



FROM EXCUSES TO EXCELLENCE

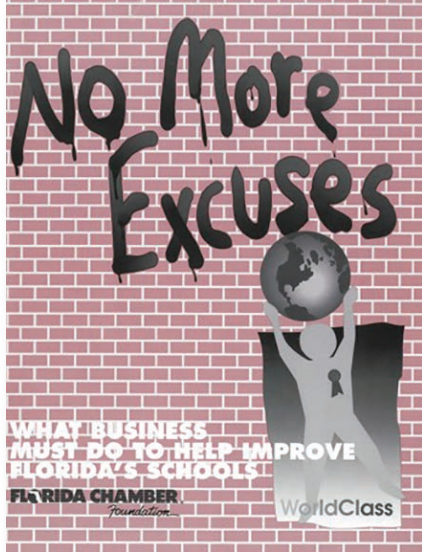
Another Call to Action for Job Creators and Employers to Sustain Educational Accountability, Continue Boosting Student Learning and Close the Skills Gap



FLORIDA
CHAMBER
Foundation
SECURING FLORIDA'S FUTURE
flfoundation.org

FROM EXCUSES TO EXCELLENCE

Another Call to Action for Job Creators and Employers to Sustain Educational Accountability, Continue Boosting Student Learning and Close the Skills Gap



“Becoming a world leader in education is not a process that happens overnight. It’s taken years and the dedication of many business, legislative and community leaders to get to where we are, but our work is far from over. From Excuses to Excellence outlines the gaps that our state needs to address– but now it’s up to a united community to ensure that we are creating more successes in our state’s educational systems.”

MARK WILSON
President and CEO
Florida Chamber of Commerce

When it comes to economic development, talent is quickly replacing the tax incentive as the economic development tool of choice.

—MARK WILSON, FLORIDA CHAMBER PRESIDENT

For many decades, Florida’s education system was stagnant and ranked near the bottom nationally in just about every important category. In 1994, the Florida Chamber Foundation issued important research and a call to action titled, *No More Excuses: What Business Must Do to Help Improve Florida’s Schools*. This is where the Florida story of education improvement begins. Unencumbered by political compromise and education interest groups, the Florida Chamber Foundation conducted research into what constitutes a world-class education system. The resulting vision provided a clear guide for improving education through eight key components:

- ▶ High standards for all students,
- ▶ Accurate assessments to measure what students know and can do,
- ▶ Challenging curricula with real world applications,
- ▶ Competent and inspired teachers,
- ▶ Leading edge instructional technology,
- ▶ Culture of continuous improvement,
- ▶ Accountability tools that measure performance of school systems, and
- ▶ Supportive communities.

The Chamber Foundation challenged job creators and employers across the state to become champions for a world-class education for all Florida students and engage in local action to improve schools. Florida’s job creators and employers responded by partnering with education reformers, parents, trade associations, community leaders and citizens to work towards making this vision a reality. The extraordinary accomplishments of Florida’s education reform initiatives can be traced to these key components.

