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Subject: FW: 11/30/11 Education Round-Up

FYI – have a great day!

Sincerely,

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From: Higgins, Deborah
Sent: Wednesday, November 30, 2011 10:37 AM
Subject: 11/30/11 Education Round-Up

Site is still down.

Today's News:

The FL Current: Lawmaker wants more oversight of disabled student scholarships
Bradenton Herald: More oversight sought on McKay Scholarships
Naples Daily News: Edison Board of Trustees places President Kenneth Walker on paid leave; rejects offer to step down early
Bradenton Herald: Trustees scrutinize State College of Florida president's contract
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WPTV-TV: State Department of Education rejects Martin County school district's evaluation plan
Ft. Myers News Press: Proposal emerges to create adult charter schools
Palm Beach Post: More than 1 in 5 Palm Beach County students live in poverty
Sun-Sentinel: Poverty rate soars among S. Florida kids
Tallahassee Democrat: BOG calls for FAMU probe
Bloomberg Business Week: Recession Drove Child Poverty Up in 96 of 100 Top School Systems
St. Pete Times: Dispute in limbo over former Pinellas superintendent's severance package
Real Clear Markets: The Root Cause of Market Failure In Higher Education

The FL Current
Lawmaker wants more oversight of disabled student scholarships
Gray Rohrer
11/29/2011 - 05:33 PM

Rep. Kelli Stargel listens to a presentation during a committee meeting at the Capitol. Photo Credit: Ana Goni-Lessan
In response to an expose from the Miami New Times this summer detailing abuses of the John M. McKay Scholarship funds, Rep. Rick Kriseman, D-St. Petersburg, is pushing for greater oversight of the program.

The ranking Democrat on the House K-20 Innovation Subcommittee sent a letter Tuesday to its chair, Rep. Kelli Stargel, R-Lakeland, recommending the stricter oversight and accountability measures.

The McKay scholarships were set up in 2005 and designed to go towards private school tuition for physically and mentally disabled students. Since then, Florida has spent more than \$911 million on the scholarships. In the 2010-2011 school year, 22,198 students took advantage of \$148.6 million in private tuition provided by the program.

But the Miami New Times article tells the story of South Florida Prep, which received more than \$2 million between 2006 and 2010, where classrooms convened in a run-down strip mall, music classes were taught without instruments, and a school administrator used corporal punishment to discipline pupils. The state, however, can do little to prevent the abuses because the schools are private: There are no site visits from the Department of Education or other state agency, no curricula requirements and no background checks on administrators.

In his letter, Kriseman suggests mandatory site visits, Department of Education background checks of personnel at private institutions receiving McKay funding, requiring accreditation and minimum curriculum standards, allowing the DOE and school districts to initiate investigations of schools, and prohibiting corporal punishment at schools receiving the scholarships.

"Along with several subcommittee members, I am troubled by news accounts detailing cases of abuse and fraud due to an apparent lack of accountability in this voucher program. The Legislature must do everything it can to make sure that children who receive McKay Scholarships to attend private schools get the highest quality education possible," Kriseman's letter reads. He also stated that his suggestions were on behalf of all Democrats on the subcommittee.

His suggestions, however, may not get past the discussion phase. Stargel said Tuesday that although she is open to the recommendations, she's reluctant to dictate the operations of private schools, even if they receive state funding.

"You're dealing with private schools. I wouldn't want to mandate to a private school what their curriculum is going to be," Stargel said.

She added that parents provide the state's best measure of accountability, because they can remove their children from the school if it is inadequate, but also wants to eliminate fraud from the scholarship program. The Miami New Times article noted incidents of private school administrators forging documents to pad their enrollment stats in order to receive more money.

"I am all about making sure that we prevent fraud," Stargel said.

Bradenton Herald

Wednesday, Nov. 30, 2011
More oversight sought on McKay Scholarships
By ANGELINE TAYLOR

State Rep. Rick Kriseman, D-St. Petersburg, asked Tuesday for more oversight in the McKay Scholarship Program.

Kriseman's request was sent to the state's chairwoman of the K-20 Innovation Subcommittee, Rep. Kelli Stargel, R-Lakeland.

In a letter dated Nov. 29, Kriseman said he believes accountability might be lacking in the voucher program, which is designed to give students with disabilities a scholarship to attend a private school of their choice.

"I am troubled by news accounts detailing cases of abuse and fraud due to an apparent lack of accountability," he said. "The Legislature must do everything it can to make sure that children who receive McKay Scholarships to attend private schools get the highest quality education possible."

Kriseman suggested nine issues to increase accountability, including mandatory site inspections of facilities. He said the Department of Education should review and sign off on personnel criminal background checks in facilities seeking to receive McKay dollars. And teachers in a school accepting McKay dollars should have a state teaching certificate.

Former State Senate President John McKay – who created the law – agrees. McKay listened to Kriseman's full list of suggestions.

"A number of his suggestions are quite positive," McKay said. "Many of the things he's asking for are already in the statute."

McKay suggested asking officials with the Department of Education to enforce the law.

"It's nice to have words in a statute," McKay said. "Unless someone does something, it's kind of meaningless."

Kriseman seemed surprised by McKay's assessment.

"If that is the law and it's not being enforced, that's a problem," said Kriseman, Democratic ranking member of the Innovation Subcommittee.

Officials with the state's education department were in on the discussion regarding more accountability, Kriseman said. He said no one mentioned that his suggestions were already in state law.

