

# ***BTU*** *Broward Teachers Union*

A Union of Education, Technical Support, Charter School and Education Support Professionals

## **2012 Legislative Platform**

The Broward Teachers Union (BTU) is committed to working with all stakeholders, including but not limited to policymakers, parents, educators, labor unions, for-profit and non-profit organizations, to raise awareness about the resources needed to ensure student achievement and accountability for educators, parents, students and the community-at-large.

### **Education Funding**

- The State of Florida must adequately fund education and cease from further budget cuts (in 2011 the Florida Legislature cut public education funding by \$1.35 billion dollars)
- The Florida Constitution states that it is a “paramount” duty of the State to make adequate provision for the education of all children
- The Legislature must examine and implement creative, innovative, and sustainable revenue generating ideas
- Florida is missing out on upwards of \$1 billion per year in sales tax on online purchases; this is not a tax on the internet – it is a tax on certain goods and services that is being avoided because the shopping is done remotely
- This is an already-existing tax which is not being enforced on remote sales transactions and is blatantly unfair to local merchants who could be fined or charge criminally for not charging sales tax in their stores
- In addition, the Legislature must review and repeal any unnecessary tax exemptions such as: spa services, luxury sky boxes, high priced yachts, tattoo services just to name a few
- Repealing tax exemptions which are found to not be in the public’s interest could generate much-needed revenue for public education
- Further, the Legislature should explore expanded gambling in the State of Florida which would not only bring in revenue but would attract tourism and create much-needed jobs
- Local control of funding decisions should be expanded and maximum flexibility should be given to districts regarding the use of categorical funds

- Districts should be provided with a menu of state mandated programs and given the discretion to decide which to implement based on each district's individual needs
- Any pay for performance evaluation system for teachers should be adequately and sustainably funded and should not divert or supplant funds from the basic salary schedule

### **Florida Retirement System (FRS)**

- The changes made to the Florida Retirement System (FRS) during the 2011 legislative session are already having a devastating impact on Florida's economy
- 655,000 public employees salaries have been reduced by 3% which leads to less consumer spending and worsens Florida's economic crisis
- FRS is one of the most fiscally sound and stable pension systems in the country
- Instead of taxing public employees, the State should identify reliable and sustainable funding sources like the ones listed above in education funding section
- The Legislature must avoid any further changes to the FRS which would result in less disposable income for public employees in order to see Florida economically thrive
- Further, if the Legislature implements revenue generating ideas like the ones mentioned above, it should be able to repeal this 3% tax on public employees

### **Teacher Merit Pay Bill**

- Even the strongest proponents of SB 736 agree that a "glitch" bill amending problematic provisions of SB 736 will most likely appear during the 2012 session
- The Legislature should remain open and flexible in addressing problems during the first years of implementation by working collaboratively with educators, parents, and others in order to amend the bill where necessary
- Funding is a huge concern --- there was no money allocated for rewarding high performing teachers
- Currently the only funds available to implement SB 736 are in "Race to the Top" which is a four-year grant; further, the monies provided by "Race to the Top" are not sufficient to adequately reward high performing teachers in a meaningful way
- The intent and spirit of "Race to the Top" is to reward high performing teachers; however, SB 736 focuses on eliminating due process instead of rewarding teachers

- The evaluation formula is still a work in progress and must be monitored and reviewed continuously in order to avoid unfair and inaccurate measurements
- The Legislature should rethink and reevaluate placing so much emphasis on one high stakes test (FCAT) when measuring students and teacher performance
- There is no evidence what-so-ever that performance pay systems increase student achievement

### **Class Size Reduction**

- The 2011 Legislature reduced the number of “core” classes for purposes of meeting class size reduction requirements from 849 to 288
- Critical courses such as foreign language and honors/advanced courses will not be considered “core”
- This will lead to bigger classes in many more courses and will hurt students
- The Legislature should refrain from making further changes to the class size reduction amendment and implement it as the voters passed it in 2002

### **Union Dues Deduction Bill**

- Any attempts by the Legislature to curtail unions’ political activities is anti-American and potentially unconstitutional
- Many organizations which are involved in political activities utilize automatic payroll deduction (i.e. health care companies)
- Unions already keep separate accounts and require specific authorization to utilize any portion of dues for political purposes
- The Legislature should not unfairly and unconstitutionally pick one group over another in an attempt to silence differing political views (this goes against the first and fourteenth amendment of the US Constitution)

### **Charter Schools, Virtual Education and Vouchers**

- Achieving adequate funding of public schools should precede any expansion of voucher or tax credit systems that fund private schools
- All students, teachers, and administrators should be subjected to uniform and consistent performance measurements and rigors, including students who attend and educators who work at charter schools, virtual schools, and any other school funded by public monies through vouchers or other systems

- Any attempt to utilize public monies to fund religious institutions and/or schools should be avoided due to constitutionality issues (a Florida appeals court found a voucher program by former Governor Bush unconstitutional)

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