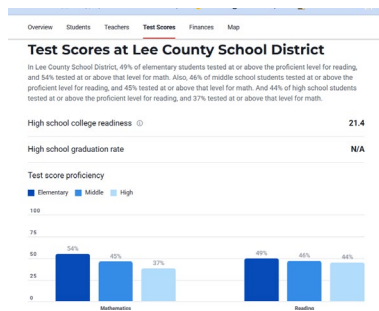


Lee County Schools leaders refuse to cut fat out of the budget and want their small savings to go to all teachers rather than hire tutors



Ft. Myers, FL — The Lee County School District, with a budget of \$2.9 billion, claims it can only cut \$15.9 million. However, analysis suggests that substantial savings of \$105.8 million could be realized by implementing a 10% reduction in school administration, replacing 491 retired school employees with newly educated personnel, and privatizing support services such as cooks, janitors, bus drivers, groundskeepers and Attorneys.

<https://tripleddippers.org/fl-lee-county-schools-cash-outs-q1-2025-report/>

At a time when 56% of Lee County High School seniors cannot pass a 10th-grade reading test and 63% fail at math, the district graduated 85.8% of students in 2024, including many who struggle to read their diplomas. Critics argue that the Florida Legislature's push for lower graduation standards will make it even easier to "Graduate" High School students who cannot read, do basic math and are not employable.

<https://www.wuft.org/news-from-our-partners/2025-04-03/florida-senate-passes-bill-lowering-stakes-of-school-standardized-tests>

Tanglewood Elementary School Principal Linda Buckley, dissatisfied with her five-year \$349,479 pension cash bonus and \$130,122 salary, used her public position for an eight-year pension bonus of \$648,519. Meanwhile, 41% of her students cannot pass basic reading tests, and 34% fail basic math. Across the district, 491 employees seek pension bonuses totaling \$84.6 million, alongside \$31.1 million in salaries and \$12.44 million in annual benefits. 101 Lee County School Employees were not satisfied with a 5 year pension cash bonus and used their public positions to take an 8 year pension cash bonus! These employees are exempt from contributing 3% of their salaries to the Florida Pension System, shifting the burden to taxpayers.

Lee School Bureaucrat Charles Vilardi, known as the "Pension Cash Bonus King," takes home a \$673,602 pension cash bonus, a \$142,000 salary, and avoids paying \$4,260 annually into the pension system. The average Lee County resident, earning \$45,891 annually, would need to work 14.67 years to match Vilardi's pension bonus and over three years to equal his salary. Across the district, 491 employees seek pension bonuses totaling \$84.6 million, alongside \$31.1 million in salaries and \$12.44

million in annual benefits. These employees are exempt from contributing 3% of their salaries to the Florida Pension System, shifting the burden to taxpayers.

“Triple Dippers” refers to Florida public employees who file retirement paperwork and, for eight years, receive both a salary and a pension for the same job. They also cash out unused personal, vacation, and sick days at their highest salary, further burdening taxpayers.

The Lee County School Board and Superintendent are urged to replace or privatize these positions, saving \$12.44 million annually. These funds could be redirected to hire tutors, providing nearly 500,000 hours of student support. Public, Private Charter and Religious schools around Florida and the USA found that privatizing non-educational services could save between 18% and 25% of operating costs” said Dave Jaye, Researcher, <https://tripleedippers.org/> as demonstrated by Collier County Schools’ \$5 million savings from privatizing janitorial services in 2008. Privatization would save much more as Lee Schools has over 96,000 students while Collier County Public Schools has approximately 47,000 students.

“Why are taxpayers tolerating poor student outcomes while rewarding school employees responsible for students' education?” asked Pastor Rick Stephens, Co-Founder of the Florida Citizens Alliance. “How can students learn if they cannot read?”

TRIPLEDIPPERS.org



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