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Ryan Petty  
Joe York

March 17, 2023

The Hon. Ron DeSantis, Governor  
The Capitol  
Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Governor DeSantis:

As you know, my State Board of Education term of office expired on December 31, 2022 but I have had the honor of continuing to serve at your pleasure through the upcoming board meeting next week. My service for two terms as a member and then as Chairman has enriched my life and I'm hoping, in some small way, those of Florida's families and our nearly 3 million students.

When I first joined the board in 2015, I wrote (by hand) my goals as a board member:

1. Improve high school graduation rates;
2. Prepare all high school graduates for college or career;
3. Promote accountability and school choice; and
4. Celebrate good teachers and outcomes!

I'm proud to say that I have played a small role alongside my truly dedicated and talented fellow board members in making great progress on these goals. As one example, the number of children whose parents have exercised their right to choose charter schools as the best option for their kids has increased by over 110,000 students, an impressive 44%. And 70% of those kids in 2021-22 were minorities. Meanwhile, the high school graduation rate increased from about 78% to 90%, a 15% improvement. This is power to the people!

Of course, all of this was achieved under your unwavering leadership and that of Commissioners Corcoran and Diaz and their stellar staff at the Department of Education. But more than anything else, I'm most proud of two things. First, how our board refused to accept the soft bigotry of low expectations, insisting on new leadership in our lower performing schools and that *all* kids can learn. And second, how our board, under your courageous leadership despite bashing by unions, the media and the president, ensured that schools remained open throughout the federal government takeover years of Covid 19 (perhaps the

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Page 2 of 2

permanent pandemic should be called Covid 19-23). Now that we're on the other side, we see the permanent harm caused to kids in other states who were locked out of their schools by education unions and authoritarian politicians. Those kids may never catch up to Florida's kids who remained in school, especially those in lower socio-economic circumstances who are the most vulnerable and the most in need of our great teachers across the state. Hopefully more states will follow Florida's lead and put kids and families at the head of the line while empowering parents with the right to decide how to raise their kids.

Looking forward, please stay the course and continue to aggressively oppose the War on Excellence – it is so harmful to our kids and society. We must celebrate excellence, not bury it as states such as California are doing by, as one example, eliminating honors and upper-level math courses in its high school curriculum, claiming it's not equitable that some students cannot perform at that level. DIE policies get it all wrong by focusing precisely on the opposite of what should be our focus, *i.e.*, they focus entirely on the color of our skin when we all know that we should judge each other *not* by the color of our skin but by *the content of our character* (as Dr. Martin Luther King dreamed in 1963).

And as you said earlier this year,

“Higher education... we believe in Florida it's about academic excellence and the pursuit of truth,” DeSantis said. “We don't believe higher education should be for ‘social justice’ or to impose an ideology on students.”

Finally, I'd be remiss for not reminding students (again!) that Dr. King spoke the truth to teens at Barratt Junior High School in Philadelphia in 1967 when he chanted “Learn, baby learn, so you can earn, baby, earn!”

I am grateful for the opportunity to have served you, my fellow board members, the Department of Education, and the great students, teachers, and families in the Free State of Florida.

Respectfully,

*Tom*

Tom Grady,  
Chairman

cc: Members, State Board of Education (*c/o Christian Emerson*)  
Manny Diaz, Commissioner, Dept. of Education  
Richard Corcoran, President, New College of Florida