

SOUTH FLORIDA SCHOOLS BIGGEST LOSERS IN STATE BUDGET -- Of the myriad losers in a state budget that cuts a record \$4 billion in spending, public education will lose the most -- with Miami-Dade and Broward schools getting hit hardest of all. The two biggest counties together will shoulder more than a third of the \$332 million in cuts to K-12 classroom spending in the proposed budget lawmakers will approve when the legislative session ends Friday. Those school cuts are a fraction of the total slashed from education: \$2.3 billion -- 55 percent of the total cuts -- which will reduce spending on everything from construction to class programs in kindergarten through graduate school. Meantime, there's enough money to keep giving the owners of 20 sports stadiums and arenas tax subsidies as high as \$2 million each. Lawmakers also peppered the budget with millions of hometown spending projects and items such as \$160,000 for "alligator marketing and education." All in all, Florida's schools, colleges and universities had the biggest cut in dollars as well as share: 9.7 percent. As a result, K-12 construction spending is \$10 million lower than prison construction. An overwhelming number of Democrats plan to vote against the budget, saying it doesn't represent their way of thinking. "Our priorities are upside down and backwards," said Rep. Joe Gibbons of Hallandale Beach. "There's a direct correlation between failure in schools and numbers of people going to prison. We're funding what we're causing by not funding education. We're not investing money on the front end. We're just spending it on the back end."

PINELLAS MAY CUT 147 SCHOOL DISTRICT JOBS, CLOSE SCHOOLS -- Pinellas school officials proposed a 2 percent pay cut for all district employees and raised the possibility that seven to 10 schools would be closed next year as the dire predictions of budget forecasters came true Tuesday. In addition, the district proposed eliminating 147 jobs, reassigning 170 employees and canceling contracts with companies and public agencies that provide education services. Among those who face job cuts: 35 assistant principals at middle and high schools, most of whom will return to teaching. Also gone is a \$2.5-million plan to beef up the district's school nurse staff. The superintendent emphasized that the proposed wage cuts would have to be negotiated with the district's employee unions. **Jade Moore**, executive director of the **Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association**, said he still held out hope for a small raise. "We have to go look at some other solutions to this thing," he said Tuesday. Asked where he would find the money, Moore suggested shifting revenue from a special property tax that goes to enhance teacher salaries and improve art, technology and music programs. Given the crisis, he argued, the money earmarked for art, technology and music could be used for salaries. Several School Board members said Tuesday they doubted that could be done.

CUTTING SALARIES WON'T CUT IT -- The Manatee County School District's plan to cut salaries to save about 400 jobs is a non-starter, officials said Tuesday. Instead, district administrators are meeting with principals to review each school's budget again. The principals are evaluating those proposals with administrators so the latter could "understand the proposals better," said Tim McGonegal, assistant superintendent of finances. "What our goal was, under that scenario, if employees were to take 5 percent pay cut and leadership group take a 7.5 percent pay cut, we won't have to lay off 400 school-based employees," he said. "We've moved away from that now. We have to come up with some other plan that will be more, based on the input we received, palatable." When asked if the 400 employees still face layoffs, McGonegal said "everything is on the table. No decision has been made." Representatives for both the local teachers and support staff unions have hinted that employees did not react warmly to the choice of taking pay cuts or watching their co-workers get laid off. "I'm hearing various things, but I haven't heard from a lot of people who are interested in having their ability to take care of their families reduced," said **Pat Barber**, president of the **Manatee Education Association**. "I can tell you we will exercise every option available to us to advocate the people we represent." The teachers union has not scheduled negotiations with the district yet.

ESCAMBIA CUTTING 115 TEACHER POSITIONS -- When Escambia schools open next year, there will be 115 fewer teachers and 40 fewer elementary school administrative clerks. Ten of the teaching positions will be cut from music, art and physical education, while students enrolled in exceptional student education classes will get by with 16 fewer teachers. Other positions to be eliminated include an assistant principal, two deans and five counselors. In a 4-1 vote Tuesday night, Escambia School Board members approved Superintendent Jim Paul's plan to trim \$6.2 million from the district's budget. Current employees will not lose their jobs. The School District hires about 300 teachers each year, and those in positions to be cut will be reassigned to other posts. With state budget cuts and rising diesel fuel and food costs, the School District is expecting a shortfall of more than \$15 million next school year. Linda Holt, an administrative clerk at West Pensacola Elementary School, said the loss of the administrative positions at the elementary level will greatly impact those schools. She said her clerk duties include giving medications to students, helping run the clinic, acting as a teaching assistant, and filling in on lunch duty. That doesn't include her administrative duties. "Can the schools do without us?" she asked. "Well, yeah. But somebody else is going to have to pick up that ball, and it's a lot." School Board member Claudia Brown-Curry cast the dissenting vote on Paul's \$6.2 million cost-reduction plan. She said she believes Paul's plan should have included more administrative cuts and fewer classroom cuts. "I still feel we have not addressed cuts at the top level -- the fat if you will," she said. The largest single savings from the \$6.2 million in cuts approved will come from having high school teachers pick up an additional class. Instead of teaching five out of seven periods, they will teach six out of seven classes. Some 70 fewer high school teachers will be needed next year by having teachers pick up an additional class. The estimated savings is \$3.2 million, the largest single savings in Paul's plan. The [Escambia Education Association](#) has argued, however, that changes in teachers' schedules have to be negotiated and it will likely contest the decision.

DOZENS OF TEACHERS WON'T BE REHIRED -- Jerry Conrad bleeds Bartow orange and blue. Conrad, 57, coached football for 18 years, taught biology and is currently a dean at Bartow High School. "It's the only job I've ever had," Conrad said. Now, because of budget cuts, Polk County Schools are not rehiring Conrad and dozens of other longtime teachers participating in the extended Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP). The state created the Deferred Retirement Option Program several years ago. It allows state employees to stay on for five years to collect salaries and places their pensions in a state fund. When the state began clamoring for teachers, it allowed an additional three-year extension. But there is a downfall to the program. Anyone who participates loses seniority, meaning that much younger teachers under contract have more safety in their jobs. It's unclear how many extended-DROP participants may lose their jobs, but the estimated 90 teachers participating have all been told their contracts may not be renewed. Currently, there are 720 teachers in the DROP program. Those participating in just the five-year program are not affected by the cuts. The grim budget and a new school schedule for middle and high schools that requires teachers to teach an additional class has led to rumors throughout the district about massive layoffs for teachers. [Marianne Capozziello](#), president of the [Polk Education Association](#), said she's heard rumors about hundreds of layoffs.