

BACK TO SCHOOL // First Class Efforts Series: BACK TO SCHOOL

[STATE Edition]

St. Petersburg Times - St. Petersburg, Fla.

Subjects: EDUCATION; LABOR & PERSONNEL ISSUES

Author: SHEILA MULLANE ESTRADA

Date: Aug 20, 1997

Start Page: 1

Section: NEIGHBORHOOD TIMES

Document Text

For weeks, Pinellas County teachers have been dipping into their own pockets, possibly to the tune of half a million dollars, to make their classrooms a little more colorful and a lot more fun for the 107,040 students who start classes today.

"It's a tradition with teachers," said Ron Stone, associate superintendent in charge of human resources and public affairs. "Children and their families probably don't realize how much teachers spend for their students."

Pinellas County teachers earn between \$24,550 and \$44,650, depending on how long they have worked with the school system and the number of degrees they have earned. They received their last paycheck when school closed in June. They do not get another paycheck until Aug. 29.

Yet, in just the past few weeks, teachers surveyed spoke of spending at least \$50 and, in some cases, hundreds of dollars to buy bulletin board art, extra pens and pencils, markers, scissors, notebooks, and a variety of toys, candy and other learning incentives for their students.

Teachers said they will continue to spend their own money throughout the year. Because Pinellas County has more than 7,000 teachers, this tradition of buying extra teaching materials not provided by the schools equates to a lot of money.

"I probably spend about \$700 a year, but don't tell my husband that," said a laughing Delores Austin, who has taught third-graders at Madeira Beach Elementary for 28 years. "I hardly ever go out shopping that I don't pick up something for my class."

A round table in Austin's room is piled with some of these extra colored pens and notebooks. Waiting on a storage counter are welcoming "goodie bags," filled with drinking cups, glue sticks, bookmarks and a package of Life Savers.

"I do it because I want to make school more enjoyable for my kids," she said.

Leslie Edmiston, a second-grade teacher at Madeira Beach Elementary, also buys class extras every year and is careful to save and reuse what she can. Wooden puzzles she has collected are stacked, waiting for her children. "They really love them," she says.

This year she has purchased pencils, stickers, little books and other items for her "Treasure Tin" to use as incentives.

Janet Lynn, a fourth-grade math teacher at Bardmoor Elementary, has spent \$75 to buy the usual items as well as wire, feathers and beads so her children can make "dream catchers."

Each year Lynn fills a clear plastic "Estimation Bear" with animal crackers. The students who most closely calculate how many animal crackers are in the bear get to take it home. They have to bring it back filled with peanuts, candies, pennies, baseball cards or whatever else they want for the other students to estimate and try to win.

Racquel Freidhoff, a fourth- and fifth-grade special education teacher at Azalea Elementary, has been spending about \$600 a year on rewards and incentives for her children. This year, she says she is "getting smart" and, instead of giving tangible rewards, is now offering privileges such as more computer time or private teacher time.

Cindy Triffon has been buying and collecting books for 17 years. Her Bardmoor Elementary fifth-grade "lending library" now totals more than 1,000 books, including a complete collection of Nancy Drew mysteries saved from her own childhood.

Diane Edstrand of The Learning Scene, a school supply store in Clearwater, said the teacher buying spree began in early August, with few teachers spending less than \$45. A typical shopping bag contained teaching resource books, charts, games, student desk name plates and bulletin board art sets.

And it is not just elementary teachers who buy. Angie Tyson of Everything Educational, also in Clearwater, says high school teachers also come in looking for thematic materials suitable for teens.

In addition to the money spent by individual teachers, each school is allocated "discretionary money" from the School Board. An average elementary school receives about \$20,000, while high schools can get as much as \$90,000.

How this money is spent is decided by each school's teachers and parents and normally is used to purchase special items or re-usable teaching materials or to cover copying costs, extra training and hiring of substitute teachers.

Illustration

COLOR PHOTO, FRED VICTORIN, (3); Caption: Madeira Beach Elementary second-grade teacher Leslie Edmiston cuts out numbers and letters for her class.; Third-grade teacher Delores Austin sets up her Madeira Beach Elementary classroom.; A few of the things Delores Austin buys for her students.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Abstract (Document Summary)

For weeks, Pinellas County teachers have been dipping into their own pockets, possibly to the tune of half a million dollars, to make their classrooms a little more colorful and a lot more fun for the 107,040 students who start classes today.

"It's a tradition with teachers," said Ron Stone, associate superintendent in charge of human resources and public affairs. "Children and their families probably don't realize how much teachers spend for their students."

Pinellas County teachers earn between \$24,550 and \$44,650, depending on how long they have worked with the school system and the number of degrees they have earned. They received their last paycheck when school closed in June. They do not get another paycheck until Aug. 29.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.