Kriseman hopes for the committee to take a look at his suggestions and review what might be worthy of being new legislation.

In 2010-11, there were 22,198 students participating in the McKay Scholarship Program with 1,013 private schools, according to the Department of Education. The year's average scholarship cost came to \$7,209 and the annual cost to the state was \$148.56 million.

Naples Daily News
Edison Board of Trustees places President Kenneth Walker on paid leave; rejects offer to step down early
By BRITTANY SHAMMAS
Tuesday, November 29, 2011

After 20 years serving Edison State College, President Kenneth Walker has been locked out of his office and placed on administrative leave.

He left campus quietly Tuesday evening after the college's board of trustees rejected his offer to step down a year in advance of the June 30, 2013 date outlined in his contract. Instead, the board chose to hire a law firm to investigate terminating the embattled president with cause.

Minutes after the 7-1 vote — which led several in the audience to hold up signs that read "Thank you" — Walker shook hands with trustees before leaving the meeting. Several trustees would later call the meeting the most difficult they'd ever attended.

"Thank you for your service," Chairwoman Ann Berlam said to Walker, who is leaving town following the recent death of his brother. "Thank you for what you've done for the school."

The board's decision came after repeated calls from students, faculty and, most recently, the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce for his removal following months of controversy at Edison. Walker was blamed by many for issues faced by the school, which include a course-swapping scandal and miscommunication about the school's unaccredited nursing program.

"I beg you to terminate Dr. Walker with cause," student Willie Filkowski said before the vote. "We won't take any more. What we will take is, 'I'm sorry.'"

Due to constant criticism and fears it could be too late to repair strained relations, Walker proposed during the meeting to leave his position in June 2012 and accept a voluntary pay cut of \$70,000 in addition to a nearly \$179,000 reduction he took in April. His compensation previously stood at \$837,000: the highest among college and university presidents in the state.

Trustees voted 5-3 not to accept that proposal, with Trustee Washington Baquero — a Walker supporter — absent from the meeting. They also voted unanimously to terminate Robert Beeson, Lee Campus vice president of instruction and district dean of arts and sciences, who is popular among students and faculty.

Beeson views his firing as retaliation. He will be given the opportunity to appeal the termination.

Many of his supporters were present during Tuesday's meeting; wearing buttons reading "Bring Beeson Back," they asked the board not to fire him.

Beeson has been on paid leave since Oct. 25, when Walker initially recommended he be terminated.

Walker wrote in a letter to Beeson at the time he was being fired because he was aware of inappropriate course substitutions at the college, but didn't take appropriate action. He was later named as partly responsible for the school's nursing accreditation scandal.

Attorney Michael Mattimore told the board Tuesday that Beeson didn't take appropriate action when forwarded an email from a student concerned about the accreditation status of the school.

Walker sat quietly as trustees discussed his own employment. They acknowledged his many contributions to the college in his time at its helm, but agreed that immediate change was needed to send a positive signal to the college's accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, or SACS. SACS gave the college 14 areas of needed improvements that were also discussed during the meeting and are viewed as critically important.

"If we do not remove the president quickly, I'm very concerned that SACS will believe that we're not taking this as seriously as we should," Trustee Chris Vernon said.

Other options, including negotiating with Walker for an earlier retirement date or terminating him, were raised and discussed. Some at the school have said retaining the president for the rest of the SACS process was in the school's best interest, and that point was mentioned by Trustee Marjorie Starnes-Bilotti.

"It may allow us, the administration and the faculty to focus more effectively on the SACS accreditation issue if Dr. Walker, knowing all the players, is in place," she said.

Also a concern among trustees was the possibility that Walker may sue the college for terminating him with cause. Vernon indicated that Walker told him he would file a lawsuit if removed, and Starnes-Bilotti pointed out Walker has received nothing but glowing evaluations, even as recently as April.

Ultimately, the board decided that a five-point proposal made by Vernon was the best route for the college. Vernon's plan, which only Trustee Randall Parrish voted against, includes placing Walker on paid leave while having a law firm investigate whether there are grounds to terminate him for cause.

Charlotte Campus President Patricia Land will serve as acting president while the board seeks assistance from Randy Hanna, chancellor for the Division of Florida Colleges, in finding an interim president. Under the plan, the board will begin searching for a new president to ideally be in place by fall semester 2012.

"While it may seem disruptive to immediately replace the president or put him on paid leave, it, I think, sends a very strong message to SACS and to Tallahassee," Vernon said.

Walker spoke just once after making his proposal, asking the board for more time to access his office, as he will be out of town for the week and needs time to retrieve 20 years worth of personal items he's collected.

That request was reluctantly denied by the board in an attempt to secure evidence in the event of a lawsuit.

"My heart says I would love to do that," Vernon said. "But we have to put the best interests of the college above Ken Walker."

The difficulty of the meeting was addressed by many of the trustees, but they said they felt they made the decision that will put Edison on the right track moving forward.

"I know it was tough for all of us," Berlam said. "There are going to still be some tough days ahead. We can all of us together strengthen the institution ... and have the respect in the community that we always have."

Bradenton Herald

Updated: Wednesday, Nov. 30, 2011

Trustees scrutinize State College of Florida president's contract

By JAMES A. JONES JR.

LAKEWOOD RANCH – Sparks flew when several State College of Florida trustees asked Tuesday how much the payout would be if they were to part ways with President Lars Hafner.

