

## Officials consider ads on school buses

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Bill has limits on size, content of marketing

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The Tampa Tribune

Financially strapped school districts may soon have another source of revenue -- advertising on school buses.

The ads would be allowed under a bill approved Wednesday by the state Senate Education Committee, sponsored by Sen. Bill Montford, the Democratic Whip. A companion bill in the House has been referred to several committees but has not yet had a hearing.

Montford estimated, based on the experience of other states, that a school district with 200 buses could expect to raise about \$250,000 a year through the advertisements.

Hillsborough County has 1,400 buses in its school fleet, according to district spokeswoman Linda Cobbe, who said the district spent \$64.3 million last year on student transportation.

Using Montford's estimate, Hillsborough could expect to be able to raise about \$1.75 million a year if it sells school bus advertising.

"With continuing budget cuts, we have to look at every opportunity to increase revenue," Cobbe said.

"The school board will approach this revenue-generating opportunity cautiously and deliberatively, considering the pros and cons of placing advertising on school buses."

The bill calls for half the money raised to be used to offset district transportation costs, with 40 percent for discretionary spending within the district and 10 percent for driver's education programs.

School districts are bracing for large-scale budget cuts as legislators move to close a \$3.75 billion state revenue shortfall, plus an additional \$1 billion needed to shore up a reserve fund.

In Hillsborough County alone, the governor's proposed 10 percent decrease in school spending would result in more than \$100 million in cuts. Although legislators are struggling to reduce those cuts, their current proposals would result in cuts of nearly 7 percent.

Montford's advertising bill limits the size of the ads to 2 feet wide and 6 feet long, and gives districts guidance on limiting the content -- banning, for example, ads for alcohol or cigarettes.

"The intent is to make sure the integrity of the buses is not compromised," said Montford, who is chief executive officer of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents. "We are very, very conscious of the integrity of the buses, not only from a safety standpoint, but from a public presentation standpoint as well."

Montford said the limits are intended to ensure that "school buses continue to look like school buses."

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Photo credit: MEDIA ADVERTISING IN MOTION

Photo: State legislators are considering allowing ads on school buses. Hillsborough schools could be expected to bring in about \$1.75 million a year, according to estimates.

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