

The Foundation for Educational Choice
STATE RESEARCH

Reforms With Results

What Oklahoma can learn from Florida's K-12 education revolution

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Executive Summary

Florida lawmakers began a comprehensive education reform effort in 1999 combining accountability, transparency, and parental choice with other far-reaching changes. In March 2010, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released new results showing just how successful Florida's reforms have been and how futile Oklahoma's efforts have proved.

This study documents how the latest NAEP results strengthen the case for Florida-style reforms. In 2009, some groups of traditionally underperforming students from Florida—including that state's Hispanic students—widened their leads over the statewide average score for *all Oklahoma students*.

This report explains in some detail why Florida's reforms, while benefiting all students, have been especially beneficial to disadvantaged students. For example, Florida's method for grading schools looks not only at students' overall performance and overall gains, but also considers gains among the 25 percent of students with the lowest scores. Importantly, those 25 percent of students are counted in all three categories, providing a strong incentive for schools to help their lowest-performing pupils.

This paper details the key components of Florida's K-12 education reform strategy and explains why the adoption of the Florida reforms in Oklahoma would aid all children, especially disadvantaged students.

Key findings include:

- Florida's reading achievement surged over the last decade, while Oklahoma demonstrated stagnation in achievement during the same period.
- Florida students went from being more than a grade level behind Oklahoma's average in 1998 to almost a grade level ahead in 2009.
- Florida's Hispanic students scored about two grade levels below Oklahoma's average for all students in 1998 but about a half-grade level ahead in 2009.
- Oklahoma Hispanic students' average score has improved by 3 points since 1998, while Florida's Hispanic students have improved by 25 points—roughly equivalent to two-and-a-half grade levels' worth of progress.
- In 2009, Florida Hispanic students outscored or tied the statewide average for all students in Oklahoma and 30 other states.
- In 1998, Florida students eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch scored 29 points below the average for all students in Oklahoma. As of 2009, these subgroups are tied.



- After a decade of strong progress, Florida’s children with disabilities now score substantially higher than those in Oklahoma.
- Florida’s schools improved their Florida Department of Education Grade Rankings despite the fact that the state strengthened grading criteria three separate times.
- Florida’s school grading method balances overall scores and student learning gains while emphasizing progress among low-achieving students.



Introduction

Reform is never finished and success is never final. A perpetual cycle of reform will lead to sustained improvement for the long term.

-Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush

Florida Leads the Way on K-12 Education Reforms

Beginning in 1999, the Florida state legislature began adopting far-reaching education reforms. These reforms included grading schools with clearly comprehensible labels—letter grades A, B, C, D, and F—and expanding school choice by creating a tax credit scholarship program and the nation’s largest voucher program. Florida also became the nation’s leader in virtual education—offering classes online through the Florida Virtual School. In addition, Florida’s lawmakers curtailed the social promotion of illiterate elementary students, reformed reading instruction, and created multiple paths for alternative teacher certification. The results, specifically from national reading exam data, speak volumes.

Meanwhile, the reading scores of Oklahoma students over the past decade have failed to improve; they actually have declined. This drop came in spite of a 42.8 percent increase in the inflation-adjusted per-pupil spending in Oklahoma between 1998 and 2007.¹ Oklahoma students also made less progress in math than the national average and suffered an even larger decline in eighth-grade reading than in fourth-grade reading. Oklahomans have suffered from a malady all too common in the United States: paying more for K-12 schools without receiving the benefit of improved student learning. The state desperately needs far-reaching changes to its education system.

This paper makes the case for enacting Florida’s K-12 education reforms in Oklahoma by comparing the critically important fourth-grade reading scores of both states. You will see below why Florida’s scores should inspire action in Oklahoma. The results only reinforce what had already been a compelling case: The actual proves the possible. Florida has radically improved student performance, especially among disadvantaged students. Oklahoma can and must do the same.



