



“Today’s system is nothing like I imagined.”

Back To School (Tallahassee’s Way)

This month, Florida’s students return to the halls of educational institutions, some in private schools, most in public schools. Changes will be evident the first day although state officials say recent statewide educational budget cuts will not directly affect students. Rather, they assert, most cuts occurred through staff and resource reallocation.¹

Additionally, FCAT—the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test—got its first overhaul in 10 years. While standards for reading, math, and other subjects will become more difficult, the test is no longer the only measure of school grades issued each year.² Graduation rates and college-entrance test scores will now be factors, too.³

But, wait, there’s more! Because of the state’s current budget crisis, local school districts now must cover even more of the cost to educate Florida’s children.⁴ Thank goodness Florida residents voted for the property tax decrease so discretionary money is available in our personal pockets.⁵

Statistics show that out of 50 states and the District of Columbia, Florida ranks second to last in educational spending compared to relative wealth.⁶ Which leads one to wonder what to make of a state that approves spending for 10,000 new prison beds and 1,400 new prison guards, but cuts funding to educate its children.⁷

Maybe I’m too picky. Individualized learning, good teacher pay, creative instruction incentives, and local-based school management are fine and well, but only a small part of the picture. Our state leaders had to debate other important matters.⁸ At least, some legislators were able to

secure funding for new buildings across the state named in honor of their colleagues.⁹

The 2008 Florida Legislature centered around two words: budget cuts. Health care spending for our youngest and our poorest was slashed by more than \$1 billion. Education, from kindergarten to college, lost another \$900 million. The welfare of foster children, adoptive parents, the medically indigent, the handicapped, and those confined to nursing homes were all on the chopping block with significant budgetary cuts.¹⁰

So, it’s not only Florida students who are feeling the brunt of the legislative punch, but others, too. Think of the gas we’re saving by deputies not driving their patrol cars home each night.¹¹

I’m approaching a decade as a public school parent. My husband and I are products of public school. It’s safe to say we are advocates of a diverse and collaborative public educational philosophy.

Today’s system, however, is nothing like I imagined, nor, from what I hear, read, and see, does it resemble the expectations of those individuals—the teachers, administrators, and staff—who entered this field because they believed in the world of possibility. Who continue to show up early every day. Work late. Sponsor student activities. Implement arcane one-size-fits-all testing. Sit through another seminar on educational pedagogy. Do more with less.

So, welcome back to school.

Our state leaders are behind you all the way. ●●●

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1. A euphemism for downsizing. If students can’t find a book at school media centers, they can push the “easy” button for assistance. 2. No Test Question Left Behind. 3. Whole Child Assessment is sooooo yesterday. 4. More affectionately known as “deficit spending.” 5. More affectionately known as “delusional thinking.” 6. State educational officials say it’s not fair to bring relatives into the argument. 7. Isn’t that a word problem on FCAT? 8. Whether or not drivers can adorn their vehicles with Truck Nutz. 9. Also known as “Pass the pork!” 10. They can’t vote, can they? 11. I feel safer already.