

# Letter: Legislators must not fail education

Lloyd K. Curtis

St. Augustine

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Editor: I'm concerned over the current state of funding for K-12 public education in Florida. The state is facing massive budget cuts due to decreased sales and property taxes but that does not excuse lawmakers from fulfilling their Constitutional and moral obligations to maintain education as the paramount duty of the state.

While it is true that overall education funding in Florida has increased over the past 10 years, those increases have not kept up with the increased cost of living and of categorical expenses, nor the increased requirements to implement the Class Size Amendment. Money for classrooms is down to unacceptable levels.

I recommend to lawmakers support education by:

- \* Not passing any unfunded mandates for the next 5 - 10 years to allow our schools time to fund mandates already in place.
- \* Give school districts temporary relief from current unfunded and under-funded mandates like mandatory PE, class size and the Jessica Lundsford Act.
- \* Give school districts greater flexibility with education dollars. Provide relief from categorical funding that has increased to 36 percent of the total school districts' budgets in the last 10 years.
- \* Allow schools to maintain the Class Size Amendment at the school level, not class by class.

Find additional revenue through:

- \* Reallocating existing state revenue to education, i.e. prison funding or "turkey" funds.
- \* Creating new revenue streams through taxes on cigarettes, gambling, gaming and/or closing exemption loopholes.
- \* Increasing sales tax temporarily for education funding.
- \* Increasing taxes on tourism and new businesses.

In St. Johns County, public education works well. An investment in education is an investment in the economy and a bright future for Florida.

As a parent of two public school children, I ask lawmakers to take a serious look at the budget shortfall and consider education paramount when they vote.