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Eight Years of Reform

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Florida's public school student population is large, fast-growing, and contains an increasing percentage of children from low-income, minority families. With more than 2.5 million students, it is the fourth-largest public school student population in the country, just after those of California, Texas, and New York. With an increase of 13 percent in the 6-year period from 1997 until 2003, its growth rate is only rivaled by those of two much smaller states, Nevada and Arizona.[1] Forty-six percent of its students are African American, Hispanic, or American Indian, the seventh-highest concentration of minority public school students in the country, just after New Mexico, Texas, California, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arizona (not including D.C.). In addition, 46 percent of Florida students are eligible for free or reduced

1. Throughout this chapter, school years are identified by the year in which they end. Also, unless indicated otherwise, the source of the data cited comes from the Florida Department of Education.

price lunch, a common measure of poverty, and 7.5 percent are English language learners.[2]

Given the unique challenge that the Floridian education system faces, state officials might have accepted as inevitable the below-average performance of its students in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the so-called Nation's Report Card. In 1996, Florida 4th and 8th graders math NAEP scores were among the bottom fourth of the participating states. In 1998, Florida 4th and 8th graders reading NAEP scores were among the bottom fifth and seventh of the participating states, respectively. But, as a co-founder of the first charter school in Florida, Governor Jeb Bush took office in January of 1999 on a platform of education reform and committed to changing the status quo. "We need to transform our education system to focus on the fundamentals. We no longer can assume, tragically, that some students just can't learn," stated Bush early on in his 1998 gubernatorial campaign.

The new governor made education his top priority. After only a few months in office, Jeb Bush signed into law one of the boldest pieces of accountability legislation in the country, the A+ Plan for Education, that raised standards, provided increased school accountability, boosted funding levels, and offered scholarships to students in chronically under-performing schools. The A+ Plan also held students accountable by imposing tighter graduation standards and requiring an acceptable level of performance in order to pass from third to fourth grade.

Over the past few years, parents have seen their children's education choices significantly expand by way of charter schools, virtual schools, and several path-breaking voucher programs. Florida has created a statewide initiative, known as "Just Read, Florida!," to reinforce reading instruction, providing training for educators and parents alike.

2. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, The NCES Common Core of Data (2003 school year).

The state has also reduced the barriers to the teaching profession, while raising the standards of what teachers should know and introducing a highly innovative merit pay system that rewards outstanding teachers. Meanwhile, voters have approved constitutional amendments mandating a voluntary, free pre-kindergarten program, and a reduction in class size. Along with these innovations has come additional state funding. For the 2007 school year, the legislature has appropriated $18.26 billion of state and local funds to be directed towards K–12 education, an increase of almost $8 billion, or 73 percent, since 1999.

How effective have these initiatives been in raising student performance? In the chapters that follow, each of these policy changes will be subjected to in-depth analysis. But, an overview of trends in student achievement and graduation rates suggests the reforms have had positive consequences.

Changes in Student Performance

In Florida, student performance is officially tracked by ascertaining student achievement on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Using these data, it is possible to determine the gains students in Florida made between the years 2001 and 2006, the period for which strict comparisons can be readily made. Figures 1a and 1b show the trends in developmental test scores for that time period in math and reading, respectively.

Developmental scores range from zero to about 3,000 across grades 3 through 10. As can be seen in Figures 1a and 1b, the scores rise from one grade level to the next, for the obvious reason that students are developmentally more advanced and have had the advantage of an additional year of schooling. The more interesting information contained in these Figures is the change from the beginning to the end of this period at each grade level. With the exception of 10th grade, there has been an increment in student performance in both math and reading. The biggest gains have been in the elementary

