



## **Hillsborough County Council PTA/PTSA 2021 Legislative Position**

### **School to Prison Pipeline**

The HCC PTA finds that:

- Students from two groups—racial minorities and children with disabilities—are disproportionately represented in the school-to-prison pipeline
- Black students are suspended or expelled at a rate almost 3.5 times greater than White students
- Black students are most often disciplined for more subjective offenses, acts such as throwing food, cursing, disobeying a teacher, loitering, or making excessive noise, whereas their Caucasian schoolmates are less likely to be suspended for more concrete offenses that include smoking, skipping school, or vandalism.

HCC PTA:

- encourages collaboration between law enforcement, the judicial system, and child welfare agencies;
- promotes alternative dispute resolution techniques that are positive and instructive rather than punitive discipline.
- urges the prevention of the incarceration of youth in adult facilities;
- supports assisting youth leaving the juvenile justice system with programs that prevent recidivism.

### **Mental Health**

The HCC PTA urges state and local policy makers and school districts

- to employ evidence-based best practice ratios of those most qualified to provide school-based mental health: school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, and school nurses.
- to provide the necessary resources and support to ensure students have access to the proactive continuum of mental health services and they are incorporated with a strong family engagement component.
- to amend the statute to specify that excused absences from school include both physical and mental health (F.S. 1003.24(4)).
- to reduce the frequency of active shooter drills required by the Florida Legislature as recommended by the November 1, 2019 report by the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission.

### **Funding**

Currently there are over 90 unfunded or underfunded mandates in Florida schools, when Per Pupil Spending (PPS) is at the same level as 10 years ago.



The HCC PTA urges state and local policy makers and school districts

- To create equity in capital improvement funding using a formula which is based on district student enrollment rather than a standard mileage rate for all districts.
- To bring Florida's total per pupil funding to the median in the national education association's (NEA) Ranking of the states, providing school districts adequate funding and the flexibility to implement programs and adopt spending that best meet their community needs.

### **Equity**

The HCC PTA:

- Supports amending legislation to create pathways for our English Language Learners (ELL) to demonstrate their ability to meet requirements for graduation by providing assessments in their native languages or a waiver of assessment results based on the ELL committee.
- Will work to educate its members, educators and legislators about the unique challenges English Language Learner students face in Florida's mandated testing process.
- Recognizes that SLD students have significant educational implications.

HCC PTA urges state and local policy makers and school districts

- To implement and fully fund the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act provisions in all Florida school districts.
- To establish an ample funding allocation for the Title 1, Part A set-aside and Title X, which are funding sources used to support the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
- to require pre-service and ongoing post-service training:
  - on dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and other SLD.
  - on the warning signs of dyslexia.
  - on appropriate instructional approaches.
  - on the use of early screening for dyslexia.
  - on successful approaches to communicating with parents.

### **Voucher Funded School Accountability**

All educational institutions receiving public dollars, whether directly or indirectly, should be held to the same academic and accountability standards as traditional public schools.

- While continuing to oppose vouchers in all forms, the HCC PTA PTSA urges the Legislature to impose strict eligibility requirements on private institutions and non-public K-12 schools receiving public dollars through any state funded voucher, grant, or scholarship programs, and at a minimum, require them to meet the same accountability standards as public schools.
- Our association believes that private school choice systems have detrimental effects on our public-school systems. Public dollars must remain vested in public schools for the benefit of all students and the future of our nation.

### **Assessment & Testing**

The HCC PTA/PTSA strongly advocates for a hold harmless year in regards to FSA and EOC



testing for promotion, graduation, remediation, financial allocation, teacher evaluation, and school grades. HCC PTA/PTSA also opposes the use of state or nationally mandated standardized tests as the sole criterion for measuring student progress or school performance. We believe that student assessments should:

- identify how instruction and learning can be improved.
- be used to help parents and teachers determine specific academic needs of students .
- Increase opportunities for student learning. Policy alternatives to social promotion and grade retention must be established.

### **Gun Safety**

HCC PTA/PTSA advocates for full funding for school safety initiatives that are mandated by the state by the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act. School safety is currently underfunded 50% by the state for Hillsborough Public Schools.

### **COVID-19**

The HCC PTA supports

- a continued mask mandate in Hillsborough County
- all school personnel to have priority access to the COVID-19 vaccine and additionally, student access when approved for distribution.

### **Early Childhood Education**

Expand and fund early childhood education offerings through Hillsborough County Government and local partnership to include three and four-year olds. When students enter kindergarten ready, there is a greater likelihood that they will be on grade level in reading in the 3rd grade, which is a direct correlation with on-time graduation.

### **Military Families**

The HCC PTA/PTSA supports that HCPS formally start a county-wide Purple Star School Designation Program. Such a program would be committed to supporting military-connected student's unique educational and social-emotional needs.

- MacDill AFB is the largest employer in Hillsborough County, only second to the HCPS.
- Forming such a program would provide tangible and standardized support to the more than 7,600 military-connected students who have 4,500 parents on active duty orders, not including Veteran's or Retiree's children. Doing so will play a pivotal role in easing the transition for military-connected students, most of who have experienced 2-3 combat deployments and attend 6-9 different schools from K-12.
- Currently, military families moving into Hillsborough County have no method of determining schools that provide extra support.
- Military families would greatly benefit from the ability to easily identify schools that have demonstrated knowledge and of the military-connected student's challenges and proficiency in placement and receipt of services upon arrival to HCPS.