

From: Ford, Andy **Sent:** Monday, March 02, 2009 9:55 AM_
Subject: Make Our Schools A Priority Rally a huge success!

The Make Our Schools A Priority Rally was a huge success! On Saturday, members from as far away as Escambia, Okaloosa, and Monroe counties spent the night in a hotel to make it to the rally on time. Locals like Polk, Broward, Dade, and Seminole put aside their differences with management and came together to demonstrate their support, while locals like Brevard, Lake and Alachua, used the rally as an opportunity to strengthen their relationship with management and their communities. Meanwhile Duval reluctant at first about the rally idea, decided if FEA had a rally they would be there and they were a "sea of green" in the arena. On a statewide level, a coalition of the superintendents, administrators, school boards and entire district-level management teams attended. Our partners at the PTA and NAACP, along with FEA students and retirees, converged at the UCF Arena. What an amazing day!

We had teachers, custodians, professors, paraprofessionals, undergraduates, nurses, graduate students, maintenance workers, guidance counselors, therapists, secretaries, parents, community activists, county commissioners and city council members...Floridians brought together in their common belief that Florida can and must do better by our children. It's time to Make Our Schools A Priority!

Now, the rally wasn't the beginning or the end; it wasn't just another event. It was one milestone on the journey to Make Our Schools A Priority. The success of the rally is due in large part to each of you--every department at the FEA headquarters, the FEA field staff, local staff, and the leaders of the 103 FEA locals that make up our great statewide union--the largest employee organization in the southeast! Each of you stepped up, worked hard, and led the way.

As we look forward with anticipation to the Session that begins on Tuesday, I know that the success of Saturday happened because of the strength of FEA...think about how this began:

- At the close of the last Session we knew that bad economic times were ahead and I began talking with local leaders about a looming "bargaining crisis" and what they needed to be successful;
- We implemented regional bargaining meetings to assist locals face-to-face on an on-going basis with the challenges of bargaining in tough economic times and to confront the apparent coordinated approach some administrations were engaged in;
- At the October Governance Board meeting I presented rally targets for each local--and said we needed to see if there was the will to fill a venue for a rally;

- In November, the Governance Board directed the Cabinet to establish a comprehensive plan to include a Central Florida rally and a Tallahassee Lobby Day;
- The Cabinet met in December and authorized the www.makeourschoolsapriority.org campaign;
- In January, FEA launched the campaign with a statewide media buy, news conference, and a visit (with another media opportunity) by AFT President Randi Weingarten;
- At the January Joint All Staff/Governance Board meeting the plan was unveiled with messaging, collateral material, talking points, the penny collection organizing activity, and most importantly local leaders started making commitments for attendance at the UCF Arena;
- Locals became engaged with highly successful local rallies in St. Lucie, Fort Myers, and Brevard;
- FEA ran ads in the Central Florida media market promoting the February 28th Make Our Schools A Priority Rally;
- Orange County Public Schools held mini-rallies at schools asking everyone to wear red, while other locals held similar events leading up to our statewide rally;
- A Central Florida media frenzy began with coverage leading up to the rally, the rallies at the schools were also covered and connected to the MOSAP rally, live broadcasts from the UCF arena during the rally, and fantastic coverage following the rally (links are contained in this email). The rally was a show of true unionism, a spirit of cooperation and FEA at it's best--locals from across Florida working as one!
- But we are not finished yet...we are just beginning! The Session begins Tuesday--
- UFF is holding a march from FSU and FAMU that will join forces on the back steps of the Capitol as the Session begins;
- The students at UF are holding a rally to demonstrate against the proposed elimination of the undergraduate programs at College of Education and College of Nursing at UF;
- The AFL-CIO is hosting the annual Legislative Conference that will culminate with PTA's Lobby Day Rally on March 18...

But that's not all! Locals like Lake are conducting on-going at home lobbying visits as part of their GREAT Lobbying program. Other locals are planning to have teams of local lobbyists in Tallahassee all during the Session and others are continuing their home lobbying on the weekends when the Legislators are home in the districts...

This Session, we must make sure the voices on Saturday do not diminish. We need to keep the message on Make Our Schools A Priority! Phone calls, letters, post cards, and emails from our members on the issues delivering the MOSAP message; talking to friends, neighbors, co-workers; calling local talk radio; blogging; and staying on the MOSAP message will capture the politicians attention like never before. Their voting record and rhetoric will self-identify politicians--they will be like our "Mr. Politician" character or the true representatives of the people we want them to be!

Our issues are many--

At the National level: lobbying for the stimulus waiver--we absolutely need the funding to fill the holes and avoid massive layoffs and cuts that will further the downward spiral of the Florida economy and disrupt the education of our children; seeking passage of a health care plan for all Americans; stabilizing Social Security and Medicare; ensuring working families actually receive a tax cut and the services we desperately need that only government can provide; passage of the Employee Free Choice Act; and funding for ESEA and IDEA within the new fiscal year '10 budget.

At the State level: ensuring the Federal stimulus money is appropriated following the intent--a stop-gap measure to prevent the disaster of laying off large numbers of school employees furthering our economic recession and derailing our children's education; embarrassing the politicians who are living just for today and not looking for the opportunity to create a stable revenue source for the funding of public schools, colleges, and universities; offering true and meaningful tax reform that will provide stability to public services--schools, transportation, health care, elder affairs, and children and families...and making our tax structure fair--reforming property tax; closing sales tax loop holes by examining exempt goods and services; approving the Seminole gaming agreement; enforcing the internet sale tax system to make it fairer on Florida businesses; increasing the current tax on cigarettes and alcohol, and offering a penny for our children by dedicating one penny of increased sales tax to our schools--K-12, colleges and universities...aren't our children worth a penny! And as always, our public schools are under attack by legislators (aka: Mr. Politician types) who want to weaken our schools and clutter the public debate with false choices and empty promises.

We must remain focused, energized, and committed to our number one priority to Make Our Schools A Priority at the state and national levels. The momentum from the rally and the media coverage of our campaign presents a tremendous organizing opportunity! Now is the best time to talk with potential members about becoming involved and joining our efforts to Make Our Schools A Priority. These difficult times are an opportunity for FEA to grow and we must make organizing a key part of this campaign.

I hope you are as excited as I am with Saturday's success. It took all of us working together as one movement with one focus to Make Our Schools A Priority!

Thanks for all you do for our members and the students of this great state, I know I appreciate your unwavering efforts!

Here are the links to some of the terrific media coverage:

http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/education/orl-school-funding-rally01030109mar01_0,2481322.story

http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/education/orl-locrallyrail030109mar01_0,4253207.story

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/article980121.ece>

<http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2009/feb/28/lee-teachers-provide-first-person-account-educatio/>

<http://www.news-press.com/article/20090301/NEWS0104/903010419/1075>

<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20090228/BREAKINGNEWS/90228010/1006/news01>

<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20090301/NEWS01/903010315/1006&referrer=NEWSFRONTCAROUSEL>

<http://www.clickorlando.com/firstnews/18819591/detail.html>

<http://www.baynews9.com/content/36/2009/2/28/443095.html>

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