

# OPINION

JOHN S. KNIGHT (1894-1991) *The Miami Herald* JAMES L. KNIGHT (1909-1991)

ALBERTO IBARGUEN PUBLISHER • TOM FIEDLER EXECUTIVE EDITOR • JOE OGLESBY EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR • MARK SEIBEL MANAGING EDITOR

## EDITORIALS

### THE TEACHER CRUNCH

#### CHANGING DEMANDS REQUIRE NEW STRATEGIES

**F**lorida will need more teachers by the fall, and for the next few years — but there is no need to panic. Although the demand for teachers is up (about 15 percent), educators are confident that they can find enough recruits to fill the classrooms. But educators should take advantage of the hiring binge to get the right kind of teachers for the challenges that schools face.

In Florida, that means finding enough teachers to fill more, smaller-sized classes and meet the demands of greater accountability. Altogether, between 20,000 and 22,500 new teachers are needed statewide. Recruiters will have to act fast and creatively if they are to attract the most capable teachers. Once the hiring is done, educators should develop a comprehensive strategy for retaining teachers — both new recruits and established veterans.

Competition may make the job more of a challenge this year. Other states are vying for the best teachers. And teachers themselves have more options. For college graduates, especially women, teaching is but one of many career choices. Florida should look for teachers who are committed to helping students; and the state must provide the support systems to retain and challenge the new teachers.

Each year, retirements and defections force educators to scramble to

#### Focus on recruiting, retention, mentoring.

hire an estimated 14,000 teachers. This year the class-size mandate pushed the number up even more. Teachers in specialties such as math and science are especially coveted. Those willing to take assignments in difficult schools also are highly sought.

Florida should make the most of its assets — including, but not limited to, its balmy weather — to lure quality teachers. And educators must confront new realities that make recruiting and retention more difficult. The Legislature this year rejected Education Commissioner Jim Horne's request to raise teachers' starting salaries. This puts Florida at a disadvantage with other states, and the issue should be revisited.

Lawmakers did better when they approved the framework of a teacher-compensation plan and a reciprocity agreement that allows Florida to honor teaching certificates from other states. Teachers would advance up the career ladder, ultimately earning more money and bonuses and assuming more supervisory duties. This eventually can help retain teachers who might leave for better-paying, private-sector jobs.