A payout to Hafner, who has a five-year contract worth \$322,819 a year, could total about \$1.6 million.

Dr. Craig A. Trigueiro, one of six people recently appointed as SCF trustees, presented the question about a payout Tuesday during a staffing and compensation subcommittee meeting.

"It's not a minor issue," Trigueiro said, adding that he wanted to know "in the event something happened." Another trustee, Lori A. Moran, wanted to know as well.

Would SCF be liable for paying the remainder of Hafner's contract were he for any reason to part ways with the college, she asked.

Steven Prouty, SCF's general counsel, attempted to answer the question.

If the statute were found to apply, Prouty said, SCF may be limited to paying one year of the president's salary from state funds, but that wouldn't mean that other non-state funding sources could not be pursued to pay the remainder of the contract.

Trigueiro pressed ahead, saying he would like a definitive answer. "It's like a dangling participle," he said.

The attorney general or a private attorney could give an opinion, but an opinion is not a definitive answer, Prouty said. "It's the stuff lawsuits are made of."

Trustee C. J. Fishman, who had sat quietly next to Trigueiro, asked whether the board had a "challenge with our president. I am not sure, Dr. T, where this is going," he said.

Trigueiro responded he has no challenge with Hafner, and that he is planning no action involving the president. Any action, should there be any, would be a decision of the full board, he said.

Trustee Joe Miller questioned what kind of a message trustees were sending to Hafner.

Miller asked if Moran might be trying to terminate Hafner, and worried about the effects of such a line of questioning on staff morale.

"He has done nothing wrong that I can see," Miller said.

Moran responded that she seconds the positive comments made about Hafner's leadership, and asserted that she has no vendetta against the president.

But she said she takes her fact finding and her responsibilities seriously as a new trustee.

"This is called research," Moran said.

Trigueiro also assured the other trustees that he had no grudge against Hafner.

"I might even want to pay Dr. Hafner more," Trigueiro said.

To which trustee Ed Bailey quipped: "You'll have to pay him out of your pocket."

Bailey said he wanted to move on to the big issues facing the college, and to get back to "positive decisions."

Margaret Beck, executive director of SCF human resources, led the briefing of trustees on compensation and staffing issues.

Hafner's pay is based on what is paid the 28 presidents of the Florida College System, she said.

"He's number 14 – right in the middle," Beck said.

The compensation packages range from the \$618,163 paid to the leader of Edison State College to \$109,565 paid to the president of North Florida Community College.

Beck also reported that salaries and benefits paid at SCF total \$27.6 million, including 24 positions earning \$100,000 or more. By comparison, Edison State College has 80 staff members making \$100,000 a year or more, and St. Petersburg College has 62.

After the meeting, Charlene J. Neal, who chairs the staffing and compensation subcommittee, said she believes that Tuesday's session was an effort to get all the information on the table. She did not anticipate any recommendations being made to the full board of trustees until early 2012.

Today at 8 a.m., the Board of Trustees has its regular board meeting in the Selby Room of Building 800 at SCF Venice.

The meetings is open to the public.

New York Times
Line Grows Long for Free Meals at U.S. Schools
By SAM DILLON
November 29, 2011

Millions of American schoolchildren are receiving free or low-cost meals for the first time as their parents, many once solidly middle class, have lost jobs or homes during the economic crisis, qualifying their families for the decades-old safety-net program.

The number of students receiving subsidized lunches rose to 21 million last school year from 18 million in 2006-7, a 17 percent increase, according to an analysis by The New York Times of data from the Department of Agriculture, which administers the meals program. Eleven states, including Florida, Nevada, New Jersey and Tennessee, had four-year increases of 25 percent or more, huge shifts in a vast program long characterized by incremental growth.

The Agriculture Department has not yet released data for September and October.

"These are very large increases and a direct reflection of the hardships American families are facing," said Benjamin Senauer, a University of Minnesota economist who studies the meals program, adding that the surge had happened so quickly "that people like myself who do research are struggling to keep up with it."

In Sylva, N.C., layoffs at lumber and paper mills have driven hundreds of new students into the free lunch program. In Las Vegas, where the collapse of the construction industry has caused hardship, 15,000 additional students joined the subsidized lunch program this fall. In Rochester, unemployed engineers and technicians have signed up their children after the downsizing of Kodak and other companies forced them from their jobs. Many of these formerly middle-income parents have pleaded with school officials to keep their enrollment a secret.

Students in families with incomes up to 130 percent of the poverty level — or \$29,055 for a family of four — are eligible for free school meals. Children in a four-member household with income up to \$41,348 qualify for a subsidized lunch priced at 40 cents.

Among the first to call attention to the increases were Department of Education officials who use subsidized lunch rates as a poverty indicator in federal testing. This month, in releasing results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, they noted that the proportion of the nation's fourth graders enrolled in the lunch program had climbed to 52 percent from 49 percent in 2009, crossing a symbolic watershed.

In the Rockdale County Schools in Conyers, Ga., east of Atlanta, the percentage of students receiving subsidized lunches increased to 63 percent this year from 46 percent in 2006.

"We're seeing people who were never eligible before, never had a need," said Peggy Lawrence, director of school nutrition.