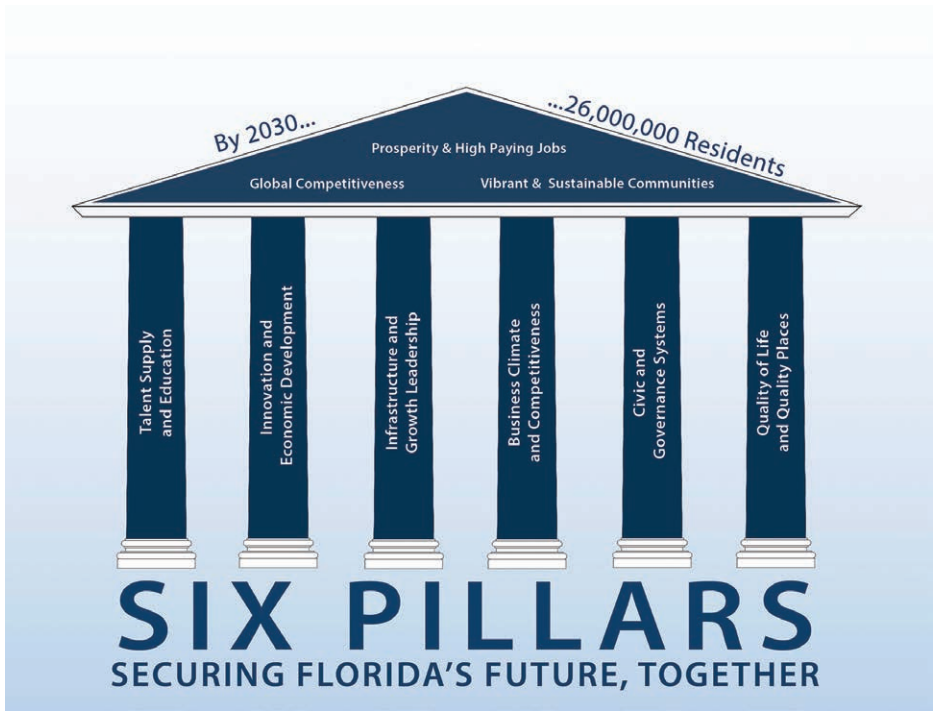
Creating economic opportunities for all starts with high quality education. This collaboration has produced game changing strides locally and statewide. Florida student achievement has gone from being ranked 48th in the nation in graduation rate to 7th in educational achievement. Schools thought to be stuck at the bottom, allegedly due to poverty and other challenges, proved that all students truly can learn at high rates.

Florida has become a national leader in performance and effective education policy and practice. Many states are emulating Florida’s reforms by adopting key improvements such as grading schools, adopting third grade reading proficiency

policies, customizing education, expanding advanced studies, focusing on career and college readiness, and giving parents and students a robust array of education choices. We should be proud of our accomplishments. However, the danger of becoming stagnant again and slipping behind remains real.

At the time of this report, there are approximately 300,000 open and unfilled jobs in Florida. As we fight to create economic opportunities for everyone, we simply cannot rest until we close the talent gap our education system creates.

If we have learned one thing in 21 years, it is that many groups seek to oppose accountability and are seemingly unaware of global competition. Every reform, large or small, was opposed by either unions or superintendents, or both, undermining our future workforce. So it stands to reason why leading groups like the Florida Chamber of Commerce put education reform at the top of its annual Competitiveness Agenda.



The Six Pillars Framework of focus for securing Florida's future begins with the primary ingredient for all human endeavors—talented, well-educated and involved citizens. Developing this necessary human capital begins with parents and extends from early learning through postsecondary education and workforce training. The prosperity of Florida demands attention and advancement in all Six Pillars, but many believe the most important is the Talent Supply and Education pillar, which encompasses early learning, K-12, higher education and workforce.

The realization that global competitiveness is in overdrive reached a fevered pitch in the 1990s. It is even stronger today and turning learners to earners will

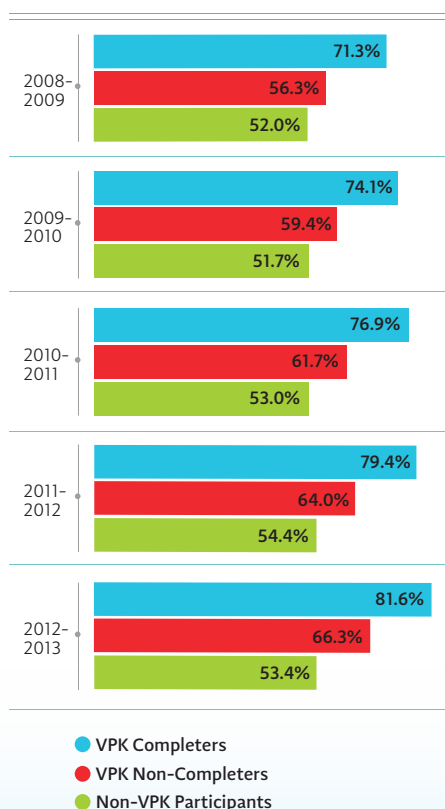
“If we want the best and most talented workforce in the world, then Florida’s business community must continue to speak with one voice, calling for reforms that best prepare students for college and career. The Florida Chamber Foundation’s report outlines the greatest opportunities we have as a state to ensure every student is on the path to success.”

