

FLORIDA EDUCATION MONTHLY: March 2005
A Project of The James Madison Institute
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This is the fifth issue of The James Madison Institute's newest school reform project, Florida Education Monthly. As a Madison Policy Digest subscriber, you'll continue to receive this exciting new public policy resource on the first Friday of every month.

We're confident that Florida Education Monthly will become your go-to source for the latest education news from the Sunshine State and across the nation. Each issue is packed with best practices, insightful research, and engaging examples on the power of choice in education.

JMI is committed to educating Floridians on practical free-market solutions to public policy problems—and we think Florida Education Monthly is the perfect tool to do just that. As always, you can count on JMI to deliver candid, straightforward information that you can use to impact public policy in Florida.

STATE NEWS

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GOV. BUSH CONTINUES EDUCATION REFORMS DESPITE PENDING SUPREME COURT DECISION

http://www.sptimes.com/2005/02/24/news_pf/State/Vouchers_big_part_of_.shtml

The St. Petersburg Times reported last week that Gov. Bush hopes to extend vouchers to any student who scores at the lowest level on the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) for three consecutive years.

The proposal comes as the Florida Supreme Court is still preparing to decide the constitutionality of using taxpayer-funded vouchers to pay for private, religious schools.

"We all have our roles to play," Bush said. "The judiciary has a role to determine the constitutionality of laws. In the interim, we have a duty to reform our system. And this is an integral part of the next of our reforms."

The program, "Reading Compact Scholarships" would dramatically increase the size of Florida's voucher efforts. About 25,000 students receive vouchers under one of the state's three programs. According to some estimates, the new voucher would increase the number of recipients by 40 percent.

But critics say the voucher bill doesn't do enough to track student performance because students who move to private school aren't required to take standardized tests like the FCAT.

"They could be fingerprinting all day at private school for all we know," said Rep. Chris Smith, the House Democratic leader.

But is this a reasonable concern truly rooted in a fear of private school performance?

According to a recent article in School Reform News, the National Center for Education Statistics noted in a June 2002 report that private school students scored higher than the national average on standardized tests, had more stringent requirements than the typical American school for the high school diploma, and sent an above-average percentage of graduates to college.

The Council for American Private Education claims 90 percent of private high school graduates attend college, compared to 66 percent of public high school graduates.

Some public school officials acknowledge the benefits of vouchers.

“Our intention as educators is to see kids succeed,” said Jim Hamilton of Hillsborough County.

To read full text of “New Publication Documents benefits of Private Education,” visit <http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artId=16284>

To read full text of “Private Schools: A Brief Portrait,” visit <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2002013>

To read more on Council for American Private Education and their sources, visit www.capenet.org/benefits4.html

HIGH STANDARDS YIELD INNOVATION AND RESULTS IN SOUTH FLORIDA

<http://www.bradenton.com/mld/bradenton/news/local/11036184.htm>

So impressed with the students’ efforts to master the FCAT, about 20 Glades-area school district maintenance employees are pooling \$2 a week out of their paychecks to reward students with highest gains on the test, reported the Bradenton Herald yesterday.

The idea came from Craig Singletary, a maintenance supervisor who grew up in South Bay and graduated from Glades Central High School. He said he was struck by the many students who come to school on their own time to improve their FCAT scores in reading, writing, math and science.

“We need to do all we can to boost their motivation,” Glade View Elementary Principal Mary Evans said.

About 30 percent of families in the Glades live below the federal poverty level. In Belle Glade, the per-capita income is \$11,159, compared with \$23,188 in West Palm Beach.

But poverty hasn’t prevented the schools from raising their FCAT scores over the past few years. While all the schools got D or F grades when the exams began in 1999, Gove Elementary in Belle Glade has gotten an A the past three years. Only one school got a D last year.

Each school has developed its own incentive program to increase FCAT scores.

Fifth-grader Jeannara Jeune said students work harder when they know they will get a reward.

“We want to change Pioneer park from a C to an A,” she said.

This is positive news for those in favor of putting high standards and accountability back into our public schools.

A new study on Florida’s student achievement by the Manhattan Institute supports the notion that promotion and reward should be based on academic achievement and that policies of social promotion may not be in the best interest of students.

The study, entitled “An Evaluation of Florida’s Program to End Social Promotion,” measures gains made by students on both the high-stakes FCAT and the Stanford-9, a nationally respected standardized test that is also administered to all Florida students, but with no stakes tied to the results.

A summary of the results comparing students subject to Florida’s new policy to students not subject to it states:

- Low-performing students subject to the retention policy made gains in reading greater than those of similar students not subject to the policy by 1.85 percentile points on both the FCAT and the Stanford-9.
- Low-performing students subject to the retention policy made gains in math greater than those of similar students not subject to the policy by 4.76 percentile points on the FCAT and 4.43 percentile points on the Stanford-9.
- Low-performing students who were actually retained made gains in reading greater than those of similar students who were promoted by 4.10 percentile points on the FCAT and 3.45 percentile points on the Stanford-9.
- Low-performing students who were retained made gains in math greater than those of similar students who were promoted by 9.98 percentile points on the FCAT and 9.26 percentile points on the Stanford-9.

To read full text of “An Evaluation of Florida’s Program to End Social Promotion,” visit http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_07.htm

EDITORIAL: SCHOOLS ARE DROWNING IN A SEA OF BUREAUCRACY

<http://www.tallahassee.com/mld/democrat/news/opinion/11015644.htm>

In the Tallahassee Democrat on Tuesday, Diane Ravitch of the Hoover Institution brought light to a recent report by a nonpartisan legal reform group called Common Good which she summarizes by writing; “Schools today are being strangled by a ton of laws, regulations, contracts, mandates and rules.”

Are school administrators free enough to tackle the responsibility of creating and maintaining an effective learning environment?

Ravitch points out, “In every situation, the principal must take care not to violate federal laws, state laws, court decisions, consent decrees, case law, union contracts and chancellor’s

regulations. Common Good's website has links to 50 legal authorities that limit or control what the principal can and cannot do."

To read full text of Common Good's report, visit <http://cgood.org/burden-of-law.html>

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