One of those is Sheila Dawson, a Wal-Mart saleswoman whose husband lost his job as the manager of a Waffle House last year, reducing their income by \$45,000. "We're doing whatever we can to save money," said Ms. Dawson, who has a 15-year-old daughter. "We buy clothes at the thrift store, we see fewer movies and this year my daughter qualifies for reduced-price lunch."

She added, "I feel like: 'Hey, we were paying taxes all these years. This is what they were for.'"

Although the troubled economy is the main factor in the increases, experts said, some growth at the margins has resulted from a new way of qualifying students for the subsidized meals, known as direct certification. In 2004, Congress required the nation's 17,000 school districts to match student enrollment lists against records of local food-stamp agencies, directly enrolling those who receive food stamps for the meals program. The number of districts doing so has been rising — as have the number of school-age children in families eligible for food stamps, to 14 million in 2010-11 from 12 million in 2009-10.

"The concern of those of us involved in the direct certification effort is how to help all these districts deal with the exploding caseload of kids eligible for the meals," said Kevin Conway, a project director at Mathematica Policy Research, a co-author of an October report to Congress on direct certification.

Congress passed the National School Lunch Act in 1946 to support commodity prices after World War II by reducing farm surpluses while providing food to schoolchildren. By 1970, the program was providing 22 million lunches on an average day, about a fifth of them subsidized. Since then, the subsidized portion has grown while paid lunches have declined, but not since 1972 have so many additional children become eligible for free lunches as in fiscal year 2010, 1.3 million. Today it is a \$10.8 billion program providing 32 million lunches, 21 million of which are free or at reduced price.

All 50 states have shown increases, according to Agriculture Department data. In Florida, which has 2.6 million public school students, an additional 265,000 students have become eligible for subsidies since 2007, with increases in virtually every district.

"Growth has been across the board," said Mark Eggers, the Florida Department of Education official who oversees the lunch program.

In Tennessee, the number of students receiving subsidized meals has grown 37 percent since 2007.

"When a factory closes, our school districts see a big increase," said Sarah White, the state director of school nutrition.

In Las Vegas, with 13.6 percent unemployment, the enrollment of thousands of new students in the subsidized lunch program forced the Clark County district to add an extra shift at the football field-size central kitchen, said Virginia Beck, an assistant director at the school food service.

In Roseville, Minn., an inner-ring St. Paul suburb, the proportion of subsidized lunch students rose to 44 percent this fall from 29 percent in 2006-7, according to Dr. Senauer, the economist. "There's a lot of hurt in the suburbs," he said. "It's the new face of poverty."

In New York, the Gates Chili school district west of Rochester has lost 700 students since 2007-8, as many families have fled the area after mass layoffs. But over those same four years, the subsidized lunch program has added 125 mouths, many of them belonging to the children of Kodak and Xerox managers and technicians who once assumed they had a lifetime job, said Debbi Beauvais, district supervisor of the meals program.

"Parents signing up children say, 'I never thought a program like this would apply to me and my kids,'" Ms. Beauvais said.

Many large urban school districts have for years been dominated by students poor enough to qualify for subsidized lunches. In Dallas, Newark and Chicago, for instance, about 85 percent of students are eligible, and most schools also offer free breakfasts. Now, some places have added free supper programs, fearing that needy students otherwise will go to bed hungry.

One is the Hickman Mills C-1 district in a threadbare Kansas City, Mo., neighborhood where a Home Depot, a shopping mall and a string of grocery stores have closed.

Ten years ago, 48 percent of its students qualified for subsidized lunches. By 2007, that proportion had increased to 73 percent, said Leah Schmidt, the district's nutrition director. Last year, when it hit 80 percent, the district started feeding 700 students a third meal, paid for by the state, each afternoon when classes end.

"This is the neediest period I've seen in my 20-year career," Ms. Schmidt said.

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/30/education/surge-in-free-school-lunches-reflects-economic-crisis.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&pagewanted=print&adxnnlx=1322654496-

WPTV-TV

State Department of Education rejects Martin County school district's evaluation plan

Posted: 11/29/2011

Tyler Treadway, Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers

STUART, Fla. — The state Department of Education has rejected an agreement between the Martin County School District and the local teachers' union on a teacher evaluation process required for the district to draw money from a \$1.3 million federal grant.

An email to district officials sent Wednesday afternoon, just before schools closed for the Thanksgiving holiday, indicated the rejection could affect the district's ability to draw funds from the federal Race to the Top program as early as this week.

But after a conference call with district officials Monday morning, the state relaxed that stance.

Kathryn S. Hebda, deputy chancellor for education quality for the state Department of Education, said the district's funds "are OK for the time being, but there's going to come a time when they're not OK."

In the email sent at 4:35 p.m. Wednesday, Hebda stated the agreement between the board and teachers improperly:

Holds that teachers can't be fired or disciplined because of their evaluations for two years.

Would prevent evaluation results from being considered when the district reduces manpower.

The state's "conflict" with the agreement, Hebda wrote, "may place your district's status as a (Race to the Top) participating district in jeopardy. Until that conflict is resolved, I regret to inform you that your ability to draw down funds for Race to the Top purposes may be suspended as early as next week."

The district has been earmarked to receive the grant money over four years. Among the criteria required to get the money was for the district to develop, with union approval, a new teacher evaluation system based equally on student performance and instructional practice.

"The problem is that the state law we have to follow is so complex and so unclear that it's incredibly difficult to see what we can and can't do," said Pam Kessler, president of the Martin County Education Association.