WILL WEATHERFORD
Former Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives and
Managing Partner, Weatherford Partners

“Our state has come a long way in early learning initiatives, and I see successes in every one of Florida’s 67 counties. But as far as we’ve come, we still have an even greater distance to go. The Florida Chamber Foundation’s From Excuses to Excellence report will help us make even more progress toward every child having the best possible chance to succeed in school and in life.”

DAVID LAWRENCE
Chair,
The Children’s Movement

Percentage of Students Ready for Kindergarten (2008–2013)



Source: Florida Department of Education, 2015

make us more productive and competitive. This renewed call to action will ensure Florida students continue to excel and take advantage of new technologies, more rigorous curricula, higher standards and opportunities to reach heights that may not have seemed possible 21 years ago. It is an understatement to say that the world is changing rapidly. Job creators and employers know that the face and pace of business is changing, requiring higher employee skills and innovations to remain competitive locally, nationally and globally.

Florida has built a foundational springboard that puts the state in a strong position to make similar advancements in the next 20 years. **The Florida business community has played a key role in building this foundation and must act with vigor and passion again to guarantee continued progress.** Florida’s education system can and should become the go-to resource for preparing our students to become innovators, citizens, leaders, researchers and producers.

In many ways, Florida’s education system is approaching world class. The new challenge is to push through world class to become world leader in student achievement and productivity. With the exception of Hong Kong, Florida’s fourth grade reading currently outperform their peers in fifty industrialized countries. We need to reach this level in all subjects and grade levels, especially mathematics and science.

Florida Chamber President Mark Wilson has stated, “When it comes to economic development, talent is quickly replacing the tax incentive as the economic development tool of choice.”

Since the Florida Chamber Foundation publication of *No More Excuses* 21 years ago, Florida has made tremendous progress toward reaching the eight world class components called for in the report. Here is a summary of those accomplishments.

PROGRESS TOWARD COMPONENT 1: High standards for all students

In 2002, Amendment 8 on Florida’s ballot passed by 59 percent, amending the constitution and opening voluntary pre-kindergarten education to all four year old children in the state. Just as important as access was the formation of initial early learning standards geared to prepare children for kindergarten. New standards in early learning represented a radical departure from daycare programs guided only by input standards, such as the presence of playground equipment, play stations, toys, etc. In 2013, 81 percent of pre-kindergarten completers were ready for school as measured upon entry. Early learning has been a true success story leveling the playing field for many disadvantaged children. Completing early learning makes a big difference in readiness for kindergarten. The prekindergarten program is Florida’s largest parental choice program relying on both private and public providers.

To make the most of their education opportunities, students need a strong basis in reading skills. From kindergarten to third grade, students are learning to read. From fourth grade forward, students are reading to learn. In 2001, the Florida Legislature enacted *Just Read, Florida!* Florida schools moved from using a myriad of reading approaches to adopting scientific-based reading strategies with massive teacher training efforts and the provision of reading coaches in elementary schools. Students who had not mastered third grade reading standards were subject to being

retained and given intensive reading instruction the following year. Retained third graders, having received added instruction, outperformed their fourth grade peers the following year.

