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September 17, 2020

Michele Lieberman
Alachua County Manager
12 SE 1st Street
Gainesville, FL 32601

Dear Ms. Lieberman:

On behalf of Alachua County Public Schools, I want to thank you and the Alachua County Commission for your recognition of the challenges facing our schools and your generous offer of support through the county's CARES Act funding.

As you may know, Alachua County Public Schools was allocated \$6.8 million in CARES funding to cover two years of COVID-related expenses. We were required to provide about \$800,000 of that allocation to local private and charter schools. Between PPE, devices, training and other items, the district has already spent significantly more than our CARES allocations, which means we've had to dig into our general fund reserves to meet our COVID-related needs.

However, that strategy is not sustainable. The state's budgetary shortfall for the 2020-21 fiscal year is estimated at \$3.6 billion. The district's prorated share of that total would be more than \$8.6 million. We also anticipate a significant loss of funding this year as a result of a decrease in student enrollment due to COVID-19, perhaps as much as \$8 million. And of course, we are expecting more expenses related to COVID in the coming weeks and months.

In response to the Commission's request for more information regarding the district's COVID-related needs, I'd like to share the following items:

1. To meet the needs of students attending school through our two online educational models, the district has already distributed nearly 7000 laptops and iPads and 1000 hot spots for Internet connectivity. We continue to receive many requests for devices and connectivity, and we expect this will continue. It's important to note that based on state mandates, students in our Digital Academy must follow the same schedule as students attending brick and mortar schools. This means we must often provide multiple devices to a family so that all their children can attend the Digital Academy.

In addition, we've had to move some of our brick and mortar classrooms to the Digital Academy due to positive COVID-19 cases, and we expect this will also continue.

Finally, as a result of distributing laptops to students in our online platforms, we have significantly depleted the number available to students attending our brick and mortar schools. While they are attending school in person, these children do need access to computers.

That being the case, we are requesting **\$3.5 million** to purchase additional Dell laptops, plus warranties, custom factory integration (which makes them ready for our specific learning platforms), software licenses, anti-virus protection and laptop charging carts for safe storage and charging. This allocation would also allow us to purchase additional hot spot devices with three months of Internet service to meet current and future requests.

(more)

2. As you know, the district provided all families with three educational options, including the state-mandated brick and mortar and our two online options—the Digital Academy (DA) and Alachua eSchool. Based on the choices made by families, the individual needs of their students, and the flexibility we continue to provide to families, we now have more teachers than anticipated teaching in what we call a ‘HyFlex’ model. This means they are teaching brick and mortar and DA students simultaneously through our ZOOM and CANVAS platforms.

To support teachers in this environment, the district would like to purchase additional monitors, headsets, document cameras and other technology. We’d also like to purchase Zoom business licenses for our teachers, which allows volunteers and other staff to assist teachers during the school day. In addition, we’d like to support more time for training and course creation as they navigate this new way of teaching.

We are requesting **\$1.5 million** to meet these needs.

3. As I indicated earlier, Alachua County Public Schools has already spent millions of dollars on non-budgeted COVID-related expenses, which will have a significant impact on our budget going forward.

Some of these non-budgeted expenses include:

PPE:	\$ 854,196
Laptops/hotspots/Internet service/technology:	\$ 4,208,454
Teacher/staff training:	\$ 2,417,547
Additional eSchool teachers:	\$ 458,391
Custodial Contracted Services:	\$ 270,300

To help defray these costs and reduce their impact on our budget, we are requesting **\$8,208,887**.

Between all three items we are requesting a total of **\$13,208,887** for the district’s COVID-related expenditures. We recognize that this is above and beyond the figure originally discussed by the Commission on September 1. However, understanding that there may be additional CARES dollars available, we wanted to provide a more comprehensive picture of the impact of COVID on our budget, our schools, our employees and our students.

While developing the list of items outlined in sections 1 and 2 of this letter, we have been negotiating with various vendors to get the best possible prices. It is possible that we may be able to save money on some of these items, especially as we are buying in bulk. That being the case, we would plan to put any savings into the purchase of additional laptops and hot spots.

As you may know, there was initially some discussion of using CARES dollars to fund full-time teacher aides/paraprofessionals to support HyFlex teachers. Because CARES funding must be expended before the end of the year (which for the district means by December 18), these would be very short-term positions. Unfortunately, we have difficulty recruiting for such positions under normal circumstances, so this strategy would not be feasible. However, we are currently recruiting volunteers, including UF students, to support our teachers in this capacity, and expect to begin placing them with teachers in just a few weeks.

Again, I want to express my deep appreciation to the Alachua County Commission for its ongoing support of Alachua County Public Schools, our teachers and families. Your earlier contribution of CARES funding for teacher training and your offer of additional funding will certainly help our schools weather this crisis.

If you have an additional questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Karen Clarke, Superintendent
Alachua County Public Schools