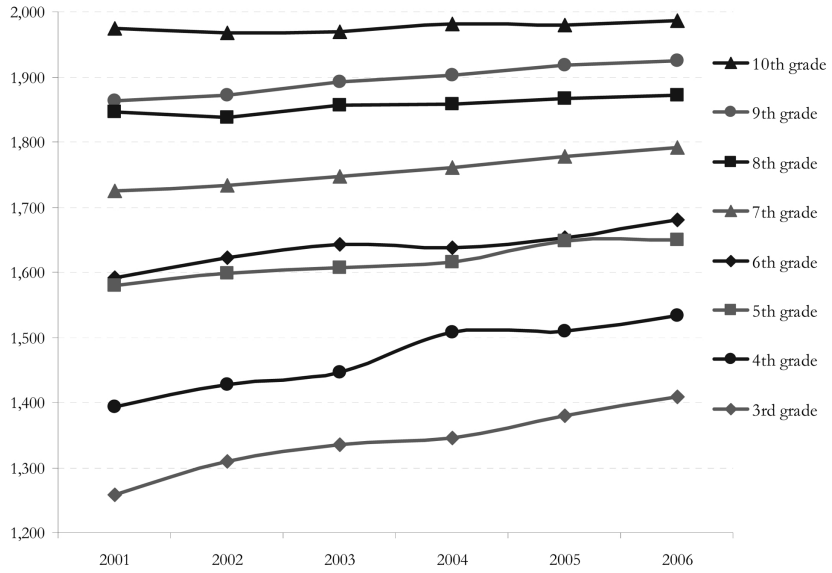

Figure 1a. FCAT Developmental Scale Scores, Math, 2001–2006
Source: Statewide Comparisons of Math FCAT Scores from the Florida Department of Education.

years. In Florida, as elsewhere in the nation, the large gains realized in the early grades have resulted in more modest gains in the middle schools and close to no gains in the high schools, a topic explored in the chapters that follow.[3]

Minority students have improved at a faster pace than white children have over the 2001–2005 time period.[4] As can be seen in Figure 2, African American and Hispanic students made more progress in math and reading than their white peers made at all grade levels, except for in the 10th grade.

High school graduation rates have also trended upwards between 1999 and 2005, despite the introduction of more stringent graduation

3. See chapters 5 and 7 by E. Don Hirsch, Jr. and Diane Ravitch, respectively.
4. For more on the closing of the achievement gap, see John E. Chubb's chapter 4.

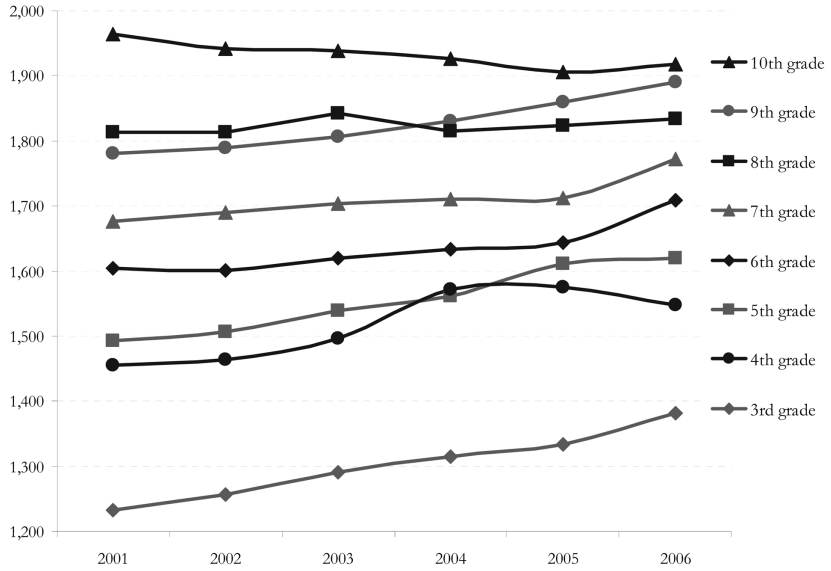

Figure 1b. FCAT Developmental Scale Scores, Reading, 2001–2006
Source: Statewide Comparisons of Reading FCAT Scores from the Florida Department of Education.

requirements (see Figure 3). In calculating graduation rates, I count as graduates only those who earned a standard diploma within their four years of their first enrollment in 9th grade (adjusting for transfers in and out of the state), which excludes those who earned a General Educational Development (GED) credential or received some alternative recognition.[5] The percentage graduating has increased from 55 percent in 1999 to 66 percent in 2005.

5. GED recipients, students receiving a standard diploma through a GED exit-option program, and students receiving special diplomas are not included as graduates in this calculation. In other words, only students who passed the FCAT and completed the core academic curriculum are included in the numerator. Several studies show that earning a GED credential is not equivalent to earning a regular high school diploma. See for example Stephen Cameron and James Heckman, "The Nonequivalence of High School Equivalents," *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1993): 1–47, and Richard J. Murnane, John B. Willett, and John H. Tyler, "Who Benefits from Obtaining a GED? Evidence from High School and Beyond," *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, vol. 82, no. 1 (February 2000): 23–37.

