

Melissa Alsobrooks

1. The elimination of the federal Department of Education has left school districts uncertain about how to handle potential revenue shortfalls in the upcoming budget cycle. Many of the department's responsibilities have been transferred to other federal agencies, sparking discussions about the possible transfer of funding, such as Title I, to state control. This change is especially significant for Monroe County School District, which receives multiple federal funding streams for specific purposes, such as supporting low-income students or funding staff positions critical to student success.

If federal funding is jeopardized, the first step will be for the district to collaborate with the federal programs department to conduct a thorough accounting of the funds received through grants. This financial review will allow the district to identify how each dollar is allocated, especially for programs like Title I, which provides support for low-income students by funding educational materials, and staff salaries. Understanding how funds are spent will enable the district to categorize them appropriately and prioritize areas where funding shortfalls will have the greatest impact on students.

The district's priority should be to minimize disruptions to programs and services that directly affect students. Essential academic programs, and support for students with disabilities should be prioritized. Once priorities are established, the federal programs department and finance team can assess which funding gaps might be covered by other internal resources. For example, exploring partnerships with local organizations or businesses could help offset costs.

An important aspect of this process will involve reviewing programs that support staff development and instructional resources. It may be necessary to collaborate with the curriculum department to design in-house professional development programs, which would reduce the reliance on costly vendor-led training. For example, instead of hiring outside experts for specialized workshops, the district could train experienced staff members to lead these sessions, cutting costs while maintaining the quality of professional development. This strategy would not only save money but also build internal capacity and foster a stronger, more collaborative district culture.

Another area of concern is staff traditionally funded through federal grants, such as parent educators and reading coaches. These positions are crucial for providing targeted support to students, and losing them could significantly affect student outcomes. The district may need to find alternative funding sources or allocate additional resources to ensure these roles continue.

While the loss of federal funding presents challenges, it also presents an opportunity for the district to work collaboratively and creatively to minimize the impact on students. Through careful accounting, prioritization, and resourcefulness, the district can navigate this difficult situation and continue to provide the support students need to succeed.

2. One of the significant challenges facing Monroe County, especially in the Lower Keys, is the lack of affordable housing for teachers. The high cost of living in the region has made it difficult for the district to attract and retain high-quality educators. To address this issue, the district has developed a plan to build affordable housing units specifically for teachers. This initiative aims to provide stable and affordable housing, which will help improve teacher retention and, ultimately, the quality of education for students.

After reviewing various proposals, the district has selected the property on Trumbo Road as the site for the housing development. However, the site is currently occupied by aging district buildings, including deteriorating offices, an old bus workshop, and warehouses. The first step in the plan is to relocate the district administration offices, which are currently housed on this site. A location has already been identified for the move- Bruce Hall.

Bruce Hall, while a potential solution, is not currently equipped to house the district administration offices. The building would require a \$14 million renovation to make it suitable for this purpose. With the recent approval of a request for proposals by the school board, the need to begin renovations is urgent in order to move forward with the project.

Our superintendent has been actively lobbying the state for financial support to facilitate the move. The district has emphasized the importance of securing state funding to ensure that the relocation and subsequent housing development proceed without delay. Recent state legislation surrounding the Live Local Act supports this initiative, as it encourages the use of excess government property for affordable housing projects, aligning with the district's plans for the Trumbo Road parcel.

A gift to the district for \$15 million in total funding would cover the costs of the renovation of Bruce Hall allowing for the district to proceed with the development of the affordable housing units. This gift would be vital to our district, as affordable housing remains one of the biggest barriers to attracting and retaining teachers in Monroe County. The housing units will provide a stable living environment for teachers, reducing turnover and helping the district maintain a high-quality workforce.

The ability to begin this project would have a long-term positive impact on the district by addressing the housing crisis, improving teacher recruitment and retention, and ultimately enhancing the educational experience for students in Monroe County.