Why Oklahoma Should Follow Florida’s Lead

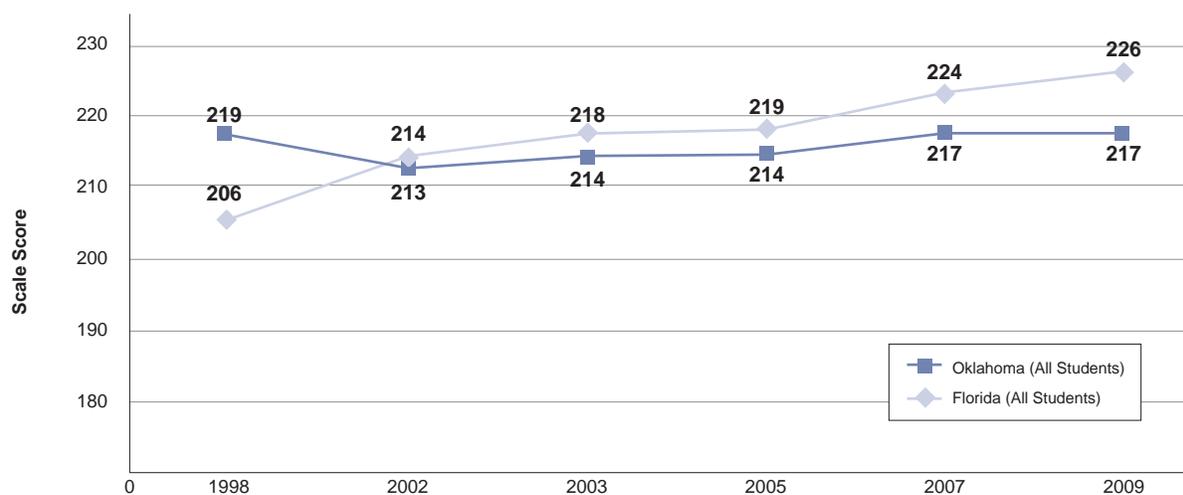
In March 2010, the National Center for Educational Statistics released the reading exam results of the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP—also known as “The Nation’s Report Card”). Of all the NAEP exams, education officials pay the closest attention to the fourth-grade reading exam. Literacy acquisition involves developmentally crucial periods—reading is broadly similar to learning a foreign language in that it is easier to do when you are young. Educators summarize this phenomenon with an expression: In grades K-3, you are *learning to read*. After third grade, you are *reading to learn*. If you cannot read, you cannot learn.

Figure 1 presents the scale scores from NAEP’s fourth-grade reading exams for both Oklahoma and Florida between 1998 and 2009. Florida’s reforms began the year after the 1998 NAEP; prior to this time the state’s reading scores had been low and flat. For the charts presented in this report, bear in mind that a 10-point gain equals approximately a grade level’s worth of learning.

Florida students went from being more than a grade level behind the Oklahoma average in 1998 to almost a grade level ahead in 2009.

Figure 1

Fourth-grade reading scores for all students in Florida and Oklahoma (NAEP, 1998-2009)



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Notice that in 1998, the year before the Florida reform efforts began, Oklahoma students out-scored the average student score in Florida by 13 points on the NAEP reading exam. Florida’s score



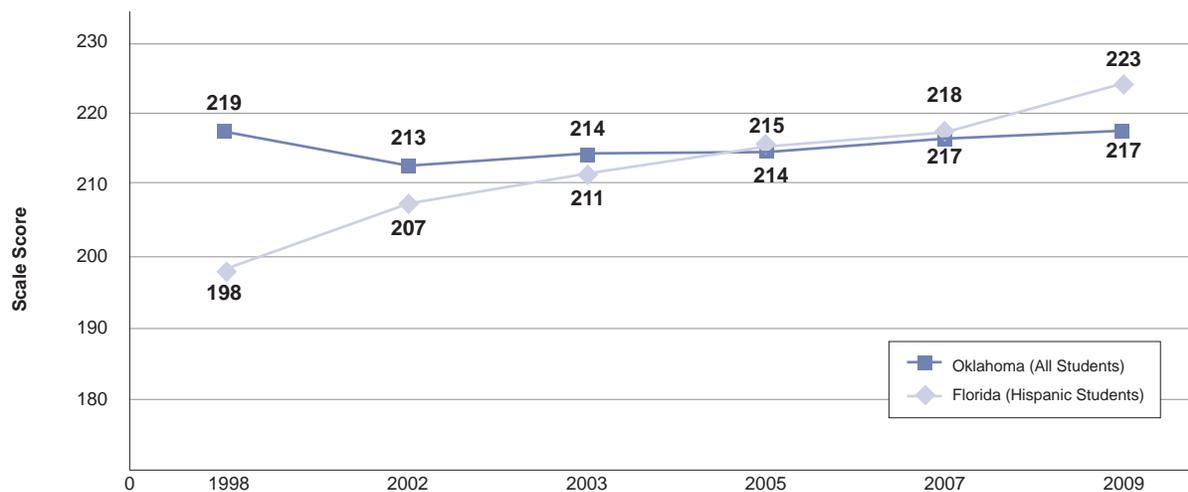
that year was near the bottom of the rankings.² In 2009, however, the average Florida student scored 9 points higher than the average Oklahoma student—almost a grade level higher.

Figure 2 presents fourth-grade reading NAEP data comparing Florida Hispanic students with the statewide average for all students in Oklahoma. In 1998, the average Oklahoma student stood head and shoulders above the average Florida Hispanic student—about two grade levels higher. In 2009, however, Florida’s Hispanic students held a six-point lead over the statewide average for all students in Oklahoma.

Florida’s Hispanic students scored about two grade levels below the Oklahoma average for all students in 1998, but about a half-grade level ahead in 2009.