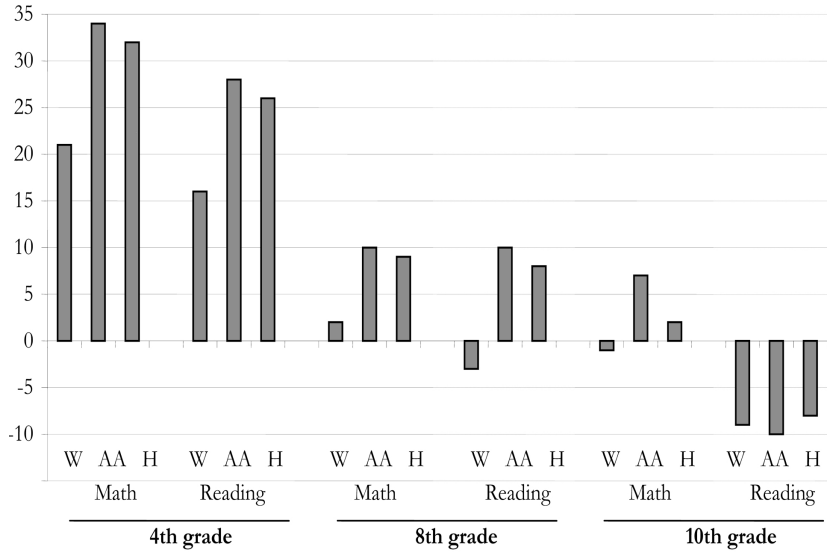

Figure 2. Percentage Change in Mean FCAT Scale Scores from 2001 until 2005 for White, African American, and Hispanic Students, by Subject and Selected Grades
Source: FCAT Student Performance Results, Demographic Report, 2000–2005. Available at http://www.fcatresults.com/demog/ (Accessed in March of 2006)

Florida's educational progress is also evident in the trends of the average NAEP scale scores, especially in the elementary grades (see Figures 4a and 4b). While in 1996 and 1998 Florida 4th graders scored below the U.S. average, by 2005 they had surpassed the nation's mean score in both reading and math. The performance trend of Florida 8th graders mirrors more closely that of the nation as a whole; showing gains in math and losing ground in reading.

Exactly which of the elements in the Florida school reform movement are responsible for these gains in test scores and graduation rates is difficult to discern, but, certainly, the A+ Accountability Plan (hereinafter referred to as A+) is the innovation that has received the greatest public attention.

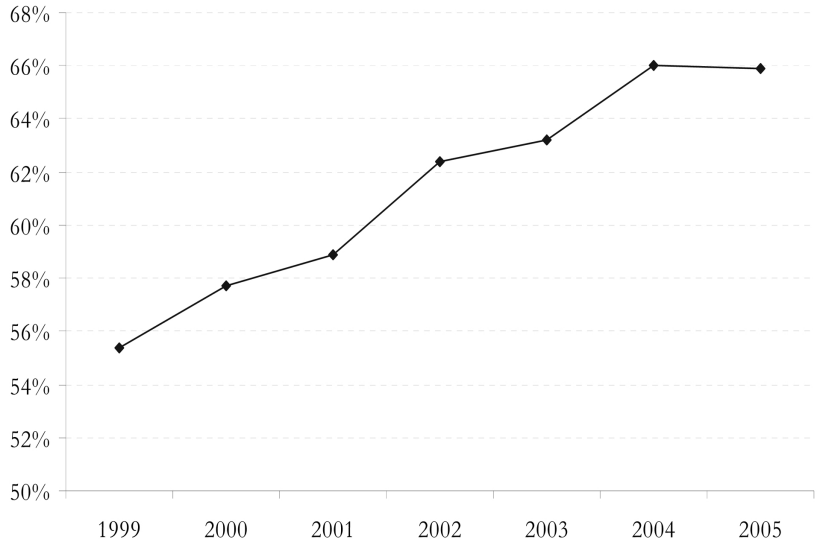

Figure 3. Florida High School Graduation Rates, 1999–2005
Source: "Florida Grad Rate Cohort Classifications: Diploma Types in Adjusted Cohort," an internal document from the Education Information & Accountability Services from the Florida Department of Education.

The Accountability Plan—The A+ Plan for Education

Although A+ was a major innovation, accountability had long been a focus of school reformers in Florida. Before its enactment in 1999, Florida already had in place a statewide assessment program based on student achievement criteria. This program identified schools with low-achieving students as critically low-performing and targeted them for special funding and programming. High school students were required to pass the High School Competency Test (HSCT) to graduate, and a new test aligned to Florida's 1996 curriculum framework, the FCAT, was being administered to students in grades 4 (reading), 5 (math), and 8 and 10 (reading and math).[6]

