



RON DESANTIS
GOVERNOR

June 2, 2022

Commissioner Manny Diaz
Commissioner of Education
Turlington Building
325 West Gaines Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Commissioner Diaz:

As you know, the Florida Legislature passed HB 5001 during the 2022 Regular Session, which contains the funding for the Florida School Recognition Program. This legislation includes a provision in Specific Appropriation 88A, and corresponding revisions to law in Section 11 of HB 5003, that would prohibit certain funds to schools that violated Department of Health rules, usually due to force masking students.

A plain reading of the existing statute for the Florida School Recognition Program and the revisions herein HB 5003 make awards to schools, not districts, based on schools' grades. Compliance with law by the schools, and not the districts, drive the allocation of funds for the program. At most, districts are a pass through, as districts have no lawful means to spend these funds.

My approval and your subsequent implementation of this funding must rely on the plain language that districts' actions do not impact schools' eligibility. This point is reinforced by statements made by members of the Florida House of Representatives throughout the 2022 Session, in which emphasis was placed on holding school district administrators accountable for their actions in the 2021-2022 school year. Midway through the 2022 Session, I articulated my support for holding administrators accountable, as long as classrooms and schools were not impacted, and the plain reading of HB 5003 seems to suggest that the Legislature agreed with my position.

Because Florida kept schools open for in-person education over the last two years, we have avoided the most devastating learning losses as experienced in states that locked kids out of school. To do this, Florida had to overcome opposition from entrenched interests that were intent on shutting out our parents and students from opportunity, including union-controlled school board members. Florida teachers overwhelmingly wanted to teach in-person and did an admirable job under unprecedented circumstances.

Accordingly, as Governor, I direct the Department of Education to implement the Florida School Recognition Program consistent with this reading of the language, which is to reward eligible schools for their achievements, as districts' actions have no bearing on a school's eligibility.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ron DeSantis".

Ron DeSantis
Governor