Figure 2

Fourth-grade reading scores for Florida’s Hispanic students and all Oklahoma students (NAEP, 1998-2009)



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

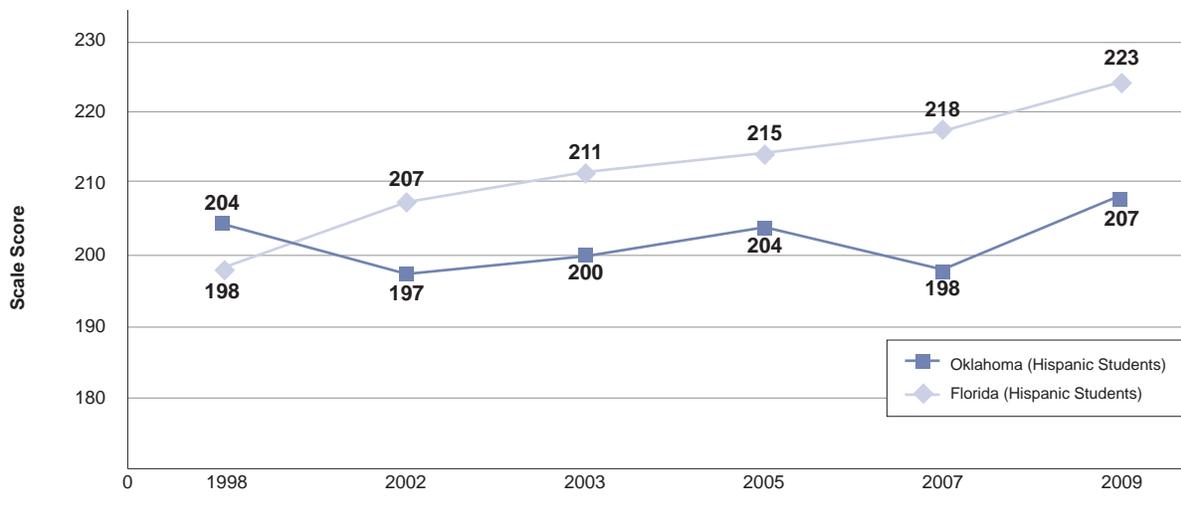
Figure 3 (next page) compares the academic progress of Florida’s Hispanic students to that of Hispanic students in Oklahoma. Between 1998 and 2009, Oklahoma’s Hispanic students improved their average score by 3 points, which is not impressive. Florida’s Hispanic students, however, increased their average score by 25 points, which is outstanding.

Hispanic students in Florida have made such strong progress that they now outscore the statewide averages of 31 states, as shown in Figure 4 (from the Heritage Foundation).



Oklahoma's Hispanic students' average score has improved by 3 points since 1998, but Florida's Hispanic students have improved by 25 points. Figure 3

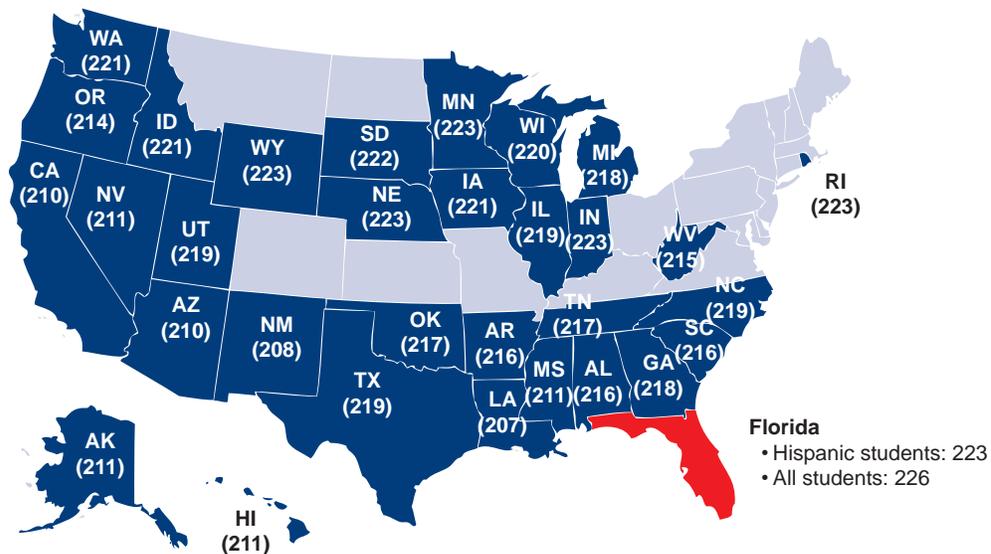
Fourth-grade reading scores for Hispanic students in Florida and Oklahoma (NAEP, 1998-2009)



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

In 2009, Florida's Hispanic students outscored or tied the statewide average for all students in Oklahoma and 30 other states. Figure 4

Fourth-grade reading achievement comparisons, Florida's Hispanic students vs. states