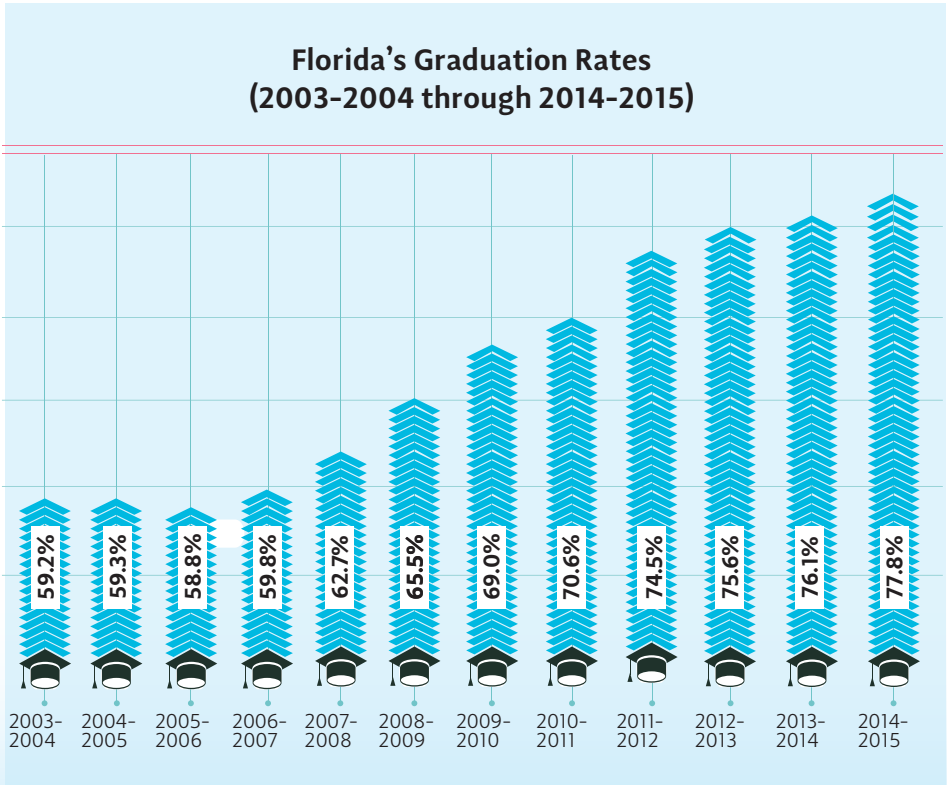
Reading is critical for students to succeed in all areas of education, including mathematics and science. Even students who are not college bound need to be able to read technical manuals that often require higher reading comprehension than found in freshman college English courses. There is no longer a clear double track for students. The workplace requires employees to be constantly learning, which is impossible without strong reading skills.

In 1996, Florida Commissioner of Education Frank T. Brogan began the march towards world class by refusing to set different standards for different students in kindergarten through high school. The implementation of the new Sunshine State Standards set high marks for curriculum design, textbook adoption, and teaching and learning across the state. For the first time in history, educators had a guide for what Florida students should know and be able to do at all grade levels. The standards represented the best thinking of national and state curriculum experts, teachers, job creators, employers, and citizens at the time. These standards introduced more continuity across all Florida classrooms and served as the basis for a revolutionary new state assessment system.

Florida high school graduation requirements have long been failing to prepare students for careers and postsecondary education, especially in highly competitive science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. The business community and higher education leaders have clamored for better prepared high school graduates. Over time, high school graduation requirements have increased in required courses and exams. Algebra I and Geometry have been added to mathematics requirements, and biology was added to previously soft science requirements.

“Twenty years ago, innovations in education were the exception rather than the norm. Today, we find that businesses who are hiring are in need of talent that is trained in new and innovative technology. We must continue to welcome innovative ways of sharing information with students in order to grow and remain a global leader in education standards.”

