

**LEGISLATIVE MEETING REPORT  
BIG BEND COORDINATING COUNCIL  
THE DELTA KAPPA GAMMA SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL  
SUBMITTED BY RHONDA WORK  
February 6, 2016**

The Big Bend Coordinating Council of Delta Kappa Gamma held its annual Legislative Meeting on Saturday, February 6, 2016 at the Leroy Collins Public Library. Alpha Kappa Chapter members in attendance were Melanie Hester, Vicki Rhodes, June Townsend, Susan Vinson, Susan Womble, and Rhonda Work.

Deborah Barnes, President of Iota Chapter, called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. and introduced the guest speaker, Todd Byars. Todd is an educator and more recently has been a full time lobbyist for education.

He presented information on the Florida Legislature which included contacts for the House and Senate Education Committees. He discussed the importance of direct contact with legislators and their staff members and made it very clear that the most effective lobbying comes from those on the front lines, i.e. teachers and administrators. A four step process for communicating with legislators was presented.

Todd then spoke on some specific issues.

- The Governor, the Senate, and the House each have separate budget proposals for education.
  1. \$500 million increase in Governor's proposal
  2. \$601 million increase in House proposal
  3. \$650 million increase in Senate proposal

There will be allocations for teachers/classrooms, but often some of it goes to administration, research, and special areas.

- The legislature is not interested in funding education. Its and the Governor's objective is to have all charter schools, no public schools. New Orleans now has nothing but charter schools. Three hundred (300) charter schools in Florida have failed. Since these schools went under, the FTE they earned per student was lost. The school districts had to absorb the students from these failed charter schools with no reimbursement for lost FTEs. The legislature has not asked for an investigation into the failures.
- The legislature continues to support testing and accountability measures even though some have proven to be ineffective or inaccurate. Budget proposal includes funding to Pearson who developed tests in question and has been paid \$300 million over past four years. There will be a change in testing in the next few years, but it will take a big effort. There is a growing movement to opt out of testing.
- The legislature is trying to defund gifted education.
- There is no major effort this year to change or defund Florida Retirement System (FRS), but it may be a big issue next year.

In closing, Todd urged the attendees to become knowledgeable, to become active, and to contact their legislators. As he stated, "Let's keep the fight for education going in Florida!"

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.