Hebda said there's "no hard, fast deadline" for the district to have the new evaluation system in place other than the end of the school year but added, "It would be difficult not to hold up funding for districts who are not done by Dec. 31."

Schools Superintendent Nancy Kline said the district "plans to have all agreements in place" by Dec. 31.

The county School Board met in a hastily called executive session Monday morning to "give direction to the district on how to continue the negotiations," Kline said.

The next negotiation session is scheduled for Dec. 13. "We may have to do something before that," Kessler said.

http://www.wptv.com/dpp/news/region_martin_county/state-department-of-education-rejects-martin-county-school-districts-evaluation-plan

Ft. Myers News Press

Proposal emerges to create adult charter schools

7:31 PM, Nov. 29, 2011

Written by News Service of Florida

Nudged by a Tallahassee-based non-profit group, two lawmakers are poised to file bills that would allow charter schools and non-profits to offer adult education.

But allowing charters to receive a portion of the nearly \$300 million in state funds given to school districts and colleges for administering these programs, could mean fewer students and less funding for public school and college providers.

Currently the 330,000 adult education students in Florida take classes through public school districts or colleges. Typically, many of these students do not have high school diplomas and take courses to obtain a GED, learn English prepare for citizenship, or receive workforce training.

This proposal, which is expected to be filed as a bill sometime this week, allows charters or non-profit groups to offer adult education classes. It also establishes a performance pay system for charters or non-profits.

Sen. David Simmons, R-Maitland, and Rep. Janet Adkins, R-Fernandina Beach, will be the sponsors, said Liza McFadden, the president of Volunteer USA Foundation, a non-profit group that touts former Gov. Jeb Bush as its honorary chair.

McFadden, who used to run the state's adult education programs and whose group is pushing the legislation, said Florida doesn't stack up well when comparing adult education programs in other states.

"Our completion rates are the second-lowest in the nation," she said. "We've got to do something new to this system." Allowing competition, McFadden said, could prompt schools and colleges to do better.

But Sen. Bill Montford, D-Tallahassee, and the head of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, said school districts and colleges have done a good job educating adult students, many of whom are juggling full-time jobs and are parents themselves.

"It is one of the most important programs and services that school districts provide," Montford said.

Montford indicated that opening up adult education to charter schools may not be welcomed by school districts. "It would be a mistake to open that opportunity up at this point to others in the school district," Montford said. "It would concern me greatly. There is a misperception that this is a simple program to administer."

A report by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability issued this year says most students who are co-enrolled in adult education classes and high school eventually earn a diploma or GED, but adult students or recent high school dropouts never obtain a diploma or GED or achieve learning gains.

"What I would like to see is each school district or state college providing contracts to groups like charter schools or literacy providers so they are pay-by-performance and there is incentive to move adults through as quickly as possible," McFadden said. A draft of the bill indicates the districts or colleges would be required to supply charters and non-profits with information on the cost per student to run these programs and average gains on tests.

The district would then be "encouraged" to set up a performance-based contract for the charter or non-profit.

Volunteer USA develops and manages programs aimed at family literacy, mentorship and parenting throughout the southeast. Allowing non-profits to offer adult education courses paid for by the state would benefit Volunteer USA.

The only tinkering lawmakers have done recently with adult education was a new law implemented this year that charges for courses and institutes stricter residency requirements. Lawmakers were told earlier this month that the new fees and residency requirements have led to dramatic drops in adult education enrollment.

This proposed bill would not address the fee or residency issues.

Palm Beach Post

More than 1 in 5 Palm Beach County students live in poverty

By Allison Ross Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

6:57 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 30, 2011

More than 40,000 school-age children in Palm Beach County lived in poverty in 2010, an increase of about 66 percent from the pre-recession days of 2007, according to information released Tuesday by the U.S. Census Bureau.

More than a fifth of the approximately 200,000 school-age children in the county were in poverty. That same trend is being seen across the country. The poverty rate for school-age children increased significantly in about one in five counties nationwide from 2007 to 2010, the Census Bureau reported.

Since 2000, the Census Bureau has issued annual poverty estimates for children between the ages of 5 and 17 in every school district across the country. The Census' definition of poverty is determined on a scale that factors in income and household size.

Palm Beach County's poverty rate for schoolchildren, at 20.6 percent, is slightly higher than the national average of 19.8 percent. It ranks in the middle of Florida's seven largest urban school districts.

"It's the economy, the impact of the economy and these foreclosures," said Kim Williams, assistant director of student intervention services for the school district.

She said she has seen families who were once middle class slip into poverty.

Henry County's school district had the highest poverty rate in Florida, at 40.5 percent. Twelve other Florida school districts had poverty rates above 30 percent. St. Johns County School District, surrounding St. Augustine, had the lowest rate, at 12.2 percent.

Nearly 18,000 more students in Palm Beach County signed on for the free and reduced-price lunch program last school year than during the 2007-2008 school year, just one sign of the toll the rough economy has taken on families and children in the area. Even more students are expected to participate in the free and reduced-price lunch program this year.

Royal Palm Beach High School is a Title I school at which the percentage of students on free and reduced-price lunch jumped from 28 percent in November 2007 to 48 percent in November 2010, according to district information. This month, the school recorded that 52 percent of its students were on the program.

"Our numbers have definitely gone up," Principal Jesus Armas said.

