



**Dr. Brennan Asplen**  
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April 25, 2026

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Commissioner Kamoutsas  
Commissioner of Education  
Florida Department of Education  
325 W. Gaines St., Room 1514  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Commissioner Kamoutsas,

I'm in receipt of your letter regarding the accusations you raised in a social media post. I was taken back when my Executive Assistant and our Executive Director of Communications alerted me to your post on X prior to your letter arriving to me. As a result, the media outlets began calling me before I was even able to read and process your issues. I find this concerning as it appears to be politicking rather than desiring to find mutual understanding through professional communication.

As the Superintendent of an outstanding school district, it is my responsibility to transparently inform our employees, parents, families and community regarding the state of our schools, including any hurdles that negatively impact the school system, regardless of the origin. My sole concern is to responsibly make judgments in the best interest of all of our students. Reflecting on my leadership style, I believe it is one of facts, transparency, and collaboration- placing issues openly on the table to gain input from all stakeholders before making determinations that will impact our learners, families, employees, and community. The St. Johns County School District has led the state of Florida for many successful years, providing a stellar education. I am confident that your point was not to suggest that I hide or downplay critical and honest information. I believe that the community needs to hear, process and understand all challenges that we face; I respect the ability of our citizens to draw their own opinions when presented with clear facts. I do not have a political agenda, nor do I care about any other individual's own agenda. My focus is the task my community has charged me with- to serve students!

Your accusation that I "encouraged your subordinates to vote the legislators in question out of office" is categorically inaccurate. I have never encouraged any of our employees to vote any legislators or elected officials -in or out of office. I take exception to your representation of me as one who would behave by retaliatory means. My style is not intimidation. I am widely characterized as a leader with an open door and an open mind. When I am asked the question "Who do we contact to express our opinion on an issue?" I tell them to contact their local delegation. You also allege that my comments are divisive. I would ask for clarity. How is it divisive to present facts? Do you have any specific example of an inaccurate representation that I have given? I would argue that my responses to direct questions are not divisive, but rather, the opposite. Our employees and taxpayers appreciate the transparency in leadership which affords us the opportunity to share ideas and create mutual solutions to issues as they arise.

*The St. Johns County School District will inspire good character and a passion for lifelong learning in all students, creating educated and caring contributors to the world.*

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In the interest of transparency, it is my understanding from the DOE and Step Up that approximately \$250 million taxpayer dollars associated with vouchers are unaccounted for. I would like to faithfully assume that you are equally alarmed about this. I have been informed that you and the Department of Education have been working with Step Up to correct the errors relative to this. A great concern to St. Johns County School District and other Florida districts is that we have been educating students in our systems with zero funding for those families who received vouchers, but then decided to stay in our public school system. We haven't received the funds as of yet and we are one month away from the end of the 2025-26 school year.

The statement in your letter relating to per pupil funds increasing each year is accurate, and I have faithfully and thankfully relayed this information to our stakeholders. However, the matter of *who* is benefitting from the funds needs to be communicated accurately as well. Currently, many more agencies, such as private schools, home schools, charter schools and micro schools (some which are for profit) are recipients of this funding. Do you feel that taxpayers – including educators- should not fully understand the picture? If so, then we must disagree.

I believe it is incumbent upon public school leaders of our Great State to accurately and transparently inform taxpayers, parents, and community members of how funds are being spent in real time especially when there may be a negative impact on public schools. As a high-performing district, the St. Johns County School District student population continues to grow and yet we are expecting a significant funding deficit for next school year. Why would this occur? Most of the students applying for and receiving vouchers are those who have been attending private schools or home school already. The majority of these students have not chosen to leave the public school system. They have never attended our public schools. We support the choices of these families, however, there are 5,842 students who have now utilized vouchers at \$9,200 per pupil- for a total of \$53.7 Million. As FTE funding follows the student, our school district has significantly decreased in revenue resulting from families we have never served or even seen in our school system. Since we have increased student population every year, but decreased heavily in revenue, we foresee a \$23 Million deficit for the 2026-27 school year. Instead of adding teachers next year due to our population increase, SJCS D has instead been forced to eliminate 22 district level positions and 130 instructional and non-instructional positions to close the gap. These are talented and dedicated employees who are part of our family and our success. Many have families who are depending on them. As a leader, this impacts me personally as I am sure it would for you as well. We need these educators, but now we will try to maintain our strong outcomes with our people wearing multiple hats. Logic dictates that our services to students, schools, families, and the Department of Education could wane. At the school level, student numbers will increase and teacher numbers will decrease. For St. Johns County School District, we will continue to create a viable plan to prepare our students for bright futures.

I have great respect for the Superintendents of our 67 school districts. They are dedicated leaders who are also challenged with creating solutions to the revenue shortfalls resulting from voucher legislation. I believe I can speak for all when I say we support choice and competition as well as the critical importance of a free and public education open to all students. The central issue confronting public schools is the lack of a leveled playing field in which to compete. We accept and accommodate all students who come through our doors; we do not choose *those* we will serve; we will serve *all*.

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Yes, all families have choice. However, for most of the private school students, the decision was made long ago for individual reasons, such as religion. Now, those families will receive taxpayer funds through vouchers which had nothing to do with choice. Parental choice stops at the front door of private schools and charter schools since the schools have the liberty to accept the students they wish- that would be the choice of the private *school*, not the *family*. Home school families who receive the voucher can save their unused funds in an account for college. For example, the family can save up to \$50,000 per child in this savings account. So, I ask, is school choice an educational choice or a financial decision for the parent?

As I have stated, I embrace competition as we market ourselves with our excellent school district record and the tremendous success of our students. However, we find it exceedingly difficult and prejudiced to compete when taxpayer funds are delivered through vouchers with no accountability. The public school system complies with a very thick book of School State Laws, requirements, regulations, and underfunded mandates. Private schools and home schools utilize taxpayer dollars with insignificant accountability. Superintendents, and I would venture to say taxpayers, hold the expectation that all entities be held to the same accountability when receiving taxpayer dollars. We, as public school educators, value accountability which should apply to all organizations using taxpayer dollars.

Reflecting on your definition of leadership stated in your letter as "leaders respond with competence, confidence, and composure" and are "steady, focused, and grounded in reality.", I would depict this as an accurate characterization of my leadership style, as well as that of my fellow Superintendents. These are admirable traits for a leader; educators live that out daily as we strive to make excellent decisions for our students and employees, despite the challenges we face. Therefore, if also being transparent, factual, and collaborative with our stakeholders to make appropriate decisions for our students is not leading appropriately, then I fully accept your vitriol. As you threatened in your letter, I encourage you to send my information to Professional Practices; I own my behavior and stand behind what I have communicated publicly.

As Commissioner of Education for the State of Florida, I would expect that you would ask for the Department of Education to comport itself with professional esteem toward all public-school personnel and sincerely support their efforts, not just the energies of private, charters, and home schools. It is disappointing that our Commissioner would not choose to communicate concerns directly to a fellow leader in lieu of posting an inflammatory blast on social media. Please allow the Superintendents the opportunity to appropriately govern themselves and their districts accordingly and please work with us.

I recommend the Department of Education, relevant Legislators, and the Superintendents come together to discuss these issues impeding our public school system and to work through solutions that benefit ALL STUDENTS- public, private, home, charter and microschoools, as we move forward allocating the taxpayer dollars of our Great State of Florida.

Respectfully:



Dr. Brennan Asplen