Source: The Heritage Foundation



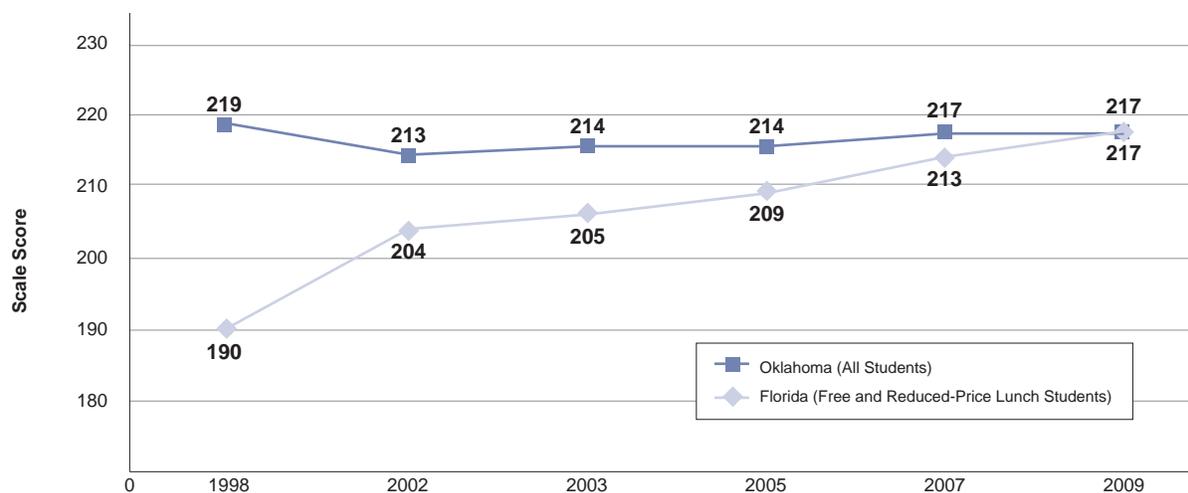
Figure 5 compares the fourth-grade reading scores of all students in Oklahoma to those of Florida's students whose family incomes make them eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program, which officials use as a poverty metric within the public school system. In 2010, a family of four could earn no more than \$40,793 per year to qualify for a reduced lunch. However, of those who qualified nationwide for Free and Reduced Price-Lunch, 80 percent of children were from families who qualified for free lunch, which has a maximum family income of \$28,665 for a family of four.

Bear in mind that the United States Census Bureau estimated the median family income for an Oklahoma family of four to be \$62,037 in 2008.³ Figure 5 compares all students in Oklahoma to only Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Florida students. As you can see, Florida's low-income children's scores tied the Oklahoma average in 2009, after scoring *29 points lower* in 1998.

In 1998, Free and Reduced Price-Lunch eligible Florida students scored 29 points below the average for all students in Oklahoma. In 2009, they tied.

Figure 5

Fourth-grade reading scores for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch eligible students in Florida and all Oklahoma students (NAEP, 1998-2009)



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)



Florida's Reform Efforts and the Teachers' Unions' "Whack a Mole" Strategy

Florida did not achieve its results with any single reform, but rather with a multifaceted strategy. Reform highlights include:

- Florida grades all district and charter schools based upon overall academic performance and student learning gains. Schools earn letter grades of A, B, C, D, or F, which parents easily can interpret.
- Florida has the largest virtual-school program in the nation, with more than 80,000 students taking one or more courses online.
- Florida has an active charter school program, with 375 charter schools serving more than 131,000 students.
- The Step Up for Students Tax Credit program assists 23,000 low-income students in attending the school of their parents' choice—both private (tuition assistance) and public (transportation assistance for district school transferees).
- The McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program stands as the nation's largest school voucher program, sending more than 20,000 students with special needs to the public or private school of their parents' choice.
- Florida curtailed student social promotion out of the third grade—if a child cannot read, the child will repeat the grade until he or she is capable of demonstrating basic skills, which can result in a mid-year promotion.
- Florida created genuine alternative teacher certification paths in which adult professionals can demonstrate content knowledge in order to obtain a teaching license. Half of Florida's new teachers now come through alternative routes.

In their book *Liberating Learning: Technology, Politics, and the Future of American Education*, Terry Moe and John Chubb detail a history of K-12 education reform since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, which in 1983 famously warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity" in American schools. The report went so far as to say that if a foreign power had saddled our country with such ineffective schools, we would consider it an act of war.