Data have shown that students in poverty tend to struggle more in school, he said, adding that "it certainly doesn't bode well whenever the numbers continue to go up."

Mike Riley, principal of South Grade Elementary in Lake Worth, has long had a high proportion of students living at the poverty level. He said the effect of the economy has simply added more stress to his students and their families.

"These guys are so used to having to struggle," Riley said. "In a school where kids are already living in poverty, this economy hasn't really changed their lifestyle as much, but in a school where kids are used to having things, it's had more of an impact. Those in the middle class who lose their jobs, they don't know how to live with poverty."

Sun-Sentinel

Poverty rate soars among S. Florida kids

By Donna Gehrke-White, Dana Williams and Cara Fitzpatrick, Staff writers

4:19 AM EST, November 30, 2011

The poverty rate for school-age children skyrocketed in South Florida from 2007 to 2010 with thousands of parents thrown out of work during the Great Recession.

In Broward and Palm Beach counties, about one in five children ages 5 to 17 live in poverty, the Census Bureau reported Tuesday. In Miami-Dade, nearly one in four children fall below the poverty level.

The huge increase in poverty among school-aged children places the three South Florida counties in the nation's top 20 percent of counties experiencing the steepest jump in child poverty, according to the Census Bureau data.

In the short term, an increase in the number of poor families means children struggle to keep up academically in school, experts say. If the economic hard times persist, some predict higher dropout rates.

"It's due to the collapse of the economy" in South Florida, said William B. Stronge, an economics professor emeritus at Florida Atlantic University and a senior fellow at the Economic Development Research Institute in West Palm Beach.

A family of one adult and two children is living in poverty if the household income is \$17,568 or less; for a family of two adults and two children, it's an income of \$22,113.

Since 2007, thousands of South Floridians have lost their jobs. Earlier this fall, unemployment rates stood at 9.5 percent in Broward, 11 percent in Palm Beach County and more than 12 percent in Miami-Dade, the lowest levels in about two years but well above those in 2007.

For those without jobs, unemployment benefits help a little, but max out at \$275 a week or \$14,300 a year, said Jorge Salazar-Carrillo, an economics professor who directs the Center of Economic Research at Florida International University.

Families living in poverty tend to move more often as parents lose jobs or homes, said Robert Runcie, superintendent of Broward Schools. That can disrupt children's studies, he said.

"You need to have common standards and institutional practices, otherwise you have a kid go from one school to the next, and it's different," he said.

Students living in poverty also tend to have "a lot more challenges" academically, Runcie said.

Studies have shown that children in wealthier homes, by age 3, have vocabularies five times larger than children in poor homes. The size of a child's vocabulary strongly relates to how well they understand what they read and how well they do in school overall.

Young students have a good chance to catch up, he said, but it gets tougher as they grow older.

The district needs to work with social service organizations and child-care providers to invest in early childhood education, he said.

Stronge, the economist, points out that, "Social services are already strained, trying to help people at the bottom."

At the same time, the public school system is struggling. Runcie said the recent budget cuts have left the schools with less money and fewer supplies.

Many parents – even if they are working – also are hurting and can't be expected to make up for the shortfall, the superintendent said.

If the bad times continue, South Florida's school dropout rate could increase because many kids may face pressure to bring home a paycheck, Stronge said.

"If you are in poverty you may not have a choice," he said.

That could mean "a less skilled workforce" as South Florida competes for jobs, Stronge said. "These things have consequences."

The Census Bureau estimates were compiled using data from administrative records, population counts, and American Community Survey estimates.

The data released Tuesday represents "the only current, single-year income and poverty estimates available for all sizes of counties and school districts," in the United States, according to the Census Bureau. Although the estimates are released annually, the bureau chose 2007 as a comparison year because it was before the recession.

Tallahassee Democrat
BOG calls for FAMU probe
Meanwhile, Ammons pledges 'complete culture change'
By Jennifer Portman
November 30, 2011

The Florida Board of Governors is calling on Chancellor Frank Brogan to launch an investigation into whether top Florida A&M University administrators took appropriate action to address hazing on campus.

"The events surrounding the tragic death of Robert Champion and allegations by Dr. (Julian) White that he received little support despite repeatedly advising current and former university administrators of hazing activities within the Marching 100 band, is of grave concern to the Board of Governors," BOG Chairwoman Ava Parker wrote in a letter sent Tuesday evening to FAMU Board of Trustees Chairman Solomon Badger.

White, the longtime band director, was fired by FAMU President James H. Ammons last week after Champion, a drum major, died in Orlando on Nov. 19 following a suspected hazing incident after the Florida Classic football game.

White, who has taught at FAMU for nearly 40 years and has led the band since 1998, is fighting his termination, which is effective Dec. 22. He said Monday he did all he could to stop hazing, and blamed Ammons and other top university officials for failing to take strong action against the practice prior to Champion's death.

"While we are aware that the university has a regulation and a rule in place to prohibit hazing activities and to penalize students for engaging in such activities," Parker wrote, "we are asking Chancellor Brogan to initiate an investigation to determine whether university administration took appropriate action to address the hazing activities referenced by Dr. White and any hazing activities in the student population at large."

In her letter, Parker said that "the investigation will be conducted through the Board of Governors' Office of Inspector General, with assistance, as may be provided, by the Governor's Chief Inspector General Office."

"We look forward to the full cooperation of your Board, President Ammons, and university administration during the course of the investigation," Parker wrote.