6. The Sunshine State Standards (SSS) are the curriculum framework adopted by Florida in 1996.

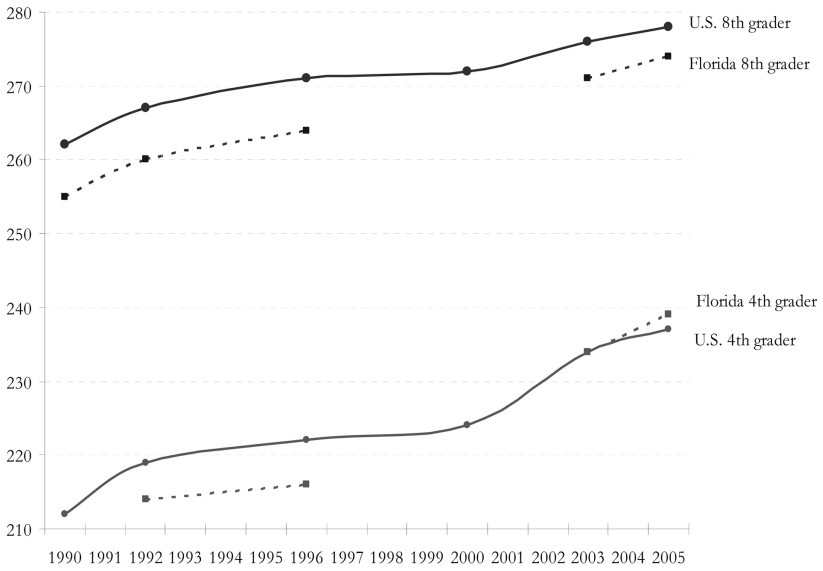

Figure 4a. Florida and U.S. Average NAEP Scale Scores, Math, 1990–2005

A+ built on the existing accountability program, while substantially raising the bar of expectations and providing additional resources. It expanded testing to be able to track progress. It increased student accountability by ending social promotion and by imposing a more rigorous high school exit exam. Furthermore, it created an intuitive school grading system and set clear incentives for schools to improve and succeed.[7]

Testing

A+ mandated testing in math and reading at all grades 3 through 10. It expanded the FCAT to include both norm-referenced and standards-based assessments in reading and math. And, it developed a system for calculating the academic growth of each student over a year's time.

7. For more on Florida's accountability system, see Paul E. Peterson's chapter 3.

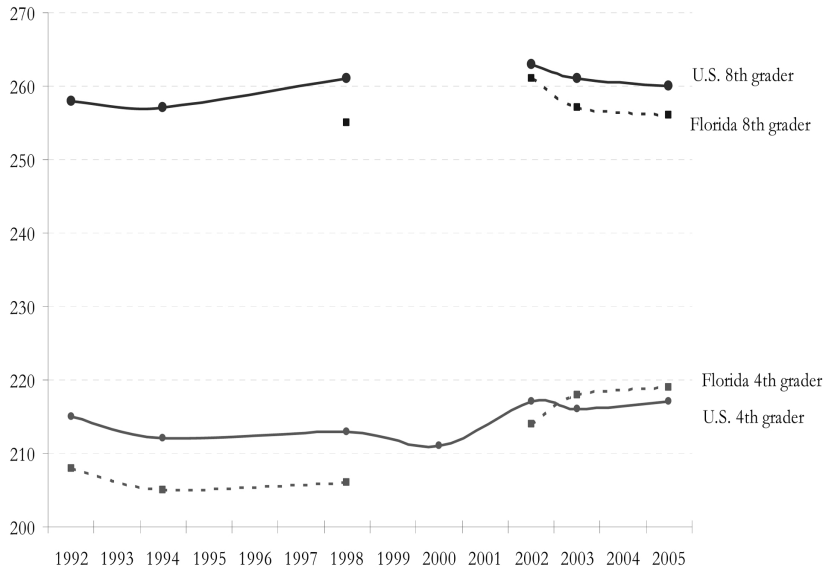

Figure 4b. Florida and U.S. Average NAEP Scale Scores, Reading, 1992–2005
Note: Pre-1998 scores are of assessments without accommodations permitted.
Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

By 2002, Florida was able to track individual student progress across grades 3 through 10.

To collect and facilitate the analysis of the data generated, Florida created a data warehouse, providing decision-makers and other stakeholders with the necessary tools to evaluate the status and progress of the state's education system.[8] By tracking students' progress over time and across different educational environments, the data warehouse allows for studies of the impact of specific programs or policies on student performance. To examine the efficiency of its public schools, Florida also created the "Return on Investment" web site, which links performance with the financial resources allocated to each school.

8. Florida's data warehouse is known by the name of PK-20 Educational Data Warehouse (EDW).

Student Accountability

A+ mandated that "No student may be assigned to a grade level based solely on age or other factors that constitute social promotion."[9] What this means is that only those students who perform above a designated academic level are promoted to the next grade. Those students who perform below that level stay in the same grade for a second year. The specific levels of performance to be met at the end of each grade are up to each school board to decide, but the state does have specific requirements regarding 3rd-graders. Starting in 2002, Florida has required the retention of 3rd-grade students who fail to achieve a level two (out of five) in their reading test, unless they meet the requirements for a good-cause exemption. The state requires not only that these students be retained but also that they be offered remedial instruction.