KATHLEEN SHANAHAN
Chair & CEO, URETEK Holdings,
Former Florida Board of
Education Member



Source: Florida Department of Education, 2015

More standardized end-of-course exams replaced teacher-made final exams, which varied from classroom to classroom. The high school graduation exam was upgraded from a very basic reading and mathematics exam to a more rigorous one that includes Algebra and focuses on more critical thinking and analytical skills. **Contrary to cries of doom from many critics, the graduation rate has continually increased for all student subgroups.**

Education standards have been upgraded and modernized several times to reflect the rapidly growing demand for talent lacking in the modern workforce. Five to ten-year-old standards are insufficient to keep up with the pace of global competitiveness. The upgrading of standards and measurements puts strain on the education system, but Florida's future can no longer rely on yesterday's needs.

“Assessment and accountability initiatives that help our students succeed are essential foundations to our state’s educational systems. The Florida Chamber Foundation’s From Excuses to Excellence report is further proof that in order to remain competitive, we must continue to push forward and set the stage for success.”

JOHN WINN
Education Improvement Advocate,
Former Florida Commissioner of Education

The newest iteration of standards is referred to as the Florida State Standards and is geared to more rigorous expectations for the future. The Florida State Assessments (FSA) of these new standards have not come without controversy. However, they assess the subjects students need to master to prepare them for college and/or careers in today's world and they meet the Chamber Foundation's identified world-class component of rigorous and applied curricula.

PROGRESS TOWARD COMPONENT 2: Accurate assessments to measure what students know and can do

Prior to 1996, Florida student performance had been measured by commercial tests graded on national norms. These tests were not aligned to curriculum and set a low bar for achievement. They did not measure performance against standards, but simply compared the performance of Florida students to other students nationally. They were heavily fact-based and incorporated few critical thinking skills. Thus, they could not capture higher level learning produced by the flexibility and creativity of professional teachers as we have today.

Florida was one of the first states to break away from the use of commercial tests to measure student performance on its own standards. The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was first administered to measure Florida's student performance on the Sunshine State Standards in 1998. As standards were revised over time, so was the FCAT. Assessing students on Florida standards was a monumental shift that opened the door to taking control of our own destiny in education and talent development. We have taken full advantage of that opportunity. When standards are raised, student performance may decline until teachers, students and parents begin to master more rigorous content. Throughout these changes, student performance on the *National Assessment of Education Progress* (NAEP) has risen steadily.

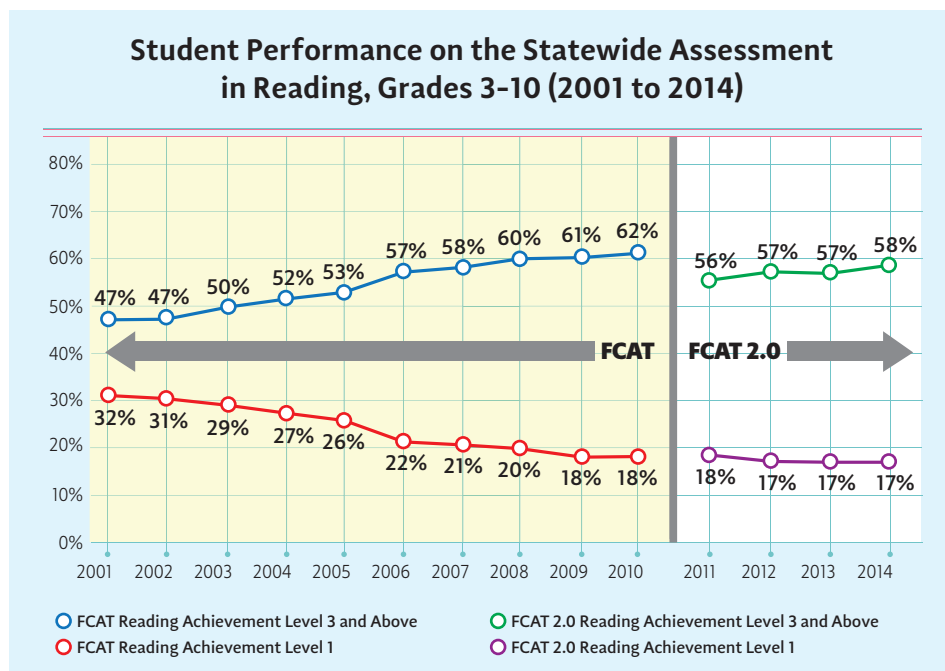
Florida began issuing school grades in 1999. Today's statewide school grading formula includes student performance and learning gains from year to year in reading, writing, mathematics and science. The formula also includes percentages of students earning career certification and advanced studies as well as more rigorous courses. A school's grade may change from year to year based on annual student achievement and progress. Grade declines are often followed by renewed criticisms of the formula or assessments. When standards or assessments are made more rigorous, student achievement and school grades decline until teachers, students and parents adjust to higher expectations.

