January 26, 2009

The Honorable Anthony C. "Tony" Hill, Sr.
The Honorable James E. "Jim" King, Jr.
The Honorable Pat Patterson
The Honorable William Proctor

As Superintendent of Flagler County Public Schools, I would first like to take the opportunity to thank each of you for the devotion you give our students and the State of Florida each day. In these difficult times we find ourselves, it will take dedicated leadership to pull the State of Florida through this crisis. We have faith in your making difficult decisions for the betterment of Florida and to give hope to the children of our State. During the current 2008-2009 fiscal year budget and next year's (2009-2010) state fiscal budget, shortfalls in state general revenue collections and reductions in local property tax values will pose a double crisis for public school finance. I am very concerned that the deep budget cut to education funding will impact our local school district with devastating results. I request that in the midst of this crisis you support the following in order to mitigate a small portion of the impact on students!

1. Freeze the implementation of Class Size Reduction at the current levels for 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 with all penalties for non-compliance waived;
2. Allow total district flexibility with the current state mandated allocations including reading, SAC funds, Teachers Lead and School Recognition, Textbook allocation, Supplemental Academic Instruction;
3. Repeal sales tax exemptions on non-essential items;
4. Find additional sources of revenue in the existing budget. While education was being cut $332 million, we found enough money to fund new prisons ($309 million), incentives to lure businesses to Florida ($95 million), Tax Watch ($109 million), and Corporate Vouchers ($30 million);
5. Generate additional revenue. $20 billion in tax cuts is no longer acceptable and has hurt our State. It takes courage to look at areas such as cigarette taxes, liquor taxes, or an Internet sales tax.

Investing in education will improve the economy in Florida. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that simply cutting the drop-out rate in half would generate $45 billion in additional tax revenue…..per year! On the flip side, the drain on the system in the area of prisons, social programs and lost tax revenue is enormous.

All of the Flagler County Public Schools recommendations together, if adopted, will only allow our district to absorb a small percentage of the currently projected cuts. Massive changes including layoffs, across the board pay cuts, and program eliminations will result if the only response at the state level to declining revenue projections is to cut the state budget. I request your support for passing these solutions.

I understand that the current economy requires reductions in the state budget, but education should be protected at all costs. Our children are the future of this country and their education is the cornerstone of so many aspects of that future. Decisions that have such a negative impact on our education system not only affect the children, but also have consequences for the entire community. We need our children to receive the highest quality of education possible as they prepare to enter the work force and become the next generation on which America will become dependent.

We believe we are fulfilling the mission of Article IX. Section 1. Public Education of the State Constitution: "The education of the 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 provisions for the education of all children within its borders. Adequate provision shall be made by law for a efficient, safe, secure, and high quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education." Flagler County Public Schools is rated an "A" District by the Florida Department of Education and all traditional schools in the Flagler system are also rated "A." Flagler County Public Schools has also received District Accreditation from the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges as well as being approved as an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma granting school district by the International Baccalaureate Organization based in Geneva, Switzerland. We, however,

are not content to stop here. We still are not reaching 100% student achievement and that is our ultimate goal. We hold ourselves to high standards that have surpassed those of Florida and we need your help and assistance to achieve our lofty goal.

I urge you to consider carefully these concerns in all future decisions concerning the state education budget. It is vital that adequate resources are available to ensure that our education system remains in a position to thrive and continue with the excellent high standards we currently enjoy here in Flagler County. Our State must decide what the priorities are and then fund them. Our children are counting on us!

Finally, I would like to thank all our Flagler Legislators for being here tonight. We do not want to have an adversarial relationship with our State leaders. We have elected you and we respect the work you are doing. We appreciate your being here tonight and allowing us to share our ideas with you. I would also like to encourage you not to allow this conversation to end tonight. In the past Legislative sessions, many times Representative Proctor called to ask our opinion on education bills. He also welcomed solutions and ideas we had for the challenges Florida faces. I would encourage you all to continue to use us. I do understand what it is like to work with a diverse group of people. I have over 2,000 employees, 13,000 students in the PreK-12 system, and 14,000 students at Adult and Community Education who all have unique needs and concerns on a daily basis. We have developed a system of open communication and we value everyone's input. I encourage you to call upon us if you need ideas. We are only a phone call or email away and we do want to be part of the solution and not complainers. We have shown by our actions that education and our children's future is important to Flagler County. We now ask that our State leaders show through your actions the children of Florida are important to you also. We are committed to assist you in any way we can to develop solutions to the challenges we now all face. Please feel free to call upon us for any assistance you need. We will continue to stay committed to our mission of Raising Student Achievement Every Day, Every Way.

Educationally Yours,

Bill Delbrugge
Superintendent, Flagler County Public Schools