



THE SCHOOL BOARD OF BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

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May 26, 2017

Ask the Governor to Veto HB7069: The Legislature's Education Bill (HB 7069) Needs a Rewrite

If a civics class student submitted a paper on the recent Florida legislative session, I would send it back for a rewrite. In my last Sun-Sentinel Op-Ed, I explained my concerns regarding cuts in educational funding, especially to the Base Student Allocation, which will create a budget deficit for Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) of nearly \$7 million. We thought the budget cuts couldn't get any worse.

To our surprise, it did. A separate 274-page education bill (HB 7069) was introduced and passed during the final hours of the legislative session. HB 7069 was passed with no real opportunity for vetting or public input, and no changes were allowed. Beyond the question regarding process, our greatest concern is how this further erodes our District finances and how this erosion could have devastating long-term consequences.

Simply put, this is yet another example of an education bill that does not prioritize public education. The legislature may have had good intentions in its initial proposal, such as a reduction in statewide assessments, but the bad provisions far outweigh the good, making the bill unacceptable.

One example of its negative impact is a provision that would severely limit our District's ability to maintain and repair our 236 traditional schools, which have over \$2 billion in critical maintenance and repair needs. HB 7069 would require BCPS to divert nearly \$100 million in capital funding (local taxpayer dollars) over the next five years to charter schools, most of which are managed by private, for-profit companies. Furthermore, this capital funding would be distributed to every charter school regardless of actual need. This is not the most efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

There are also some glaring inconsistencies in requirements for traditional and charter schools in HB 7069. The recess requirement is a glaring example of the lack of parity. The bill requires traditional K-5 schools to offer 20 minutes of daily recess, while charter schools are not required to offer any time for recess.

The bill also calls for providing additional funding for wrap-around-services for charter schools operating in low-performing areas. However, traditional neighborhood schools operating in the same areas will have to compete for a grant that is limited to only 25 schools statewide for these same wrap-around services.

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These are just some examples of the disparate treatment of traditional public schools versus charter schools under HB 7069. To be clear, we believe students attending any public school, traditional or charter, should have access to a high-quality education. However, the legislature should level the playing field beginning with legislation that treats all public schools fairly.

BCPS proudly serves more than 270,000 students. The School Board and I, along with our dedicated teachers, administrators and staff, are doing everything in our power to ensure students receive a high-quality education in safe, well-maintained learning environments.

I believe HB 7069 greatly undercuts our ability to do this in an effective manner by redirecting resources from traditional public schools to charter schools. Hence, pitting traditional schools against charters, rather than properly funding all public schools.

It's time to make a real investment in public education that benefits our students and honors our teachers. Please join us in asking Governor Rick Scott to veto HB 7069 and the education portion of the budget.

It's time for a rewrite of the recent legislative session. Our students remain our highest priority – and they deserve better.

You can help by using our District's online advocacy tool, available now at browardschools.com/leaor.



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