Parker's call for an investigation came hours after Ammons pledged on Tuesday to institute "a complete culture change" to eradicate hazing on FAMU's campus. Referencing universities that pride themselves on research and development, Ammons said FAMU will have a new, permanent "R and D" culture — one of "respect and dignity."

In a letter to the Tallahassee Democrat editorial board, Ammons acknowledged that in spite of a zero-tolerance policy on hazing, the illegal and pernicious practice continues to exist at the university. He plans to hold a campus-wide assembly at 6:30 p.m. Monday in Gaither Gym to "get everyone on the same page of this new chapter, new era and a new reality at FAMU."

"We are going to honor the memory of Robert Champion by establishing a strong, safe new set of traditions in the culture of the music program and bands — and across our campus," wrote Ammons, who was to meet with the editorial board in person, but cancelled 15 minutes before on advice of legal counsel. "It is the university's intent and absolute goal to break the culture of secrecy and the conspiracy of silence that has helped to institutionalize hazing."

Champion's funeral is planned to begin at 11 a.m. today in Decatur, Ga. Both Ammons and White are to speak at the services at the invitation of Champion's parents, who have announced their intent to sue the university for their son's wrongful death. Pam and Robert Champion Sr. have said they hope the lawsuit helps to end hazing and prevent future tragedies.

In his letter to the Democrat's editorial board, Ammons said he is committed to illuminating and eradicating "this dark corner of Florida A&M University and the American culture," but that doing so will be a challenge.

"Frankly, it will require the active pledge and participation of every member of the FAMU family and community," he wrote. "We are going to get it done." Ammons also is counting on an independent eight-member task force he appointed last week to investigate hazing within the band and recommend university-wide police and procedure changes. That task force, to be co-chaired by former Florida Attorney General Bob Butterworth and Quincy Police Department Chief Walt McNeil, is scheduled to meet at 9 a.m. Monday in the campus' Grand Ballroom.

But Gov. Rick Scott's Chief of Staff Stephen MacNamara questions the need for Ammons' "citizen task force." In an email Tuesday to the Board of Governors' chief of staff, MacNamara said he would see if the governor's inspector general had the resources to help the BOG's investigators.

"In my opinion, we don't need duplication and dueling task forces and the Inspector Generals are much better suited to review this matter than the group assembled," MacNamara wrote.

Bloomberg Business Week
Recession Drove Child Poverty Up in 96 of 100 Top School Systems
November 30, 2011, 12:49 AM EST
By Frank Bass and Henry Goldman
<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2011-11-30/recession-drove-child-poverty-up-in-96-of-100-top-school-systems.html>

Nov. 30 (Bloomberg) — The child poverty rate rose during the economic recession in 1 of every 5 counties across the nation, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The increase in poverty between 2007 and 2010 was especially pronounced in the nation's largest school systems, where 96 of the top 100 districts reported growth in the number of poor children, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

"When we see a dramatic rise in child poverty from the recession, when unemployment is rampant, I don't think it should surprise anyone that we would see more and more children showing up for school homeless and qualifying for free lunches," said Patti Hassler, vice president for communication and outreach for the Children's Defense Fund, a Washington-based advocacy group. "But it should be a call to action."

The Census Bureau tracks school district poverty rates for the U.S. Department of Education, which uses the data to direct federal funding to poor schools. The figures also are used to determine the places where poor children's test scores must be reported separately under the No Child Left Behind Act, which can affect school funding and

personnel.

The government sets the poverty level at \$22,113 for a four-person household that includes two people under 18.

Free Lunch

New York City – the nation's largest school district, with an estimated 1.25 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 – reported a rise in poverty to 29 percent in 2010, up from 26.6 percent in 2007.

Almost three-quarters of New York schoolchildren qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, said Marge Feinberg, a spokeswoman for the city's Department of Education.

Lee County, Florida, reported the greatest increase in poor students during the recession, which began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research. The proportion of poor children in the district, whose population includes about 90,000 children, almost doubled to 25.3 percent during the slump, which was the worst in seven decades.

Donna Brock, a secretary for the coordinator for student welfare and attendance in Lee County's schools, said that as of Oct. 31, 741 students had been identified as homeless. The school district keeps a running tally every month, and officials expect the total of homeless students to reach 800 as of Nov. 30. Last year, from August 2010 to June 2011, the school district had 1,282 homeless students.

Detroit At Bottom

The Detroit City School District, which was the poorest in the nation in 2007, remained at the bottom in 2010. The bureau reported 47.2 percent of the 139,300 children in the nation's ninth-largest district are poor, a 20 percent increase from 2007.

School districts in Cherry Creek, Colorado; El Paso, Texas; Mobile, Alabama; and Seattle reported decreases in poverty. The Cherry Creek district in suburban Denver had 11 percent fewer poor students in 2010, with a child poverty rate of 8.6 percent.

Almost one-quarter of the 13,619 districts in the nation have 20,000 or more students. Those districts contain 81.6 percent of poor children, the Census Bureau said.

St. Pete Times

Dispute in limbo over former Pinellas superintendent's severance package

By Ron Matus, Times Staff Writer

Wednesday, November 30, 2011

The day before she left the Pinellas County School District, former superintendent Julie Janssen said she was owed \$138,000 in retirement benefits. And even though a majority of the School Board indicated it had no plans to pay her that amount, it was unclear whether that was the end of the story.