With regards to the graduation requirements, the obligatory high school exit exam was changed from the HSCT, a minimum competency test focused on basic skills below the high school level, to the grade 10 FCAT, a standards-based exam Florida officials regarded as appropriate for high school students.[10] The class of 2003 was the first required to attain passing scores on the FCAT to graduate with a regular diploma. High school students are given six opportunities to pass the test. Currently, those students who have not passed it after three attempts are allowed to substitute designated SAT or ACT scores for the required FCAT scores and still graduate with a regular diploma.

9. Florida Statute, Title XLVIII, Chapter 1008.25, Section (6): Elimination of Social Promotion.

10. Williamson M. Evers and Paul Clopton analyze Florida's math standards and proficiency levels in chapter 6.

School Accountability

Under A+ each school is given a grade, on an "A" to "F" scale. Since 2002, school grades have been based on both the students' academic progress from one year to the next as well as their level of achievement. Unlike the pre-existing accountability system, A+ provided funding to substantially reward high performing and fast improving schools. Schools receiving an "A" and those improving at least one grade level are given some freedom from regulation and a bonus of up to $100 per student. In 1999 alone, 319 schools received about $30 million in awards. By 2005, the number of schools rewarded had risen to 1,502 and the awards summed to more than $134 million.

In addition to the carrots, A+ also created some sticks. Schools receiving an "F" two out of four consecutive years are subject to state takeover and, up until recently, their students were offered a scholarship to attend a private school or a higher performing public school of their choice. In January of 2006, Florida's Supreme Court declared the Opportunity Scholarship Program unconstitutional, affecting more than 700 students who were at the time using one of these scholarships to attend a private school and eliminating one of the most effective threats A+ had created to improve chronically failing schools.[11]

School Choice Programs

Even though in 2006 the Florida Supreme Court put an end to the school vouchers offered to students in low-performing schools, other programs offering school choice survived the court decision.[12]

11. For more on the Opportunity Scholarship Program see Paul E. Peterson's chapter 11.

12. Caroline M. Hoxby and Sonali Murarka explore Florida's tapestry of school choice programs in chapter 10.

Charter Schools

Charter schools are privately managed, publicly funded schools that operate under a performance contract. In exchange for being held accountable to a higher degree, charters are free from most regulations traditional public schools must conform with and consequently have more flexibility to innovate and provide alternative curricula. Generally, charters are open to all students within the district.

The charter school movement in Florida rapidly expanded after Jeb Bush opened the first one in 1996. Ten years later, 333 charter schools, serving a student population of more than 92,000 students, are in operation. A supportive political, financial, and legal structure led to this proliferation. Unlike in most states, Florida's charter schools are given at least 95 percent of the per student operational funding received by traditional public schools, are eligible for capital outlay funds from the state, and are not capped in number.

Virtual Education

Since 1997, Florida has offered free online courses to all students in grades 6 through 12, regardless whether they are in public, private, or home schools. Approximately 30,000 students enrolled in one of the more than 80 middle and high school internet-based courses offered in 2005–06 either to substitute or supplement a traditional classroom education.[13] In addition, two K–8 virtual schools have been in operation since 2003–04 as part of a pilot program, which became permanent in the 2006 legislative session. These schools use distance learning technology to deliver instruction to full-time students. As any other public school, virtual schools must provide course content that conforms to the Sunshine State Standards, administer the FCAT, and

13. Only about 4 percent of the 2004–05 students were taking all of their high school courses from the virtual school, the rest usually take only one or two courses at a time.

hire certified teachers. Students are provided with free computers, software, and subsidized Internet access; eligibility is limited to students who attended a Florida public school in the previous year; and by 2006 both schools had already reached the 500 student limit initially imposed by the pilot program.

The McKay Scholarship Program

Since 2000, the McKay Scholarship, a publicly funded voucher program, allows parents of students with disabilities to choose the best academic environment—public or private, religious or secular—for their children.[14] For the 2006 school year, there were more than 16,800 students using a McKay scholarship, which averaged $6,897, to attend one of the 740 participating private schools.

The Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program

Since 2002, Florida has had yet another program expanding parental school choice. The Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program (CTC) provides an income tax credit for corporations that contribute money to nonprofit scholarship-funding organizations awarding scholarships to students from families with limited financial resources. Students need to qualify for free or reduced price lunch under the National School Lunch Act in order to be eligible. The scholarships to attend a private school are worth $3,500 or tuition plus the cost of books and transportation, whichever is less. The scholarships to attend a public school in an adjacent district are worth $500 for transportation. For the 2006 school year, there were close to 14,100 low-income students attending one of the 895 participating private schools, each using one of these up to $3,500 privately funded scholarships.

14. The pilot program started in 1999, but it only had 2 students.

Making Reading a Priority

Consistent with the federal Reading First program created by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, in 2002 Florida established a statewide reading initiative with the aim of ensuring that all children read at or above grade level by 2012. "Just Read, Florida!," as the initiative is called, provides funding for reading coaches, makes available free reading diagnostic assessments to districts for all grades from kindergarten through 12, and provides training for educators and parents alike. "Just Read, Florida!" instructs principals on how to make reading a priority in the schools, advises parents on how to best support their children's progress, and offers training for teachers that the state categorizes as based on the latest research-based methods and strategies for providing solid reading instruction. The initiative's early efforts focused almost exclusively in the elementary grades, but they have expanded to middle and high school since then.

Recruiting and Rewarding Quality Teachers

In addition to providing training programs in reading instruction, the state has taken a variety of other steps towards enhancing the quality of its teaching force while exploring innovative ways of recruiting more people into the classrooms. With the aim to attract and retain high quality educators, the Sunshine State has raised the standards for teacher certification, created a temporary alternative certification credential, created alternative paths to certification, and introduced a merit pay system that rewards performance.[15]

15. Terry M. Moe explores best strategies to recruit an effective teaching force in chapter 8, while Eric A. Hanushek examines the design of teacher compensation systems in chapter 9.

Professional Certification

In 2000, the basic skill test, one of the three tests teachers must pass to become certified, was changed to be in alignment with Florida's 1996 curriculum framework (the Sunshine State Standards). This was done to ensure that teachers are competent in the performance standards that students are expected to achieve. The General Knowledge Test (GKT) is the new basic skill test, which measures teachers' competency in math, reading, English, and writing. The other two required tests measure general knowledge of pedagogy and professional practices (the Professional Education Test), and mastery of the specific content area for which certification is sought (the Subject Area Examination).

Alternative, Temporary Certification Credential

In order to mitigate Florida's pressing need for new teachers, the state has reduced the barriers into the teaching profession by creating a temporary alternative certification credential. This certificate allows career-changers and college graduates of non-education programs to teach full-time for three years. In order to obtain the temporary certificate one only needs to hold a bachelor's degree and demonstrate mastery of the subject that one chooses to teach. This certificate is non-renewable. Teachers are expected to complete the requirements for a professional certificate if they wish to remain in the profession.

Merit Pay

Florida made national news with its teacher pay-for-performance program. As a *Washington Post* article explained, the State Board of Education proposed a plan requiring "all school districts in Florida to identify the top 10 percent of each variety of teacher and award them a 5 percent salary supplement. For an educator earning the average

teacher salary in Florida of $41,578, that amounts to just over $2,000."[16]

Florida's law has required performance pay for teachers since 2002, but because compliance has been limited, the State Board of Education recently decided to develop clear rules for the districts to follow. The result was Effectiveness Compensation (E-Comp) plan aimed to ensure that all districts implement the law as it was intended, rewarding, retaining, and attracting high quality teachers.

In the 2006 legislative session a slightly modified version of E-Comp, the Special Teachers are Rewarded (STAR) plan, was included in the budget. STAR, just like the original E-Comp, has two components. First, it requires that all teachers have a portion of their salary based on the academic improvement their students make and on other approved performance appraisal factors. And secondly, it requires that outstanding teachers receive a supplement of at least 5 percent of their base salary. No arduous application process or specific credentials are required for being eligible for the bonus. STAR raised the percentage of teachers to be rewarded from 10 to 25 percent and it provided $147.5 million in funds.

Constitutional Amendments

Amendments to the Florida Constitution have spawned numerous policy changes in recent years. The document has been amended no less than 80 times since 1980. In the Sunshine State, amendments to the Constitution can be proposed by legislative action, by recommendation of the Constitutional Revision Commission or the Taxation and Budget Commission, via a constitutional convention, or via a ballot initiative process.[17] A simple majority of votes in referendums, held

16. Peter Whoriskey, "Florida to Link Teacher Pay to Students' Test Scores," *Washington Post*, March 22, 2006.

17. Article XI of the Constitution specifies the amendment processes. There are five ways in which an amendment to the Florida Constitution can be proposed: (1)

simultaneously with the general elections, ratifies proposed amendments. The public education section of the Florida Constitution (Article IX, Section 1) has been modified three times since 1998, expanding the obligations of the state.

