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STATE NEWS

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PRE-K WINS PRAISE ON FIRST DAY: SOME MIGHT EVEN CALL IT “CHOICE”

<http://www.tampatrib.com/FloridaMetro/MGBBWGKHYBE.html>  
[http://www.sptimes.com/2005/08/04/Tampabay/Pre\\_K\\_opening\\_day\\_con.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2005/08/04/Tampabay/Pre_K_opening_day_con.shtml)

Florida’s pre-kindergarten program kicked off this month with relative ease. The Tampa Tribune reports that as the program had its first day in several counties, the reports from program administrators and school officials came in saying, “all smooth.”

But some wonder whether the \$400 million state program will come under attack if Florida’s Supreme Court rules against Opportunity Scholarships in the state. One of several programs that use state money to provide educational choice options to parents with school children, Opportunity Scholarships may be deemed unconstitutional by the state’s highest court as early as later this month – the same month parents are taking their children to private, religious schools that offer the pre-kindergarten program on the state’s dime.

Legislators this year recognized the importance of school choice when they implemented the voter-mandated pre-k program. JMI president Bob McClure, although worried about the costly amendment and its potential to expand the educational bureaucracy, had urged legislators to consider choice measures when drafting pre-k legislation. “Programs emphasizing choice and accountability give Florida parents an early taste of what it could be like if they were empowered to make more choices about their children’s education in the years between choosing a pre-k program and choosing a college.”

Now that the program has begun, it remains to be seen what effect an adverse Supreme Court ruling could have on pre-k and other programs, such as McKay Scholarships and Bright Future Scholarships, that let parents and students choose their own schools with state money.

To read full text of “Florida’s Pre-K Quandary,” visit  
<http://www.jamesmadison.org/pdf/materials/296.pdf>

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ARE HISTORY BOOKS A THING OF THE PAST?

<http://www.news-journalonline.com/NewsJournalOnline/Opinion/Editorials/03OpOPN43072905.htm>

In a column appearing in the Daytona Beach News Journal, Washington Post columnist David Broder shared historian-author David McCullough’s concern that history books used in schools today are changing. In testimony given during a Senate hearing, McCullough said that over the

years he has noticed that the typeface in [history] books is growing larger, the illustrations more lavish and the content shrinking. The authors and the teachers using these textbooks “seem to assume that students don’t like to read,” he said, “and then Harry Potter comes along and blows it all away.”

Broder reports that McCullough, whose latest volume “1776” is a nonfiction best-seller, was the star witness at a hearing called, “U.S. History: Our Worst Subject?”

At the hearing Sen. Lamar Alexander pointed out a recent bill passed by Florida’s Legislature that permits students to graduate high school without taking a single U.S. history course.”

Alexander also noted that “according to the National Assessment of Education Progress, fewer students have just a basic understanding of American history than have a basic understanding of any other subject which we test.”

A recent letter to the editor of the Florida Times-Union also highlights what McCullough calls “a disquieting trend” of declining emphasis on U.S. history with the example that few today know the difference between a republic and a democracy.

Fitzhugh Powell, of Jacksonville, reminded readers of the question asked Benjamin Franklin after the signing of the Constitution, “What kind of government have you given us?”

To which Franklin replied, “A republic, if you can keep it.”

Powell was demonstrating through Franklin’s words the importance of understanding the difference between a republic and a pure democracy, “Democracy is a government that is run by the people who live under it. In a democracy, the people rule and vote on all the issues.”

The important distinction (that many American students are not learning) is that a republic, with a constitution and the rule of law, does not give the majority absolute power. It limits the rule of the people by establishing constitutional rights – such as life, liberty and property – that no majority of voters can overwhelm.

Powell states that many of the history books used in the Florida school systems state that the U.S. Constitution is a living document. Powell contends that the Constitution is not a living document; it can be amended as set forth in the Constitution, but an appointed judge cannot change it.

To read full text of “Nation is a Republic, Not Democracy,” visit [http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/080105/opl\\_19372845.shtml](http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/080105/opl_19372845.shtml)

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#### PARENTS WANT MORE MONEY IN THE CLASSROOM

<http://www.theledger.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050801/NEWS/508010320/1037/EDIT>

In a letter to the editor of the Lakeland Ledger, J.D. Lineberger of Lakeland recounts the annual experience of shopping for school supplies.

Lineberger writes, “As I review this list [of school supplies] for the fourth year in a row, several thoughts creep into my mind: Did I not get hit with a half-cent sales tax on top of a portion of my property tax that I am paying to assure ‘student achievement?’”

Linerberger wants to know where all the tax money is going. “It does not seem to be going to purchase the most fundamental supplies for the classrooms.”

Linerberger doesn’t offer any solution, but a new proposal from Rep. Adam Hasner does. What’s being called the “65% Solution,” is new legislation that would require schools to spend 65% of every education dollar in the classroom.

The proposal’s definition of in-the-classroom spending is taken from the National Center for Education Statistics and includes: classroom teachers, personnel; general instruction supplies; instructional aides; activities – field trips, athletics, music, arts.

How much money would this mean for Florida? According to Rep. Hasner, the 65% solution would bring over \$1 billion statewide into the classroom without a tax increase.

To learn more about the 65% Solution, visit [www.firstclasseducation.org](http://www.firstclasseducation.org).

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#### CHALLENGING OUR STUDENTS: THEY’RE ASKING FOR IT!

[http://www.naplesnews.com/npdn/perspective/article/0,2071,NPDN\\_14966\\_3970184,00.html](http://www.naplesnews.com/npdn/perspective/article/0,2071,NPDN_14966_3970184,00.html)

According to a poll taken by the National Governors Association (NGA), less than one in 10 teenagers (ages 16-18) said school was “very hard.” In fact, more than one-third described it as “easy.”

Addressing the issue of high-school graduation rates, NGA discovered that students want to work harder in school.

64 percent say they want to take courses that count for college credit.

32 percent “strongly agree” that they would work harder if given more demanding courses; that percentage climbs to 65 percent when you include students who “somewhat agree.”

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<http://www.jamesmadison.org>

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