

Florida K-12 Education: David Jolly vs. Byron Donalds

Comparative policy matrix — October 6, 2026

K-12 policy comparison

Issue	David Jolly	Byron Donalds
Core vision for K-12	Public education should be Florida’s foundation. Jolly calls for a 10-year “public education renaissance” centered on stronger neighborhood public schools, higher teacher pay, infrastructure and resources. Sources: Official platform WUSF	Parent-directed, individualized education. Donalds says education money should follow the student, with parents choosing the school or pathway and students receiving customized academic/career plans. Sources: Official platform Student Success Plan
Role of traditional public schools	The central public institution: every child should have access to a strong public school regardless of ZIP code, and the state should reinvest so families want to choose public schools. Sources: Official platform WUSF	One provider within a broader education marketplace. Donalds has described an “economy of education” in which parents have purchasing power and public funding follows students across providers. Sources: WUSF / Florida Trib
Overall K-12 funding	Says Florida public schools have been inadequately funded for decades and proposes dramatically increasing investment in public schools over a decade. Sources: Official issues page Public education plan	No comparable systemwide FEFP or per-student funding target is identified in the published education platform; emphasis is on targeted initiatives and portable funding. Sources: Official platform
Teacher pay	Proposes a 30% teacher-pay increase as part of the public-education renaissance. Sources: WUSF Official platform	Proposes “real bonus pay” for top-performing reading teachers. No broad statewide salary increase is specified on the education page. Sources: Official platform
Teacher workforce / conditions	Focuses on competitive pay, recruiting and retaining more teachers, and strengthening school resources and working conditions. Sources: Official platform	Focuses particularly on training future teachers in phonics/reading science and rewarding reading results; a broader teacher-retention package is not detailed. Sources: Official platform
Funding mechanism for major new investment	Proposes expanding allowable uses of Tourist Development Tax revenue—over \$1 billion statewide—to teacher pay and school infrastructure; says legislative change is required and has discussed a possible constitutional amendment. Sources: Official platform WUSF	No dedicated broad K-12 revenue source is specified in the education platform. Sources: Official platform
Universal vouchers / Family Empowerment Scholarship	Would retain a voucher option but end universal eligibility by means-testing the program for families with demonstrated economic need. Sources: Official issues page Education interview	Strongly supports universal school choice and says “let education money follow the student so parents can choose the best school for their child.” Sources: Official platform

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Voucher-school academic accountability	Explicitly says private schools in the voucher program should meet the same high standards as public schools; he has also called for the same state accountability standards for schools receiving state funding. Sources: Official issues page Lakeland remarks	No proposal identified requiring voucher schools to participate in the same school-level accountability system as district schools. The published philosophy emphasizes parental choice and competition. Sources: Official platform WUSF / Florida Trib
Tuition above the voucher amount	Private schools accepting vouchers should not charge additional tuition to voucher students. Sources: Official issues page Education interview	No restriction identified in the published education plan. Sources: Official platform
Voucher means testing	Yes. Says voucher funding should go to families with demonstrated economic need. Sources: Official issues page	No. Supports the universal-eligibility model and portable education funding. Sources: Official platform
Students with disabilities / specialized services	Says private schools accepting vouchers should provide the same specialized services public schools provide. Sources: Official issues page Education interview	Supports broad parental choice but no detailed proposal is identified requiring participating private schools to accept all students with disabilities or provide services equivalent to district IDEA obligations. Sources: Official platform
Charter schools	Criticizes for-profit charter arrangements and argues publicly funded schools should face comparable rules and accountability. Sources: Official platform Lakeland remarks	Longtime charter-school and school-choice supporter; the Donaldses helped establish Mason Classical Academy and advocate wider private-sector participation in education. Sources: WUSF / Florida Trib
For-profit role in K-12	Skeptical of shifting public education into for-profit institutions; frames public schools as a public good requiring public investment and common obligations. Sources: Official platform	More favorable to market participation. Erika Donalds said their vision would “unleash” capitalism and free-market competition in education and that profit should not be considered a bad word in the education industry. Sources: WUSF / Florida Trib
Early literacy	Supports stronger public-school academics generally, but no equally detailed standalone third-grade literacy program appears in the current platform. Sources: Official platform	A major priority: “Read to Succeed” includes early K-2 identification, science-of-reading preparation, state-funded tutoring for struggling third graders, reading-teacher bonuses and more physical books. Sources: Official platform
Science of reading	No distinctive new statewide science-of-reading initiative identified in the campaign platform. Sources: Official platform	Explicitly proposes training future teachers in proven phonics and reading science. Sources: Official platform
Third-grade reading intervention	No specific new statewide third-grade intervention proposal identified. Sources: Official platform	Proposes free, state-funded tutoring for every third grader struggling with reading. Sources: Official platform
Testing / statewide assessment	No detailed FAST or statewide-testing overhaul identified. Sources: Official platform	Donalds and Erika Donalds have discussed overhauling annual standardized testing, but detailed replacement mechanics have not yet been published. Sources: WUSF / Florida Trib

