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2 views on parents paying up

My Word: Desperate times call for desperate measures

By Jonathan McIntire

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I was thrilled with Trever Honohan's appeal to parents of children attending his Orange County elementary school for donations to help keep his school from being decimated with a half-million-dollar cut ("Public-school principal to parents: Give \$500," Friday, *Orlando Sentinel*).

It was a gutsy move by a very caring and committed principal to do the only thing he knew how to do to protect the integrity of education at Audubon Park Elementary School.

As Superintendent Ron Blocker said in response to his action: "His back was against the wall. Why did it even get to this? This poor guy has to worry about raising money instead of raising test scores." Also, "If we are crying for help and people want to help, it's hard to say no to that."

I respect Blocker's reaction, as noted in Mike Thomas' Sunday commentary, and I appreciated Thomas' statement: "So let's figure out a way to say yes" to parents willing to pay to keep the quality of our public-education system high — for all students, not just those in our wealthier neighborhoods.

I see Honohan's appeal as both courageous and, knowing him as I do, strategic. He is a highly ethical professional who invests powerfully in the education of every child in his care, regardless of race, socioeconomic status and disability. Though some might say he was unwise with his request, his intention was to document the reality of this tragedy.

He asked only those families he thinks could afford to help, not the other half of his school's parent population. The result, however, would be high-quality education for all students attending his school.

Honohan's appeal documents just how tragic and absurd the budget deficit is for public education today in Florida. This state — which is among the lowest in state funding per pupil for public schools — cannot ethically or morally cut public education more.

To access the federal-stimulus funds for education, a state must have a budget equaling what it spent for fiscal year 2005. This year's public-education budget is, appallingly, below this, placing even the federal stimulus dollars in jeopardy.

"Cuts in education never heal" — a phrase frequently heard in our schools — is a truth research and history have documented many times over the years throughout Florida and our nation. Our governor and Legislature must, if they care about the future of our state, dramatically increase funding for public schools in Florida.

This is not something they *should* do; rather, it is a *must*. To not fund schools adequately is to agree to allow the future of our state, its population and its economic health to crumble.

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