A Nation at Risk served as a clarion call for reform, but Moe and Chubb chillingly describe the politics of the reform era as a game of "Whack a Mole" played by the dominant player in K-12 education politics: the teachers' unions. "Whack a Mole," of course, is a famous carnival game in which fake moles pop up and down through holes while someone attempts to "whack" them with a mallet.⁴



The primary concern of the teachers' unions lie in protecting the employment interests of their members (through tenure and tenure-like contract provisions) and maximizing public school revenue. As Albert Shanker, the late president of the American Federation of Teachers, once put it, "When school children start paying union dues, that's when I'll start representing the interests of school children." A New York City school principal told author Steven Brill that the current president of the American Federation of Teachers "would protect a dead body in the classroom."⁵

Moe and Chubb argue that the political modus operandi of the education unions then is to oppose any reform not involving increasing public school revenue and employment. Parental choice? WHACK! Charter schools? WHACK! Solid standards and testing? WHACK! Alternative teacher certification? WHACK! Ending social promotion? WHACK!

Moe and Chubb note that the unions do not manage to whack every mole every time, but they whack most of the moles most of the time. Education unions are huge multi-million-dollar entities organized in every legislative district in the country. They hire lobbyists, give millions of dollars in campaign contributions, enlist political activists to work on campaigns, and are highly partisan. There is little to match the political power and vested interests of the teachers' unions on the reformers' side. The question then is not "How do they get to whack the moles?" but rather "How does anyone ever beat them?"

Uniquely, the unions effectively lost control of K-12 education policy in Florida. Gov. Jeb Bush made education reform his top priority, and the majority of Florida legislators strongly supported such reform. After vigorously opposing Gov. Bush's efforts, the Florida Education Association provided millions of dollars to the (unsuccessful) campaign of Gov. Bush's opponent during his re-election bid in 2002.

Today, because of those reforms, Florida's minority students outscore many statewide averages. The opponents of the Florida reforms, led by teachers' unions, ought to be embarrassed and ashamed.

Oklahoma's K-12 education policies show a distinct lack of divergence from the typical policy preferences of the teachers' unions. Oklahoma's statewide K-12 exam, the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT), is a far easier test than NAEP (a source of external validation for state exams). The state has a charter school law, but that law received a grade of "D" from the Center for Education Reform.⁶ Oklahoma's charter law includes a cap on the number of charters free to start every year, provides limited autonomy, and a limited number of authorizers. In addition, Oklahoma did



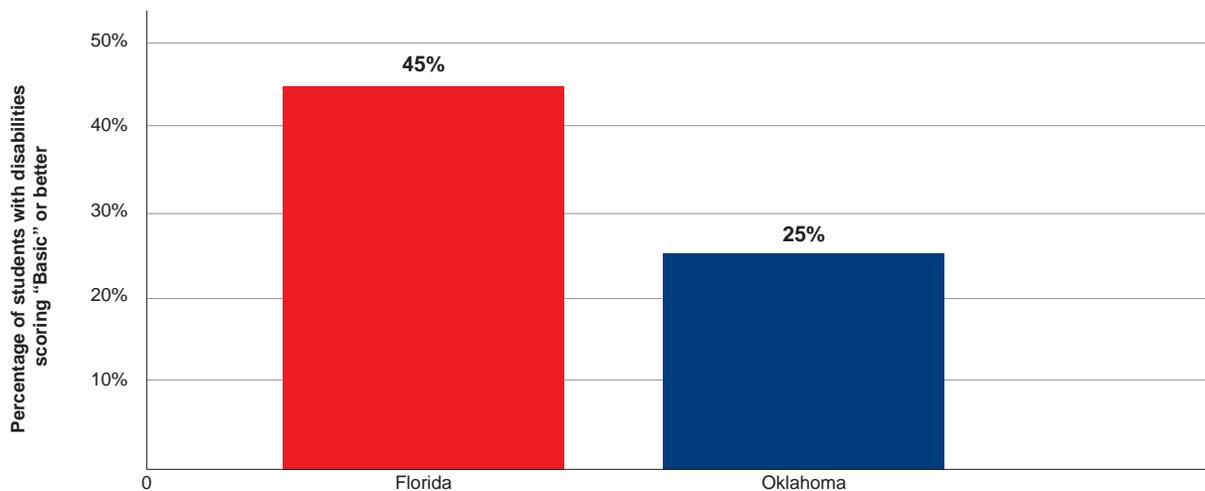
not allow genuine alternative teacher certification for mid-career professionals to enter the teaching profession until 2009.

Also, on the positive side, following up the new path for alternative teacher certification, the Oklahoma legislature passed a private school choice program for children with disabilities in 2010—based on Florida’s McKay Scholarship for Students with Disabilities Program. Florida passed its voucher bill in 1999, and Florida’s NAEP scores for children with disabilities have increased strongly since then, as shown in Figure 6.

Florida’s children with disabilities score substantially higher than those in Oklahoma after a decade of strong progress.

Figure 6

Percentage of students with disabilities scoring “Basic” or better, fourth-grade reading (NAEP, 2009)



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Florida’s children with disabilities have had the opportunity to receive a scholarship to attend the public or private school of their choice for many years. This program has been a tremendous success—almost 21,000 children with disabilities use McKay Scholarships, making it the nation’s largest voucher program.⁷ Moreover, McKay parents express strong support for the program.⁸

Florida’s McKay Scholarship program doubtlessly helped spur academic improvement for children with disabilities. The McKay program alone, however, cannot claim exclusive credit for this improvement. As demonstrated below, Florida’s reforms encouraged school districts to find ways to



produce strong learning gains for traditionally low-scoring student groups—including students with special needs.

