

South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

Parents, students join teachers, leaders for Broward rally

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South Florida Sun-Sentinel

5:52 PM EST, February 26, 2009

FORT LAUDERDALE

To Donna Greene, education budget cuts from Tallahassee are akin to the way that peasants were treated during the French Revolution.

On Thursday, she dressed as Marie Antoinette -- complete with a gown, wig and sign that read "Tallahassee Says: Let Them Eat Cake" -- joined more than 150 other parents, students, teachers, and local and state leaders in a rally to support public education.

"We feel that Tallahassee is ignoring the suffering of their students," said Greene, a mother of two South Broward High School students from Hollywood. "We need real tax reform and we need funding."

The Broward County School District is facing between \$140 million and \$160 million in budget cuts for the upcoming school year, though money from the federal economic stimulus package could reduce that figure. The district has slashed roughly \$163 million from its budget in the last two years.

Shelly Heller, one of the rally's organizers, said she hoped Thursday's event in front of the Broward County School District headquarters would send a message to legislators.

"Look at the kids," Heller said, as she watched members of the Dillard High School band perform and a group of students lead a chant. "They're our future. It speaks for itself."

School Board Chairwoman Maureen Dinnen stood along Southeast Third Avenue, gripping a sign that read: www.makeeducationapriority.org. She said she was thrilled with the turnout.

"It raises the attention level," Dinnen said. "I think that's really what we're after."

A statewide Save Our Schools rally is planned for March 18 in Tallahassee.