Declaring Education a Fundamental Right

In 1998, an amendment proposed by the Constitution Revision Commission altered the language of Florida's education clause, making it the constitutional duty of the State to provide a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, high-quality education to all children within its borders. It was on the basis of this language that the Opportunity Scholarship Program private school voucher option was declared unconstitutional by the Florida Supreme Court in 2006.

Voluntary Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program

In 2002, a citizen-initiated constitutional amendment required the state to provide pre-kindergarten learning opportunities for every four-year-old in Florida. The Voluntary Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program (VPK) was created as a result. VPK allows four-year-olds to attend, at no cost to their parents, a pre-K program during the school year or the summer in one of the approved providers. In the 2006 school year, which was the program's first year in operation, more than 100,000 children were enrolled in pre-K programs in one of the 3,532 participating private centers and schools, 585 participating public schools, 501 participating faith-based providers, and 119 participating family home centers. It remains yet to be determined how many children

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by the state legislature with a three-fifths vote of the membership of both houses, (2) by recommendation of the Constitutional Revision Commission, (3) by recommendation of the Taxation and Budget Commission, (4) via a constitutional convention called by the majority of voters in an election, and (5) via a ballot initiative process. Amendments proposed via all five methods must be ratified by the voters in a referendum before they become a part of the Constitution.

enrolled in the summer program. For 2005–06, the state appropriated $387 million to fund VPK and be able to pay the providers the stipulated $2,500 per child for the 147,000 youngsters that are estimated to participate in the school year and summer programs.[18]

Class-Size Reduction (and the 65 Percent Classroom Spending Rule)

Another citizen-initiated constitutional amendment passed in 2002 required that the legislature provide enough funding to reduce class sizes by the 2011 school year. According to this amendment, the number of students in core-curricula courses should not exceed 18 in pre-kindergarten through grade 3, 22 in grades 4 through 8, and 25 in grades 9 through 12.

Since the implementation of this amendment started in 2003, the average size of classes has dropped four students (from 23 to 19 in 2005–06) for pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade, three students (from 24 to 21) for 4th through 8th grade, and half a student (from 24.1 to 23.6) for 9th through 12th grade. These three-year reductions have come at a price. About $3 billion of state funds have been spent for this purpose, and this is just a small portion of the estimated fiscal impact of the class size reduction amendment. The Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research estimated in 2002 that the state's cumulative costs through 2010 would range from $20 billion to $27.5 billion, in 2002 dollars.[19]

In the 2006 legislative session, some legislators attempted to weaken the class-size requirements in exchange for the implementation of an alternative education policy. The proposed bill, if it had passed the senate and had been approved by the majority of the voters in November of 2006, would have required school districts to spend

18. Chester E. Finn Jr. examines the strengths and challenges of Florida's voluntary pre-kindergarten program in chapter 12.

19. Office of Economic and Demographic Research, Florida Legislature, "Fiscal Impact Statements," June 27, 2002 Revenue Estimating Conference.

at least 65 percent of their operating budgets on classroom expenses such as teacher salaries, computers, and textbooks. In exchange, the class-size amendment would have been relaxed. Compliance with the class-size requirements would have been determined by school district averages rather than for each individual classroom, thereby allowing administrators greater flexibility in the allocation of staff resources.[20] The costs and benefits of the mandated class size requirement and the failed classroom spending proposal are explored in the upcoming chapters.[21]

Expenditures

Most of the above-mentioned education reforms and policies introduced in Florida in the last few years have come with additional financial support. A+, for example, provided funding to supply technical and financial assistance to "D" and "F" schools, to award high performing and improving schools, to help students read on grade level, to help students meet promotion standards, to help teachers meet high standards, and to reward teachers for National Board Certification, among others.[22]

For the 2007 school year, the legislature has appropriated $18.26 billion of state and local funds for K–12 operational expenditures. This means an increase of almost $8 billion, or 73 percent, since 1999. Because enrollment has also grown significantly during this period, the per-pupil allocation augment is a more modest 51 percent. Figure

20. Although this bill was not passed, another bill introducing some flexibility in the compliance of the constitutional requirement did. Since the 2006 legislative session, each teacher assigned to a classroom is to be used in the calculation of class sizes.

21. Herbert J. Walberg analyses the effects and implementation difficulties of class size reduction in chapter 13 and Paul T. Hill and Marguerite Roza study alternative strategies to focus resources on the classroom in chapter 14.

22. Other additional funds were distributed for school safety programs, for text books and instructional materials, and to cover shortfalls in construction funds.