The Oklahoma legislature’s embrace of alternative teacher certification and parental choice for children with disabilities is promising. The section below, however, will demonstrate that Oklahoma lawmakers should go much further in adopting the Florida model. Florida’s reforms worked in concert to raise achievement for all children, but it also helped most the students who have the least.

Why Have Florida’s Disadvantaged Students Advanced So Strongly?

Florida’s reformers, having wrested control of education policy from the teachers’ unions, pushed forward a multifaceted strategy, which has benefited a wide range of students in that state. Disadvantaged students, however, have gained the most from these reforms. Why?

Let us take the reforms one at a time. Florida’s private school choice programs allow children with disabilities and low-income children to receive assistance to attend private schools of their parents’ choosing. Charter schools, public schools of choice, are open to all students; however, students unhappy with their experience in their current public schools are more likely to transfer into them. Who are the big winners from public and private school choice? Those most poorly served by traditional district schools.

The same goes for Florida’s third-grade retention policy, which may seem cruel to some; however, the research demonstrates that it is only cruel to those students exempted from the retention policy.

In 2006, approximately 29,000 third-grade students failed the reading portion of Florida’s Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).⁹ It is important to note, however, that Florida’s retention policy contained a number of exemptions. An analysis by Manhattan Institute scholars compared the academic progress of retained students to two groups of similar students (those who barely scored high enough to avoid retention and those who scored low enough for retention but received an exemption).¹⁰

The Manhattan team reported that after two years “retained Florida students made significant reading gains relative to the control group of socially promoted students.” The researchers found that



the academic benefit increased after the second year: “That is, students lacking in basic skills who are socially promoted appear to fall farther behind over time, whereas retained students appear to be able to catch up on the skills they are lacking.”¹²

The retained students learned how to read, whereas the promoted students continued to fall behind grade level, which is the normal academic trajectory for children failing to learn basic literacy skills. Once again, the students at the bottom proved the biggest winners from Florida’s tough-minded reforms.

Consider also alternative teacher certification. Allowing more people with degrees to demonstrate content knowledge and join the teaching profession expands the possible pool from which to recruit high-quality teachers. Inner-city children suffer the most from the shortage of high-quality teachers, as the system favors suburban systems in recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers. Thus, inner-city children gain the most from reducing the shortage.

Curriculum reform follows the same pattern. The U.S. Department of Education’s “Project Follow Through” spent a billion dollars over multiple decades and found that traditional methods of instruction were far more effective, on average, than “progressive education.”¹³ In the United Kingdom, Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair led the charge against progressive education, noting that it is the lowest-income students most harmed by these methods. Wealthier children in two-parent families have greater opportunities to learn through reading at home or from tutors than do low-income, single-parent children whose parent or caregiver is often struggling to make ends meet. The poor have the most to gain from the adoption of proper instruction methodologies. Florida’s experience mirrors this perfectly.

Also, Florida’s system of accountability grades schools A, B, C, D, or F, which many complained was cruel to schools with predominantly minority student bodies. A small but noisy group continues to bemoan the grading method, claiming that it is unfair to teachers and to students.

It would prove difficult to be any more tragically mistaken, or more willfully ignorant. To be sure, rating schools A through F in Florida represents hard medicine. The state called out underperforming schools in a way that everyone could instantly grasp. Tough love is still love: Florida’s schools began to improve, both on the state FCAT and on NAEP (again, a source of external validation for the state exam).



