

SUPERINTENDENT MARK RAINS SELECTED FOR STATE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

Dixie County School Superintendent Mark Rains was recently selected by the Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS), along with nine other school superintendents from throughout the state to serve on a committee to address legislative issues concerning education. The superintendents selected to serve on this committee are: Ron Blocker (Orange County), Bill Husfelt (Bay County), Julie Janssen (Pinellas County), Gail McKinzie (Polk County), Ed Pratt-Dannals (Duval County), Mark Rains (Dixie County), Rick Shirley (Sumter County), Peg Smith (Volusia County), Lori White (Sarasota County), Jim Yancey (Marion County).



Superintendent Mark Rains

The committee will review the Legislative Platform, which will currently focus on budget issues. One of the issues that will be discussed is the additional .25 discretionary “Super Majority” millage provision.

Florida’s school superintendents are the chief executive officers and education leaders in the 67 school districts. Today’s school superintendents must possess the vision and leadership to create schools that inspire students to become successful, caring, contributing members of society. School superintendents must successfully navigate their school districts through severe, unprecedented economic times.

Florida’s Economy

The United States economy has officially been in a recession since December 2007, and now is the longest recession on record, which is projected to last until the spring of 2010. Florida’s economic growth continues its decline. State Gross Domestic Product ranks Florida 48th in the nation in real growth. Florida was 2nd in 2005. Population growth is the state’s primary engine of economic growth, but such growth has slowed and is forecast to remain relatively flat between 2008 and 2012. Student growth or enrollment is also in decline – down almost 10,000 students from last year and only projected to grow by almost 3,000 students for the 2010-2011 Fiscal Year. Employment has worsened with a projected unemployment rate of 11% for spring 2010. In August 2009, 39 of 67 counties had double-digit unemployment rates. Recovery in the Florida housing market is not anticipated to begin until the latter half of the 2010-11 Fiscal Year.

During a time of severe economic conditions, the Legislature must build a state budget for the 2010-2011 Fiscal Year for citizens whose needs continue to grow. Unfortunately, to fund critical and high priority needs (Medicaid, education, prisons), the Legislature will face a general revenue forecasted shortfall of \$2.65 billion. Other revenue sources are also in decline. The Educational Enhancement and Tobacco Settlement Trust funds will have little or no long-term growth. The Principal State School Trust Fund has a projected deficit in the current year that must be resolved.

Impact on Education Funding

Florida's education spending has been significantly reduced by over \$430 per student as compared to the initial General Appropriations Act passed in May 2007. General revenue shortfalls and the corresponding funding reductions have eroded educational opportunities for students. Total funding for public education has been reduced by almost \$1.4 billion. The reductions are somewhat softened in that school districts are funded with a combination of state general revenue funds and local property taxes. Federal stimulus funds in excess of \$1 billion greatly assisted school districts in maintaining educational programs for students. However, these funds will not be available beyond the next fiscal year.

The Challenge

Florida's constitution, supported by its citizens, demands a high quality education system. Florida's future vision must bring this into reality. A rigorous and adequately funded K-12 education system is the key to renewed and sustained economic development by an engaged citizenship. This transformation must incorporate rigorous academic and workforce development options, utilize up-to-date technology, expand virtual education opportunities and move students toward mastery of content rather than seat time. To realize this vision, legislative and education leaders must develop and fund a comprehensive plan to bring our education system into the 21st Century rather than a piecemeal approach that is modified every year and underfunded. FADSS Legislative Recommendations will begin to bring this vision in to focus.