Nationally, achievement gaps between student demographic groups have long been a challenge for educators. Florida's new system of high standards, more accurate measurement tools, and increased educational support have produced gains for all students, with the students with the greatest struggles making up the most ground. By counting progress of all subgroups, our accountability system does not allow any subgroup to be ignored.

The FCAT assessment scale had five levels, one being the lowest performance and five being the most advanced. The State Board of Education defines satisfactory in each area as a score of three or above. The graph below shows advances in student reading performance from 2002 to 2014. The 2011 drop in reading performance reflects the raising of standards rather than actual lower achievement.

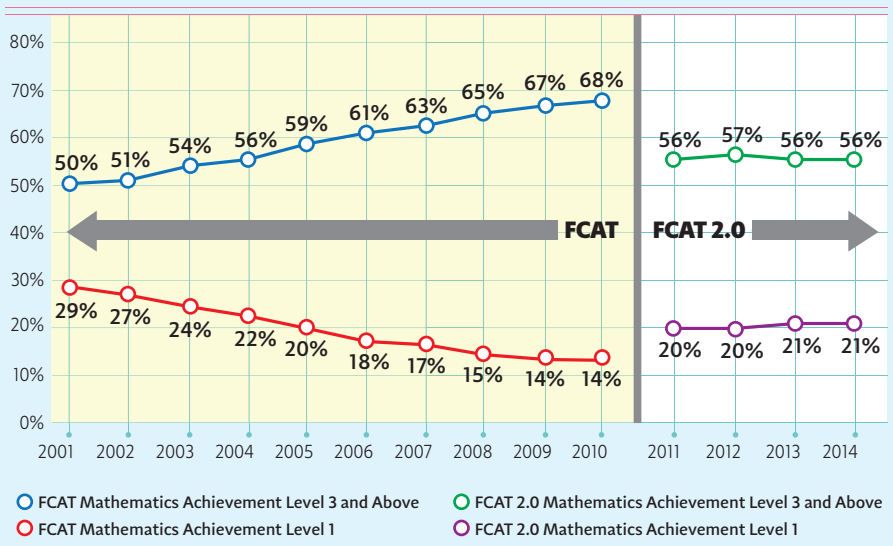


Commissioner Pam Stewart discusses Florida's educational progress and achievement at the Florida Chamber Foundation's 2014 Education Summit.



Source: Florida Department of Education, 2015

Student Performance on the Statewide Assessment in Mathematics, Grades 3-10 (2001 to 2010) and Grades 3-8 (2011-2014)



Source: Florida Department of Education, 2015

“Florida’s students are better prepared than ever before to compete in today’s global economy. It is our role, as business leaders, to work hand-in-hand with school leaders, students and parents to ensure that every student is ready for the challenge of college and career.”

