

5 THINGS THAT MUST CHANGE TO IMPROVE PUBLIC EDUCATION

A message from the 140,000 teachers and education staff professionals of the Florida Education Association.

1 Ensure adequate funding

Florida ranks 38th in the nation in average teacher salary.

You can't talk about attracting and retaining high-quality teachers and education staff professionals without talking about funding.

If we're serious about every child's future, let's get serious about ensuring every child has a well prepared teacher. It begins with adequate funding so school employees are fairly compensated. This also means resourcing all schools so students have learning opportunities that begin by age 4, safe schools, small class size and modern tools.

We must invest in well-maintained public schools. Adequate funding is our best bet for setting every student in Florida on a path to a great future.

2 Let teachers teach

When given the resources and opportunity educators can help every child unlock their full potential.

As public school employees, we are deeply committed to the success of every student. Students are at the center of EVERYTHING we do.

Elected leaders need to recognize and trust that the professionals who work with our students every day know what works best when it comes to their classrooms, student learning and assessment.

The Legislature must do everything it can to help ensure that each educator has

the resources, mentoring and support every professional needs. Teachers should have the authority to select the best methods and pacing to meet their students' needs.

3 Reduce time spent on testing

Out-of-control testing in Florida cheats our students of valuable instruction time. Because of your work the tide is turning.

Good education inspires students' natural curiosity and builds their desire to learn — which is what every parent wants for their child.

Unfortunately, Florida's accountability system has gone horribly wrong and the burdensome testing regime is hurting our students. Teachers know that fostering creativity and teaching critical thinking skills are far more important than any test prep session or practice test.

Instead of high-stakes testing we should depend on useful everyday assessment of student classwork. This allows teachers to better meet the needs of their students by providing immediate feedback and making real-time adjustment to instructional tactics.

4 Restore class size limits

The Legislature continues to skirt the will of Florida's voters who said they want smaller class sizes.

Our students deserve class sizes that are small enough to allow one-on-one attention.

The Legislature has chipped away at the class size amendment — in spite of overwhelming parent support — until it is almost meaningless.

We need to get back to the true intent of the class size amendment. Research shows that smaller classes improve learning, strengthen discipline, reduce dropout rates and raise students' grade-point averages.

Implementation of class-size reduction has been the surest way to target needed dollars directly at the classroom level. These dollars go directly to funding students, classroom space, teachers and teacher salaries — not bureaucracies.

Implementing class-size reduction is an affordable and effective use of our school money.

5 Assure a living wage for education staff professionals

Education staff professionals make the difference in our schools — they deserve to be paid a living wage.

No school can function without dedicated education staff professionals.

Our students depend on education staff professionals to get them to and from school safely, provide them with healthy meals, keep their schools clean and safe, mend hurt knees and perform numerous other vital jobs throughout our public schools.

We must pay our hard-working employees a living wage.