

The School District of Hernando County, Florida

Office of the School Board and General Counsel

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February 24, 2021

FROM: Linda K. Prescott, Chair, Hernando County School Board

RE: Elected vs. Appointed Superintendents

The school board members of Hernando County would like to share with you a resolution passed on Feb. 23, 2021 regarding elected vs. appointed superintendents. This is in response to a bill being filed by a member of the Hernando County Legislative Delegation to place on the ballot in 2022 a proposed change from an appointed to an elected superintendent for Hernando County Schools. The bill received support from two of the three members of the Delegation with one member unable to attend the February 12th meeting.

On behalf of the entire board, we wish to express our strong opposition to the proposed legislation to ask voters to switch back to an elected superintendent in Hernando County.

Many good reasons exist on why 98 percent of the school districts in America have an appointed superintendent. Only two states, Florida and Alabama, allow elected superintendents. That's because it's an executive position, not a political position. It takes a rich understanding of teaching and learning, curriculum and standards, technology and safety, facility and human resource management, as well as the ability to make immediate, real-time decisions on critical issues during day-to-day operations. An elected superintendent only needs to be older than 18 and without any felony convictions to run.

The school board is elected by its citizens for the purpose of hiring and firing a superintendent. We need the latitude to search both locally and nationwide to ensure the best qualified candidate fills the post. Citizens can object to policies and procedures through their school board at any time and we can fire the superintendent if warranted. If the superintendent is elected, citizens have to wait four years for the next election to replace him or her.

The national and state trend shows districts moving toward appointed superintendents, including most recently Marion, Martin, Escambia, Polk and Lake counties. Prior to 1992, Hernando had an elected superintendent. Returning to an elected superintendent bucks this trend in the opposite direction. Voters are recognizing the need to have its chief executive officer immune from political influence. An appointed superintendent releases employees from the obligation of taking sides during an election and possibly paying a price for their actions later.

Hernando County has 27 schools, more than 22,000 students and 3,000 employees. Any corporation that large would surely search for the most qualified candidate with superior executive skills to run day-to-day operations. In addition, the district is going in the right direction, with a graduate rate of nearly 92% and a district grade just a few points from an A. The superintendent and school board have a healthy working relationship and agreement on the strategic direction of the district. Now is not the time to take a step backwards toward a more heated and divisive political environment.

Please feel free to contact me or any board members to discuss this important issue. As always, thank you for your support of Hernando County Schools.

Linda Prescott

Hernando School Board Chair