, that will ensure a source of income to fund the increasing demands of education. I say it is time for Floridians to step up and pay for what we want most, quality education for our children. Where else can increased funding come from if it does not come from us, the residents of this state?

We must let our government know we stand ready to do whatever is necessary to find our way out of our self-indulged budgetary crisis. Indeed, it is time.

'By putting an extra \$20 a month in our pockets [voting for Amendment 1], we guaranteed less revenue for a state budget already in deep trouble.'