Three months later, it's still unclear.

Janssen's attorney, Ron Meyer of Tallahassee, said Nov. 18 that there is still a dispute, but also said to call back the following Monday for more information. Meyer did not return messages left for him the following Monday and Tuesday, and again on Monday and Tuesday of this week.

Pinellas School Board attorney Jim Robinson said Monday that there are no new developments. He said he has talked to Meyer once since Janssen made the claim and they "agreed to speak again if there is anything that developed."

They have not talked again, he said. Asked if there is still a dispute, he said, "I don't know."

Florida has a five-year statute of limitations over contract disputes.

Janssen's contract called for the School Board to pay her a year's salary plus benefits. She said she was owed \$621,536.

A board majority conceded she was due her \$203,000 salary, along with some benefits, and didn't quibble with the \$199,198 she corralled in unused vacation and sick days. But it wouldn't sign off on about \$150,000 of her claim.

The big ticket: \$138,000 that Meyer said Janssen would have earned during one more year of employment had the district continued to pay into her state retirement fund. In September, Robinson called that claim ludicrous.

The board also said no to paying Janssen's annual communications allowance (\$3,000) and car allowance (\$10,800).

Janssen receives severance payments from the district every other week. To date, she has received five payments, each for \$8,074. She received payment for the sick leave and vacation time on Sept. 13.

Janssen could not be reached for comment.

Real Clear Markets

November 28, 2011

The Root Cause of Market Failure In Higher Education

By Bill Frezza

A little noticed Associated Press news story last week reported that China now plans to phase out college majors that consistently produce unemployable graduates. Any program in which 60% of the graduates failed to find work for two consecutive years would face funding reductions until supply was brought back into balance with demand.

This Chinese hand may not be invisible, but it would be one that Adam Smith would recognize. Isn't it amazing that even self-identified communists are figuring out that markets only work when adjustment mechanisms act to reduce surpluses and shortages? Destroy those mechanisms and unemployable college graduates pile up as fast as unsold electric cars.

The back story is a simple one illustrating the old adage: He who pays the piper calls the tune. In a world turned upside down, China's rulers want to make sure the young cadres they educate at the people's expense actually find jobs in the private economy. Here in the U.S., where outstanding government guaranteed student loans have recently passed the \$1 trillion mark, education policy is geared not toward maximizing the employability of graduates, but toward garnering votes for politicians.

How so? After years of cultural bombardment, a college education has gone from being a means to an end - a successful career - to an end in itself. Parents who don't send their children to college lose status. American kids feel both entitled and pressured into getting a college education regardless of whether they have the intellectual capacity to profit from it, the work ethic to manage it, or the money to pay for it.

Alternative means of career training, like apprenticeship in trades that remain in demand - because, after all, you can't fly in Chinese plumbers - get no social respect. This despite the fact that skilled plumbers, with a little hustle, can out-earn most liberal arts majors.

Countless politicians now call college education a "right," alongside food, housing, and medical care. They pander to the education establishment, promising to deliver

diplomas no matter how much of other people's money they have to spend. Meanwhile, the intelligentsia looks askance when college students are encouraged to choose a major based on practical expectations of future employment, suggesting instead that students should follow their muse.

To finance this so-called "right" to a college education a Government Sponsored Entity known as Sallie Mae, originally the Student Loan Marketing Association, was created in 1972 to issue below market rate student loans guaranteed by the federal government. Like its cousin Fannie Mae in the home mortgage business, lending practices were guided by political considerations, not sound economics. Just as Fannie Mae fueled an unsustainable housing bubble, Sallie encouraged runaway college tuition increases. And just as the federal government was forced to nationalize Fannie Mae when the bubble bust, Uncle Sam has now nationalized the college loan business with an eye on disguising the coming tsunami of student loan defaults.

Such policies have consequences. Too many aspiring young museum curators can't find jobs? The pragmatic Chinese solution is to cut public subsidies used to train museum curators. The free market solution is that only the rich would be indulgent enough to buy their kids an education that left them economically dependent on Mommy and Daddy after graduation. The progressive American solution is to seek increased public funding to build more museums.

When such make-work spending fails - as it must during periods of fiscal belt tightening - do progressives encourage maleducated kids to look around, see what needs doing, and start businesses of their own? No. They urge them to take to the streets to bang drums and chant slogans.

The system is nearing breakdown, which will come when student loan defaults finally push the federal agency that guarantees such loans into bankruptcy. At that point, we will have to face the fact that capping off adolescence with a four-year party at taxpayer expense is a luxury we can no longer afford.

College participation rates will have to go back down to historical norms. Slots will have to be reserved for students that can actually profit from them, restoring graduation rates to where they were before colleges were flooded with people who don't belong there, including illiterate freeloaders. Selection will have to be based on merit, not social engineering. Loans will have to be restricted to majors that confer capacity to pay the loans back. Dead-end programs used to train the next generation of professors - whose only skill will be to teach more such dead-end programs - will have to be limited, funded not by taxpayers but by ideological philanthropists with a hankering for fineries like literary criticism and gender studies.

This may seem like common sense to most people, but it strikes horror into the hearts of the liberal professoriate. After years of feathering their nests so they can produce students trained only to bite the hand that feeds them, perhaps it's time to serve up a few helpings of horror. We can no longer afford to take the snobbery of academics seriously. Taxpayers just don't have the money to keep them or their young acolytes on the dole.

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