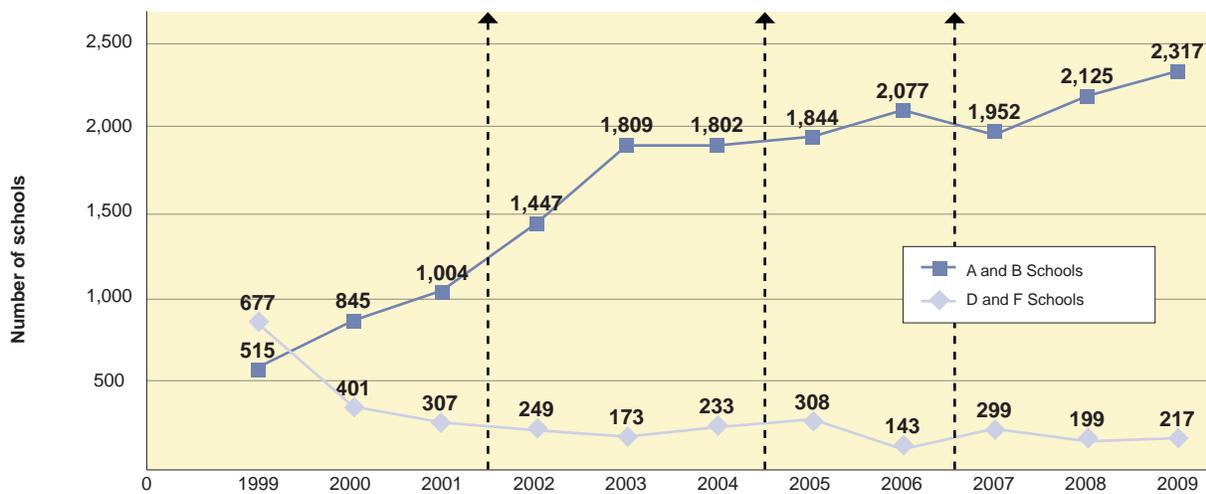
Did Florida’s D and F schools wither under the glare of public shame? Quite the opposite: Those schools focused their resources on improving academic achievement. Made aware of the problems in their schools, communities rallied to the aid of low-performing schools. People volunteered their time to tutor struggling students. Improving student academic performance and thus the school’s grade became a focus.

In 1999, 677 Florida public schools received a grade of D or F, and only 515 an A or B. Figure 7 tracks the trend for those sets of grades, and critically, the three dotted arrows represent a raising of the standards, which made it more challenging to receive a high grade. In 2009, only 217 schools received a D or F, while 2,317 schools received an A or B.

Florida’s schools improved their grade rankings despite the fact that the state raised the bar three times (see dotted lines).

Figure 7

Trends in Florida school grades, 1999-2009



Source: Foundation for Excellence in Education

But was this just an illusion? That is, was progress achieved by lowering the “cut score” of the state FCAT exam? (The “cut score” is the minimum passing score students can achieve.) In a word, no. Florida did not make the FCAT easier to pass, maintaining a constant standard. Harvard Professor Paul Peterson has demonstrated that Florida has indeed maintained the integrity of the FCAT. Moreover, in the same study, Peterson and Rick Hess gave Oklahoma an F for the huge disparity between the state’s accountability exam and its performance on NAEP.¹⁴



Florida’s students have improved both on the FCAT and on the NAEP. Importantly, Florida’s improvement on NAEP also dispels the concern that schools are “teaching to the test.” NAEP exams have a high degree of security, and federal, state, and local authorities do not use them to rate schools or teachers. Teachers lack both the ability and the incentive to teach to the questions on NAEP exams.

Florida’s schools improved their rankings because their students learned to read at a higher level and became more proficient at math. Those who wanted to continue to coddle underperforming schools, while perhaps well-intentioned, argued in favor of consigning hundreds of thousands of Florida children to illiteracy. They may not have realized it at the time, but one cannot avoid the conclusion now.

In summary, those with the least consistently gained the most from Florida’s reforms. This is perhaps clearest of all when one examines the formula for assigning letter grades to schools.

Florida determines schools’ grades in equal measure between overall scores and gains over time. In addition, the state divides the gain part of the formula equally between the gains for all students, and the gains for the 25 percent of students with the lowest overall scores. Figure 8 illustrates how the state determines these grades (50 percent on overall scores, 25 percent based on the gains of all students, and 25 percent based upon the gains of the lowest performing students).

Florida’s grading system balances overall scores and student learning gains, while emphasizing progress among low-achieving students (by double-counting).

Figure 8

School grading system, each category has 100 possible points (percentage of students)

Reading	Math	Writing	Science
Proficiency (all students)	Proficiency (all students)	Proficiency (all students)	Proficiency (all students)
Progress (all students)	Progress (all students)		
Progress (lowest 25%)	Progress (lowest 25%)		

Source: Foundation for Excellence in Education



Notably, the bottom 25 percent of students play the biggest role in determining the grade of a school. These students count in all the categories: the overall scores, the overall gains, and the gains of the lowest performing students.

Notice the elegance of that system. On the other hand, the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) allows schools not to count subgroups depending upon the size of the group. NCLB divides student bodies into various subgroups based upon race, ethnicity, income, disability status, etc., and requires an increasing passing threshold from each group. The exact size of the groups permissible is determined by obscure bureaucrats in state departments of education—and some exempt far larger groups of students than others.

The Florida system is far more direct: *Every school* has a bottom 25 percent of students. Regardless of why those students have struggled academically, Florida’s grading method will not grant schools a high grade unless those students make progress.

Academic fatalists quickly will jump up to argue that many students simply cannot learn. Florida and the success of others in substantially improving the scores of poor and minority children should put this “soft bigotry of low expectations” into the shameful dustbin of history that it so richly deserves.

Moreover, Florida’s success in getting Hispanic and Free and Reduced-Price Lunch children to read at higher levels than the statewide average for all students in Oklahoma crushes such arguments. Bottom line: Tough love for schools works great for kids, especially disadvantaged kids.