MAUREEN WILT
Education Program Manager
Florida Power & Light

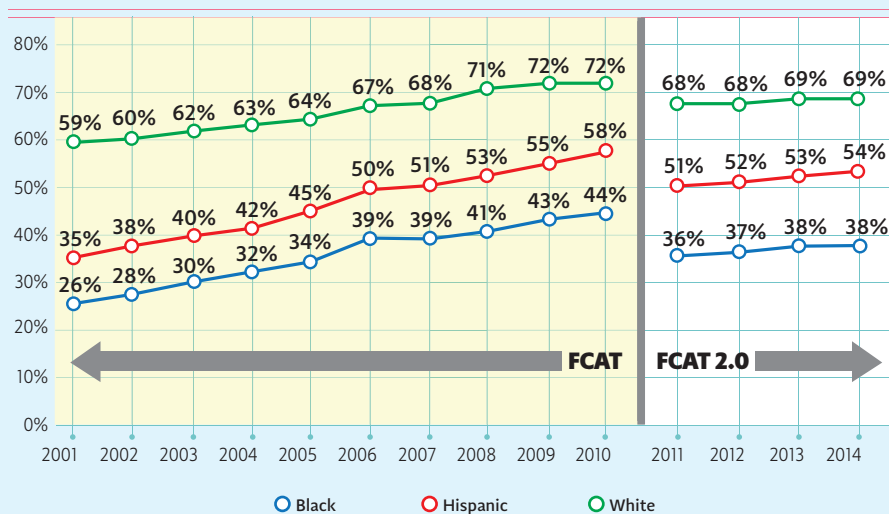
Florida has made solid progress in closing the achievement gaps between white and minority students, as measured by the FCAT and NAEP. These gaps continue to be a challenge, but must be overcome if all children are to fully benefit and if we are to realize the return on investment in education. Schools are now organizing to monitor student performance regularly and deliver real time assistance before moving on. Florida has been recognized for sustained achievement growth among minority and disadvantaged students on the NAEP. There can be no better evidence of educational excellence than raising achievement levels among our most underprivileged children.

Florida fourth graders from economically disadvantaged families made the greatest gains in the nation from 1998 to 2013 in reading.

In 2013, Florida’s fourth grade Hispanic students outperformed their peers in every other state in reading.

Within the ten years between 2003 and 2013, Florida closed the reading achievement gap between white and African American fourth grade students from 35 percentage points on the NAEP to 28, and reduced the mathematics gap from 35 to 20. This accomplishment took place while all subgroups increased performance.

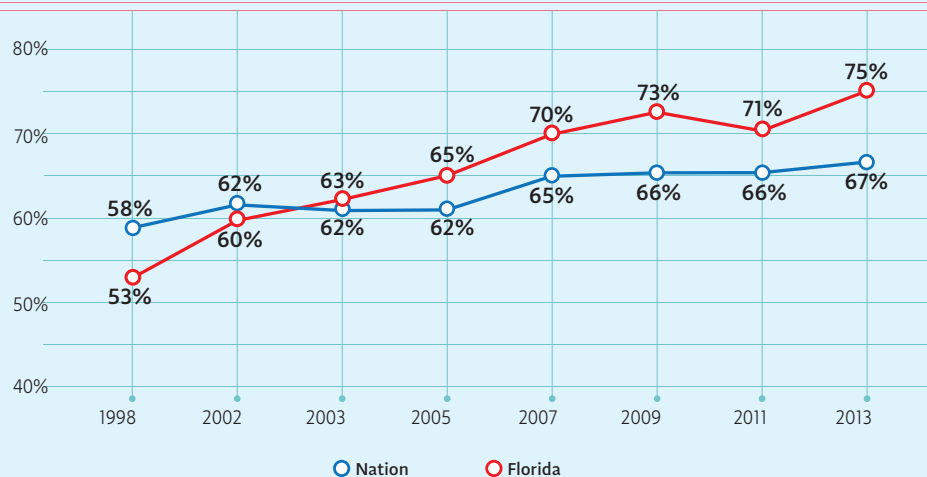
Student Subgroup Performance on the Statewide Assessment in Reading: Grades 3-10, Achievement Level 3 and Above (2001-2014)



Source: Florida Department of Education, 2015

Florida's minority students have outpaced the national average in grades four and eight in reading and mathematics. In fact, Hispanic students have earned higher reading scores than state averages among all students in 35 states and the District of Columbia.

