

April 28, 2022

The Florida State Board of Education
325 West Gaines Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400



Re: Appointment of a new Commissioner of Education

Dear Chair Grady, Vice Chair Gibson, and members of the State Board of Education:

I write in support of Senator Manny Diaz's appointment as the next Commissioner of Education.

Having spent 19 years of my career in the Florida House of Representatives, I personally had the honor of working with Senator Diaz and know him to be a strong leader and a staunch advocate for the success of all Florida's students. These traits, and his passion, make him uniquely qualified to spearhead a department overseeing PreK-14 education in the state.

I also want to express that he has the support of the Florida Council of 100, a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan business membership organization of the top CEOs in the state. We have long held that having a highly skilled workforce is the prerequisite to a thriving economy. Thus, for the past six decades, the Council has focused much of its effort on helping to improve Florida's education system.

One of the key issues addressed by the Council over the years is that of student choice, and if we want students to fully invest themselves in their education, they must be able to pick the pathway that's best for them. This means two things.

First, choice stimulates competition that ultimately lifts the tide for all students. For example, several researchers have found that providing students with educational options other than their zoned neighborhood schools actually improves the performance of those schools. In other words, all students benefit from simply having a choice, even if they choose a classic, well-traveled path. Over the years in his legislation, Senator Diaz has clearly expressed the need to expand the capacities of all choice options to meet market demand (e.g., charter schools, dual enrollment, early college programs), and we expect him to continue to do so as Commissioner of Education.

Second, a student's success must not be dependent on the zip code in which they're raised. All students, regardless of their family income, must have the same opportunity to learn and excel in school. Senator Diaz's ardent support of Family Empowerment Scholarships and Florida Tax Credit Scholarships, demonstrates his commitment to ensuring that low-income students have the best education available.

Another important issue is that education in Florida be based on high standards, rigorous assessments, and strong accountability (performance and growth). By supporting such initiatives as the development of the B.E.S.T. standards and, most recently, the creation of the F.A.S.T. progress monitoring system, Senator Diaz has shown the desire to use innovative practices to deepen student learning and streamline testing regimens to help students and parents make the best decisions possible for their student's education.

Lastly, the Florida College System and district technical colleges provide students with world-class opportunities to earn sub-baccalaureate credentials and industry certifications that can help them hit the ground running when it comes to entering the workforce. Senator Diaz has a strong record of supporting career and technical education, and we know that he will continue this work and that associated with incentivizing Credentials of Value as Commissioner of Education.

In short, it is our honor to support Senator Diaz for Commissioner of Education. As always, we stand ready to help the State Board of Education, the Commissioner and the FDOE as it continues its efforts to make Florida the number one state for education in the nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bob Ward", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bob Ward
President & CEO