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A-F school grading system	No clear proposal identified to retain, replace or substantially redesign Florida’s A-F school grading system. Sources: Official platform	Donalds and Erika Donalds have discussed an overhaul of the A-F rubric; no detailed replacement formula is identified in the available campaign materials. Sources: WUSF / Florida Trib
Career and technical education	Emphasizes that strong public schools should offer excellence in academics, the trades and the arts. Sources: WUSF	A major priority. Wants career pathways, industry credentials, dual enrollment, apprenticeships and employer-designed tracks embedded in grades 6-12. Sources: Official platform Student Success Plan
Individual student planning	No comparable statewide individualized roadmap beginning in middle school is identified. Sources: Official platform	Every student would receive a personalized academic/career success plan no later than sixth grade, updated annually with parents and schools. Sources: Student Success Plan
College vs. workforce pathways	Supports academics, trades and broad opportunities in public schools, but has not proposed the same level of statewide restructuring around individualized pathways. Sources: WUSF	College, university, trade/workforce, military, entrepreneurship and hybrid paths are to be equally respected and equally resourced. Sources: Official platform Student Success Plan
LaunchPad / apprenticeships	No equivalent named statewide apprenticeship program identified. Sources: Official platform	LaunchPad Florida would connect high schools and colleges with employers for paid apprenticeships in construction, advanced manufacturing, defense and other fields. Sources: Official platform
Use of tax-credit mechanisms for workforce programs	No comparable proposal identified. Sources: Official platform	Public reporting on the Donalds agenda describes a broader vision of portable public funding and employer-linked pathways; the exact tax-credit mechanics for LaunchPad remain incompletely specified in the campaign’s written plan. Sources: Official platform WUSF / Florida Trib
Curriculum / culture-war issues	Says “Let teachers teach,” “bring back the books,” and “bring back all of history,” criticizing DeSantis-era restrictions and political intervention in curriculum. Sources: WUSF	Says schools should keep “partisan political theories” out of classrooms and focus on reading, math and science; his education philosophy emphasizes parental authority over curriculum decisions. Sources: Official platform
Books / instructional materials	Calls for bringing books back and opposes what he describes as political censorship of public-school materials. Sources: WUSF	His Florida legislative record included expanding mechanisms for citizens to challenge instructional materials; current campaign language stresses parental rights and classroom focus. Sources: WUSF / Florida Trib
Parental rights	Supports family involvement but does not make parental-rights legislation the organizing principle of his K-12 platform. Sources: Official platform	Central principle. Parents are to be co-authors of student plans and should control where education dollars follow their children. Sources: Official platform Student Success Plan

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School infrastructure	Explicitly calls for investment in school infrastructure, classrooms and resources; proposes Tourist Development Tax revenue as one funding source. Sources: Official platform	No broad statewide school-construction or facilities program is identified on the education page. Sources: Official platform
Class size	Broader reinvestment rhetoric supports more teachers and stronger neighborhood schools, but the current official page does not specify a numeric class-size target. Sources: Official platform	No specific class-size proposal identified. Sources: Official platform
Mental-health / student support services	Frames stronger staffing and specialized services as part of restoring public schools; no detailed standalone statewide mental-health formula is identified in the core platform. Sources: Official platform Official issues page	No major K-12 mental-health initiative is identified on the education page. Sources: Official platform
School meals / nutrition	No major standalone K-12 nutrition proposal identified in the core education platform. Sources: Official platform	Healthy Florida proposes removing specified ultra-processed foods, artificial dyes/additives, restricting sugary drinks at school events, posting ingredients and expanding farm-to-school purchasing. Sources: Healthy Florida
School drinking water	No specific statewide school-water initiative identified. Sources: Official platform	Healthy Florida proposes testing school water for lead and other contaminants, publishing results and remediating unsafe systems. Sources: Healthy Florida
Physical education / recess	No major standalone statewide fitness proposal identified. Sources: Official platform	Strong Kids, Strong Florida would revive the Presidential Fitness Test or an equivalent, encourage daily activity/recess and provide school mini-grants. Sources: Strong Kids, Strong Florida
Arts education	Explicitly describes the arts, along with academics and trades, as part of the excellence available in strong public schools. Sources: WUSF	The arts are not a major element of the published education agenda. Sources: Official platform
School choice as a governing principle	Does not propose eliminating choice, but would constrain it through means testing and common obligations while making public schools the strong default institution. Sources: Official issues page Education interview	School choice is foundational: portable public funding, parental purchasing power, multiple providers and individualized pathways are central to the agenda. Sources: Official platform WUSF / Florida Trib
Public-accountability principle	Public money should carry public obligations: comparable standards, specialized services and limits on added tuition. Sources: Official issues page	Public money should empower parents to choose. Accountability is framed more through parental choice, transparency and competition than through identical regulatory structures. Sources: Official platform WUSF / Florida Trib
Basic theory of reform	Strengthen the institution: rebuild public-school capacity, pay teachers more and attach public obligations to publicly financed alternatives. Sources: Official platform	Strengthen the consumer: give families portable resources, customized pathways and a larger marketplace of education providers. Sources: Official platform WUSF / Florida Trib

Primary and major secondary sources

- [David Jolly — Public Education](#)
- [David Jolly — Issues / Saving Our Schools](#)
- [David Jolly — Education Interview](#)
- [WUSF — Jolly “public education renaissance” speech, Oct. 4, 2026](#)
- [Byron Donalds — Education platform](#)
- [Byron Donalds — Student Success Plan](#)
- [Byron Donalds — Healthy Florida](#)
- [Byron Donalds — Strong Kids, Strong Florida](#)
- [WUSF / Florida Trib — Donalds education vision, Aug. 1, 2026](#)

Note: “No clear position identified” means no sufficiently specific position was found in the cited campaign materials and reporting reviewed for this document as of October 6, 2026. It should not be read as evidence that a candidate opposes the policy.