



Pennies will give thought to education sales tax

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Published: Monday, March 9, 2009 at 6:30 a.m.

OCALA - Local teachers are encouraged to bring one penny from home for every child they teach to show support for a statewide penny sales tax to raise \$10 billion in three years for education.

Chris Altobello, president of the Marion Education Association, said the goal is to collect 42,000 pennies. Each one would represent a child who is enrolled in Marion County Public Schools

Altobello said the idea is simple.

"We want to show how easy it is to collect pennies for education," the teachers' union president said.

The Florida Education Association supports the tax, which would generate about \$3.5 billion annually and be distributed to all public schools, including community colleges and universities.

The three-year tax then would sunset or state lawmakers could use the revenue to reduce property taxes.

Altobello reminded everyone that they only want 42,000 pennies and that the money will not be collected from children.

The idea is for the teachers to bring in the coins by next Friday.

Local union representatives are planning to take the pennies to Tallahassee on March 18, where the statewide union and county representatives will lobby for the penny sales tax.

The drive is in the wake of a severe funding shortfall that has led local school officials to begin making plans for extensive cuts, which could reach \$44 million in the 2009-10 school year.