



## Florida School Boards Association

*The voice of education in Florida.*

October 11, 2021

Dear President Garcia and Interim Executive Director Slavin,

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Florida School Boards Association (FSBA) to voice our concern of the letter the National School Boards Association (NSBA) sent to President Joe Biden dated September 29, 2021, without consultation of our association or your own board of directors. FSBA strongly encourages a review of NSBA leadership and its processes, as well as urges a public acknowledgement of the federal overreach expressed in your letter.

Several elements of your letter run counter to the tenets embraced by the FSBA, and this communication has caused serious concerns, conflict, and consternation for many of our members within the FSBA. Not only has it unnecessarily distracted from the important work being carried out by our members, it has strained important local and state collaborative relationships our members have worked hard to build and maintain for years. This includes our Governor, Legislature, local law enforcement, communities, and our members questioning our commitment to the First Amendment rights of citizens, which we believe is the bedrock of democracy and would always protect.

Let us be clear, the safety of our members and the public through the affirmation, value, and local control of school districts, is a top priority. We are extremely concerned about alarming incidents and comments which extend beyond civil civic discourse, directed at school board members in Florida. Illegal acts, violence, and intimidation of any public officials should not be tolerated, and our districts will continue to work closely and collaborate with local law enforcement to effectively address these and other issues of public safety if and when they arise. We respect our local and state law enforcement agencies and will continue to rely heavily on them to ensure all participants in our school board meetings are safe and secure.

We also both encourage and welcome parents, as well as other concerned citizens into our school board meetings to engage in lively, respectful, and civil civic discourse. We respect Florida's open meeting laws, invite disparate beliefs to be shared, and believe hearing from passionate stakeholders is a sign of a healthy community engagement. We will continue to provide a safe environment for all stakeholders to exchange views; thereby, ensuring parents' voices are heard when it comes to decisions about their children's education and safety.

Over the last 18 months, communities have demanded strong local leadership, and school boards have been there every step of the way to address issues of student learning gaps, teacher shortages, student and staff mental health, and robust educational outcomes. Rather than needlessly inserting division into the national dialogue, we should be focusing on these critical elements to a robust public education system. In Florida, we intend to do just that by continuing to demonstrate the leadership our communities require.

As you are aware, we did not submit payment for 2020-2021 dues, which were due July 1, 2021. We have been clear about reassessing the value of our affiliation with NSBA due to concerns surrounding NSBA's governance, leadership, transparency, and failure to embrace non-partisanship. Due to the fact we have not seen the changes we would have expected given the number of states, who are your members and have expressed these and similar concerns, nor have we received any promised plan or timeline to accomplish these changes, we will continue to withhold our dues until further notice.



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If we are to ever again have a strong national federation, it must be one that eschews rhetoric, avoids partisanship, collaborates with its members, and focuses its energies on intentional impact. It must reinforce the role families and communities play in public education and underscore the importance of local school boards. It must spend its energies and efforts focused on issues and events, information, and policies that unite rather than divide. It must prioritize high governance standards and follow them.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

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