



Citizens for Strong Schools, Inc.
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NEWS RELEASE

Citizens group urges residents to contact governor on school cuts

In less than a month, Governor Charlie Crist will be presenting his budget request for 2009-10 to the Florida Legislature. A local citizens group wants to ensure that public schools are a top priority in that request, and time is of the essence.

Citizens for Strong Schools is urging Alachua County residents to contact the governor now about both current and future school budget cuts. The group, formed last summer to promote the local one mill initiative for schools, is now broadening its mission to educate the public about the crisis in school funding and lobby state leaders for better funding for education.

“We’re hearing that the legislature may cut another 10% from next year’s public school budgets during the regular session,” said chairman Mark McGriff. “To add so much to the severe cuts schools have already experienced during the last two years is completely unacceptable.”

The special legislative session that ended earlier this month resulted in a revised state budget for this year that cuts public school funding statewide more than \$460 million. Alachua County’s share of that cut is \$3.7 million, and that’s on top of more than \$17 million in cuts last year. There are also rumors that the state may cut even more from this year’s school budgets when lawmakers meet again in March.

“These mid-year and late-year cuts are particularly devastating,” said Superintendent Dan Boyd. “It’s much, much more difficult for us to make cuts when we are so far along in the school year.”

State education officials have told Florida’s 67 school districts to brace for another potential loss of 10% to 12% in funding for the 2009-10 school year. That would mean another \$10 million loss for local schools.

“There’s no way we can maintain the quality of education here in Alachua County and around the state with such a dramatic and ongoing loss of resources,” said Boyd.

Governor Crist is required to have his formal legislative budget request ready by February 20th. Lawmakers will then review that request in advance of the regular legislative session, which begins March 3. There are also reports out of Tallahassee that Crist may veto certain parts of the budget approved by lawmakers during the special session, including some education cuts. Under state law, he is required to make those decisions by the end of the month.

McGriff says local residents should contact the governor now and encourage him to reduce the cuts to schools for this year and hold schools harmless in the upcoming budget year.

“Florida’s Constitution says public education is the state’s ‘paramount duty,’ which means it must be the top priority for both the governor and the legislature,” said McGriff. “They have a responsibility to provide funding for high quality schools, and we as citizens need to hold them to that.”

Governor Crist’s public e-mail address is Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com. The phone number for the Governor’s office is (850) 488-7146, the fax is (850) 487-0801, and the mailing address is: Office of Governor Charlie Crist, State of Florida, The Capitol, 400 S. Monroe Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001.

Contact information for Alachua County’s legislative delegation, along with other school funding information, is available on the Citizens for Strong Schools’ website at www.yesforalachuaschools.org.

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