A report issued by the Oklahoma Business and Education Coalition (OBEC) on Oklahoma’s accountability system found a number of serious weaknesses. Those problems included, but were not limited to, the state test containing a lack of rigor, the state test poorly reflecting state standards, and a weak reporting of data.¹⁵ Oklahoma policymakers have the opportunity to drastically improve their system of testing, and the effectiveness of their K-12 education system overall.



Fortune Favors the Bold in K-12 Education Reform

In December 2006, the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce released a report titled *Tough Choices or Tough Times*. The commission included a bipartisan mix of education luminaries, including two former U.S. secretaries of education. The report warns, “If we continue on our current course and the number of nations outpacing us in the education race continues to grow at its current rate, the American standard of living will steadily fall relative to those nations, rich and poor, that are doing a better job.”¹⁶

Commenting on the report, Jack Jennings told the *Christian Science Monitor*, “I think we’ve tried to do what we can to improve American schools within the current context. Now we need to think much more daringly.”¹⁷ These and other observers have reached an unavoidable conclusion: The traditional model of delivering public education requires a drastic overhaul, not incremental reform.

Florida’s example shows that it is possible to improve student performance by instituting a variety of curricular and incentive-based reforms, placing pressure both from the top down and bottom up on schools to improve. Oklahoma’s policymakers should view Florida’s reforms as a *floor* rather than a *ceiling* in terms of their own efforts to improve education in their state.

Marc Tucker, vice chairman of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, told the *Christian Science Monitor*, “We’ve squeezed everything we can out of a system that was designed a century ago. We’ve not only put in lots more money and not gotten significantly better results, we’ve also tried every program we can think of and not gotten significantly better results at scale. This is the sign of a system that has reached its limits.”

Indeed, Oklahoma cannot achieve global competitiveness through minor tweaks of a largely underperforming system. Florida’s broad efforts and resulting outcomes prove this. Fortune favors the bold, and a brighter future awaits Oklahoma’s students if Oklahoma’s adults will take strong action.



Notes

- ¹ See *Digest of Education Statistics 2009*, “Current expenditure per pupil in fall enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by state or jurisdiction: Selected years, 1969-70 through 2006-07.” Table 185. Available online at: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dto9_185.asp?referrer=list.
- ² Passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 made participation in NAEP a precondition for receiving federal education dollars. All states began participating in NAEP beginning in 2003.
- ³ See <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/medincsizeand-state.xls>.
- ⁴ Terry M. Moe and John E. Chubb, *Liberating Learning: Technology, Politics, and the Future of American Education* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2009), pages 29-56.
- ⁵ Steven Brill. “The Rubber Room: The battle over New York City’s worst teachers,” *The New Yorker*, August 31, 2009. Available online at: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/08/31/090831fa_fact_brill#ixzz0jEjLuhxrhttp://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/08/31/090831fa_fact_brill
- ⁶ See Center for Education Reform on the Oklahoma Charter School law at: <http://www.charterschoolresearch.com/laws/oklahoma.htm>.
- ⁷ For details on the program, see http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/McKay/quarterly_reports/mckay_report_june2010.pdf.
- ⁸ Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster. *Vouchers for Special Education Students: An Evaluation of Florida’s McKay Scholarship Program*, (Manhattan Institute, 2003). Available online at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_38.htm
- ⁹ Laura Green, “Despite Rise in Scores, Reading Still Emphasized; Schools Want to Reach Lowest-performing Students,” *Sarasota (Fla.) Herald-Tribune*, May 4, 2006.
- ¹⁰ Florida’s retention policy allowed students to demonstrate basic literacy skills to advance with a portfolio, and limited the number of times a student could be retained.
- ¹¹ Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters, “Getting Farther by Staying Behind: A Second-Year Evaluation of Florida’s Policy to End Social Promotion,” *Manhattan Institute Civic Report No. 49*, September 2006.
- ¹² Greene and Winters, “Getting Farther by Staying Behind,” 2006.
- ¹³ Gary Adams, “Project Follow Through: In-depth and Beyond,” *Effective School Practices* 15, no. 1 (winter 1996). Available at <http://www.uoregon.edu/~adiep/ft/adams.htm>.
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About the Author

Matthew Ladner (mladner@goldwaterinstitute.org) is Vice President of Research for the Goldwater Institute and co-author of the American Legislative Exchange Council's Report Card on American Education: Ranking State K-12 Performance, Progress, and Reform. Prior to joining Goldwater, Ladner was Director of State Projects at the Alliance for School Choice, where he provided support and resources for state-based school choice efforts. He has provided invited testimony to Congress, a number of state legislatures, and the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

Ladner has written numerous studies on school choice, charter schools, and special education reform, and has published articles in *Education Next*, the *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, and the *British Journal of Political Science*. He is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and received both a master's and a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Houston.

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