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Overcrowding And Legislation Are Obstacles To Orlando Schools

By Patricia Hawke

The city of Orlando has a fast growing population and rapid development, creating a situation of overcrowding in the Orlando schools. The facilities are so overcrowded that, by the end of 2006, an estimated 40 percent of Orlando schools students will be taught in portable buildings — and the need is much greater than previously anticipated. With rising construction costs, increasing growth, and new mandates from state and local government, the funding is not keeping pace with the growth and innovative ideas to reduce overcrowding are being sidetracked by new government regulations.

In 2000, the Martinez Doctrine was adopted by Orange County, where the Orlando schools district is located. The doctrine is designed to reduce overcrowding in public schools by denying or awarding zoning and rezoning requests from developers, dependent upon whether the projects are located near an overcrowded school or not. The doctrine was meant to curb residential growth in already dense areas. Though it was never an official law, the county adopted it as a general planning procedure.

For the Orlando schools, the doctrine is a dual-edged sword. Due to the strict regulations, many developers are building elsewhere and the Orlando schools are losing much needed tax revenues; yet the doctrine assists in decreasing the overcrowding in the Orlando schools and makes developers "pay as they go" for growth.

In 2002, voters approved a half-penny sales tax to raise \$2 billion to pay for 136 school improvement projects and build 25 new schools across the county. The use of this money for a permanent solution to overcrowding in the Orlando schools was undercut by the voters and lawmakers, who passed the class size amendment. This meant that at least seven portable buildings had to be added immediately to each of the Orlando schools. The district's vision of eliminating these buildings through facilities renovation and new construction was thwarted.

Then last year, the growth management law was passed, requiring additional schools be built by 2012. The law provides \$10 billion in state funds over the next 10 years to ensure new development is concurrent with schools — either a school must already be physically within the area of new projects or plans already in place to build a new school. The law affects the Orlando schools beginning in 2008. It does underscore the Orlando schools position that developers should help pay for the growth they

bring to the city; however, as with the Martinez Doctrine, many developers are building elsewhere and funding from tax revenues are being lost.

The Metro Orlando Home Builders Association has developed the School Express Program with the Orlando schools, making fast track construction of schools part of their development plans. The program has drawn support from both local developers and builders, as well as the Orlando schools, who are open to any help, support or suggestions to allow them to implement their overcrowding reduction strategies.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more on Orlando schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk–12.com/Florida/Orlando/index.html>

Orlando Schools Aim To Improve Language Program

By Stacy Andell

Orlando Schools Administrators Visit China

Several Orlando School administrators will be among the nearly four hundred curriculum developers and administrators from around the nation to visit China in an effort to create and expand educational programs that teach Chinese language and culture in America. The trip to China will last one week from June 27 through July 5. The trip is in cooperation with Hanban, China's Office of Chinese Language Council International, in partnership with the College Board, the Chinese Language Association of Secondary–Elementary Schools (CLASS), and the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL). The visit will focus on the incentives and strategies that educators can take back to their own schools and use to support the growth of Chinese programs. Currently there are only about 24,000 students in the US studying Chinese compared with close to 150 million Chinese students studying English. During the trip, educators will have an opportunity to meet with Chinese education leaders, build sister school and city ties, and network with other U.S. school leaders who are bringing Chinese language programs to their districts and schools. Orlando Schools want to ensure they are prepared for the new opportunities to offer more language education at younger grades.

In surveys conducted in the Orlando Schools concerning Advanced Placement courses several high schools expressed an interest in offering an AP Chinese course for the 2006–2007 school year. The problem was that many of these schools do not have a teacher of Chinese nor do they see a way to fund such a program. But that may be changing thanks to new programs that unite the governments and educators of China and the US. In April 2006, the College Board and Hanban announced the formation of a partnership to build and expand Chinese language programs in U.S. schools. The partnership features other programs especially intended to help educators who would like to create or grow a Chinese language and culture program in their schools or districts. Because of this program plans have been made to allow 250 guest teachers from China to work in schools in the United States. Also some American teachers will begin training at Beijing Normal University and Shanghai

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International Studies University. The first sessions begin this summer with sixty teachers from across the nation attending special intensive courses to gain state certification to teach Chinese classes for the new school year.

Orlando Schools Recruit teachers from Puerto Rico

Orlando Schools have hired over sixty new teachers from Puerto Rico during a two-day hiring fair held in Puerto Rico. The aim was to hire veteran certified teachers with special skills in teaching Gifted programs and Limited English Proficiency students. Mathematics and Science teachers were also recruited due to the shortage of math and science teachers in some Orlando schools. Orlando Schools will be hiring 2,400 new teachers for the 2006–2007 school and be opening nine new schools. Many teachers from Puerto Rico are attracted to the Orlando Schools because of the constancy that working in a strong educational environment can provide, the lifestyle that living in the Orlando area offers and the closeness of Orlando to Puerto Rico.

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