

# The Delray Democrat

## Republican Pandering Hurts Students, Parents, Taxpayers, and Education<sup>1</sup>

*Jeffrey Kash*

It's time to put Republicans on the defensive about their "Putting Parents First Adjustment". This "adjustment" is just another bit of pandering to the Republican "base." Republicans claim is not punishment and won't cut funding for student activities. It certainly is punishment and certainly will hurt students, their parents, and other taxpayers when staff are cut, educational resources are cut and local real estate taxes are increased.

The "adjustment" proposed by state representative Randy Fine and supported by the Governor will take \$200 million from the twelve public school districts that enforced a student mask policy during the pandemic. Fine says that money should be given as a reward to the districts that didn't enforce masks. He claims that the \$200 million bonus for the 55 districts would come from the salaries of administrative workers earning more than \$100,000 per year from the 12 districts.

We need to let voters, Democrat and Republican, know that Representative Fine and the Governor are playing politics with education and are playing to the detriment of schools, students and parents. The consequences of the "adjustment" will be to jeopardize student education and put an inordinate burden on parents and other taxpayers.

Setting aside the Republicans' continued lack of regard for the safety of teachers and students and their families during the pandemic, the proposed "adjustment" is punishment for standing up to the despots that run our state. It punishes districts for following CDC guidance and acting on a local level in counties that, at the time, had the highest COVID positivity rates to protect teachers, students, and their families.

Contrary to Representative Fine's claims, the "adjustment" will hurt students and will negatively impact parents and not just those that vote Democrat. Republican parents will feel the pain as well. Logic dictates that Palm Beach County students will be hurt if you take \$28 million from Palm Beach County Schools.

County School Boards contract with their administrators. Those contractual obligations must be met or the administrators could sue for breach. For example, the School Board of Palm Beach County entered a written agreement with Michael Burke. That contract provides for a base salary as well as other compensation and has a formula for calculating raises. The school board will have to find the money to meet their contractual obligations or face potential lawsuits as well as the prospect of losing administrators and being unable to replace them.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Delray Democrat*, March 2022, page 1.

If the “adjustment” becomes law, school boards will have some options in order to meet their contractual obligations:

They can try to run a school district without administrators while they pay lawyers to defend lawsuits. The consequence would be chaos in management of a district with 197,000 students and 22,426 employees, including more than 13,000 teachers.

They can lay off noncontract or non-administrative employees. Teachers, coaches, counselors, janitors, security guards, bus drivers, and nurses could all be at risk in order to make up for the “adjustment.” The likely result of what Republicans claim is “not punishing” Palm Beach County will be exacerbated staff shortages. Staff shortages directly impact students when they can’t get to school and when they can’t receive all of the services they need when they are at school. When schools can’t provide for the students, their parents will feel the impact.

Other budgetary items like textbooks, computers, and other educational technology (like the 24-hour a day virtual tutoring) could be cut to make up the difference. Jeopardizing the tools of education hurts students.

If schools have to cut educational tools, there is no reason to think that school sports would be immune. It is not unreasonable that the football teams’ budgets could be cut. Student activities would be at risk.

School boards may be unwilling to cut spending to make up for the funds lost to the “adjustment”. Without spending cuts, the remaining option would be raising revenue. Raising revenue means raising taxes. Local revenue for school support is derived almost entirely from property taxes levied by Florida’s 67 counties (with a complex formula involving the Department of Education and the Department of Revenue). However, school boards may set discretionary tax levies for things like school buses, equipment, computers and software. The law allows revenue to be raised from property taxes and allows discretionary tax levies. If the shortfall caused by the “adjustment” cannot be remedied by cutting spending, it could result in higher local property taxes.

Article IX, section 1 of the Florida Constitution establishes the State of Florida’s commitment to funding kindergarten through grade 12 education, as follows: “The education of children is a fundamental value of the people of the State of Florida. It is, therefore, a paramount duty of the state to make adequate provision for the education of all children residing within its borders. Adequate provision shall be made by law for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure and high-quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education...” (Florida Department of Education 2021-2022 Funding For Florida School Districts publication) (emphasis added).

It is the state’s job to provide for public education. The above consequences fall squarely on the Governor’s shoulders based on his misguided and punitive policies. The voters should hear about it in no uncertain terms.