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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### ***Citizens for Strong Schools joins statewide lawsuit on school funding***

Citizens for Strong Schools has entered a new phase in the battle for high quality schools in Alachua County and throughout Florida.

Our group has joined with a number of other grass-roots organizations, parents and students statewide as plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the state over education quality and funding.

The lawsuit has been filed in the Leon County Circuit Court in Tallahassee. The legal effort is being spearheaded by former Speaker of the Florida House and current University of Florida law professor Jon Mills, Neil Chonin and Jodi Siegel of the non-profit Southern Legal Counsel and Thom Rumberger of the law firm Rumberger, Kirk & Caldwell.

The intent of the lawsuit is not to fix blame but to find solutions.

“We don’t blame any single party, person or group,” said Mills. “The problem is the result of years of not fulfilling our paramount duty. It’s everyone’s fault, and it’s everyone’s duty to help fix it.”

The lawsuit refers to Article 9 of Florida’s Constitution, which states that providing a ‘high quality’ public education for all children is the state’s ‘paramount duty.’ That language was approved by 71% of Florida voters in 1998 and sets one of the highest standards for state support of public schools in the nation.

“As one of the people who helped draft this language and put it before the voters of our state, I believe the citizens of Florida meant what they said when they approved it,” said Mills.

All of us with Citizens for Strong Schools know that state support for K-12 education has fallen significantly since that language was adopted. In the last decade, the state’s share of funding for the Florida Education Funding Program has dropped from nearly 60% to about 37% as lawmakers have shifted the responsibility for funding schools onto local communities through property taxes. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that Florida ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation in per pupil funding compared to wealth.

Citizens for Strong Schools and Fund Education Now out of Orlando are the first two grassroots groups to sign on as plaintiffs in the case. Parents and students are also named as plaintiffs, and other groups have expressed their support and are expected to sign on to the litigation in the near future.

Although most of the legal work is being supported through the non-profit Southern Legal Counsel, there will be a number of other expenses associated with the litigation. Donations toward this effort would be greatly appreciated, and will help Citizens for Strong Schools and our counterparts in other communities make a positive difference in the future of our students, our schools and our state.

Of course, we will continue to work with those other advocacy groups to keep citizens informed about the current crisis in Florida’s educational system and to lobby state leaders. Keep checking our website for details about upcoming events and activities.

Citizens for Strong Schools welcomes the participation of parents, educators and other local residents interested in our group. Join our organization today and help ensure high quality schools in our community and throughout Florida.

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