

December 23, 2003

Governor Jeb Bush
PL 05 The Capitol
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor Jeb:

In our opinion, expansion of the 2003 BEST Act offers a great opportunity to improve the teaching force. As you're well aware, education has always been the most important on the agenda of The Florida Council of 100. As business leaders from across the state, we are keenly aware of the complex issues that permeate our K-20 system, and understand the importance of establishing a high quality education system that ensures everyone – children and adults – will receive the best education that they deserve. Like the rest of the United States, Florida needs to improve its K-12 system to better prepare students for the workforce or college and adulthood. The Council of 100 wants Florida's students to perform at the highest levels, and we believe that the quality of the teaching force will have the greatest impact.

First, we believe that teacher quality must be an important focus for the state. Research shows that teachers have a greater impact on student achievement than any other educational indicator. According to research from Tennessee (Sanders, 1996), the effectiveness of an individual classroom teacher has greater impact on student learning than other indicators of school quality, including school socioeconomic status, class size, and student variability within classrooms. Ineffective teachers actually decrease student performance. Florida recognizes the importance of teacher quality, as evident in the Florida Board of Education's Strategic Imperative #1: Increasing the supply of highly qualified K-12 instructors. Implementing the BEST career ladder program is an important step to achieving this goal.

Second, as business leaders, we understand and support the principles of the BEST initiative--market driven compensation, differentiated pay, performance-based accountability, and multiple career paths--because we have seen these principles work very effectively in the business world. These principles, along with incentives and accountability, will go a long way in improving a teacher's experience both professionally and personally.

Third, not only does Florida need to improve the quality of its K-12 instructors; it must also increase the quantity of K-12 instructors. According to the Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research, it is estimated that the state will need to hire approximately 162,000 teachers between school years 2000-2010. 72% of the new teachers will replace teachers who will leave teaching prior to retirement. An additional 21% of the new teachers will replace retiring teachers, and the remaining 7% will be hired to cope with projected student enrollment. Obviously there is a great need to recruit, hire and retain good teachers over the next eight years.

The BEST Act aims to elevate the teaching profession, and ideally encourages teachers to remain in the teaching profession.

Finally, the current salary structure in Florida and around the country rewards mediocrity equally with excellence. Critics of the system say while the current salary schedule is predictable, it often rewards mediocrity by valuing seniority over teaching skill.

A tighter labor market, greater scrutiny from state legislatures, and new laws in some states that encourage or require changes in teacher compensation, are currently pressuring schools to raise salaries. Transforming the teacher compensation system can reassure the public that teacher performance is the most valued salary definer.

The Council recognizes the urgency for recruiting, hiring and retaining qualified K-12 teachers in Florida. We are pleased the legislature recognizes the importance of a high quality teaching force in Florida by passing the BEST legislation in 2003, and we hope that the legislature will provide the funds during the 2004 legislative session so that *all* school districts can implement a salary career ladder during the 2004-05 school year. This is a critical step to ensuring that all of Florida's K-12 students have a highly qualified teacher so they can achieve at the highest levels.

Sincerely,

Chris Sullivan
Chairman
(Chairman & CEO, Outback Steakhouse)

Leerie Jenkins
Teacher Quality Task Force Chair
(Chairman & CEO, Reynolds, Smith and Hills)

cc: President King, Speaker Byrd, Chairman Handy, Commissioner Horne, Chancellor Warford