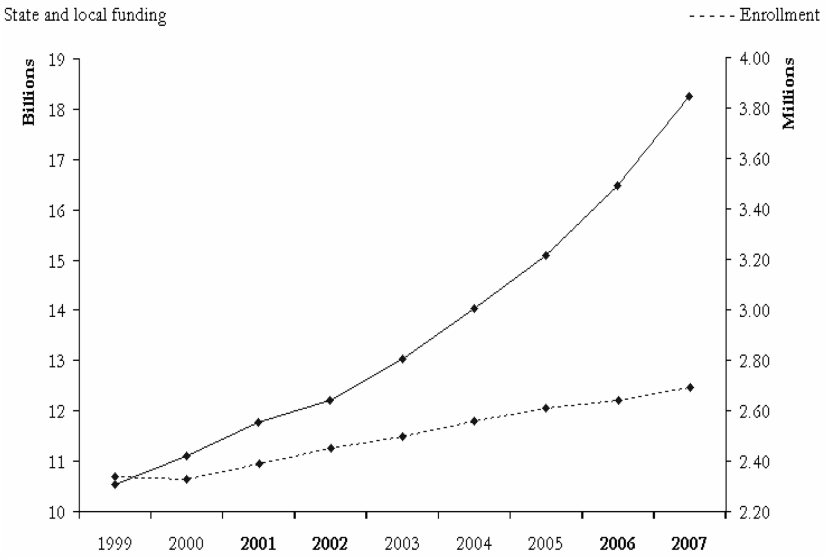

Figure 5. K–12 State and Local Funding and Enrollment, 1999–2007
Source: Florida Education Finance Program Calculations from the Office of Funding and Financial Reporting of the Florida Department of Education.
Note: 2006 data are fourth, not final, calculations; and 2007 data are from the final conference report.

5 shows the amount of local and state funds directed towards K–12 in the last 8 years (left side of the graph), as well as the number of students enrolled (right side of the graph).

Despite those increases, Florida's school reforms have been executed without greatly increasing financial costs for the state, an approach that is in keeping with the traditions of the Sunshine State, which has long attracted Americans in their retirement years. Almost 18 percent of its population is 65 years old or over, as compared to the national average of 12 percent. Many of these retirees live on fixed incomes and resist tax increases. For example, Florida is one of the few states without personal income taxes. As a result, Florida has never been among the top education spending states in the country, and besides the funding increases of the last years, this remains true

now. Florida's per pupil expenditures were below the national average in 1999 and were still below average by 2003, the last year for which national data are available. According to *Education Week*, Florida's per-pupil expenditures adjusted for regional cost differences were of $5,829 for the 1999 school year and of $6,439 for the 2003 school year, while the national average were of $6,168 and $8,041, respectively.[23]

The Future of School Reform

In the last eight years, Jeb Bush's administration has introduced a wide number of innovations in the Floridian education system. It has held schools and students accountable for their performance, rewarding or penalizing them accordingly. It has expanded the charter school movement, allowed for virtual schools to be formed, and created school choice programs for a variety of underserved populations. Through the "Just Read, Florida!" initiative, it has made reading a priority in the schools, providing training and funding to reinforce reading instruction. With the intent to attract, retain, and reward high quality teachers, it has raised teacher certification standards, reduced the barriers into the profession, and proposed a groundbreaking merit pay system. Meanwhile, Floridian voters have, through constitutional amendments, mandated free access to pre-kindergarten programs and the reduction of class sizes. Spending levels have increased and the trends of student achievement and graduation rates are upwards.

In addition, the 2006 legislature approved a bill commonly known as A++ with a wide range of education reform policy initiatives. These initiatives include middle and high school reform, revision of each one of the Sunshine State Standards (paralleling the revision of the Reading/Language Arts standards that is still in process), and dif-

23. *Education Week*, "Quality Counts 2000: Who Should Teach?," vol.19, no. 18 (April 2001); and, *Education Week*, "Quality Counts at 10: A Decade of Standards-Based Education," vol. 25, no. 17 (January 2006).

ferentiated pay for both instructional personnel and school-based administrators. Although much has been done, many challenges remain ahead. Whoever holds the Governor's office next will have to make education a top priority if Florida's education system is to continue improving.

As one of the pioneering states in education reform, Florida's experience provides a myriad of valuable lessons of what does and does not work for those concerned with improving the public school system in America. In the chapters that follow, each of the policies introduced in Florida in the last eight years will be subjected to in-depth analysis. We will find out how a state with such a complex population as Florida has managed, through innovative avenues, to increase its student performance even though its per pupil expenditures remained below the national average. And we will be provided with numerous suggestions as to ways in which education reform can continue to be moved forward in the years to come.