NAEP Grade 4 Reading Percentage at or Above Basic: Florida vs. Nation (1998-2013)



Source: Florida Department of Education, 2015

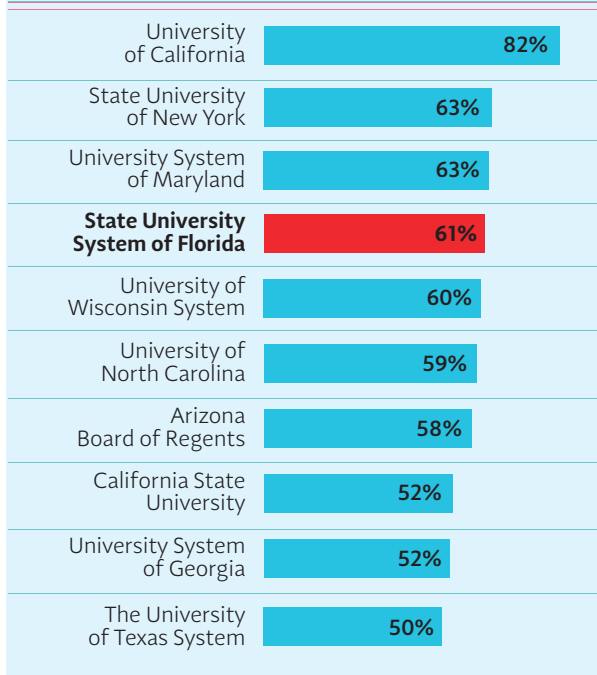
Public concerns over the adoption of more rigorous standards have often cast the standards as a federal takeover of education or as a plot to undermine shared values. But these standards, while promoted by the U.S. Department of Education, were not developed by the federal government but are the result of a consortia of states. After a great deal of public input, Florida took these standards and tailored them to meet the state's educational aspirations.

Florida's rapid gains in student achievement have captured the attention of many states seeking to improve their education systems. While most have adopted state assessments, more and more are emulating Florida's policies.

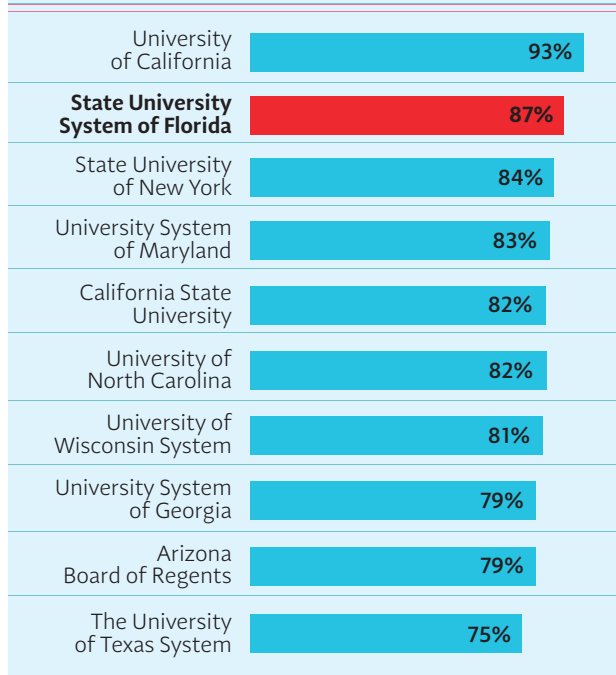
TRACY DUDA CHAPMAN
Senior Vice President /General Counsel
A. Duda & Sons, Inc.



SUS Graduation Rate is 4th Among Ten Largest Public University Systems (2004-2010)



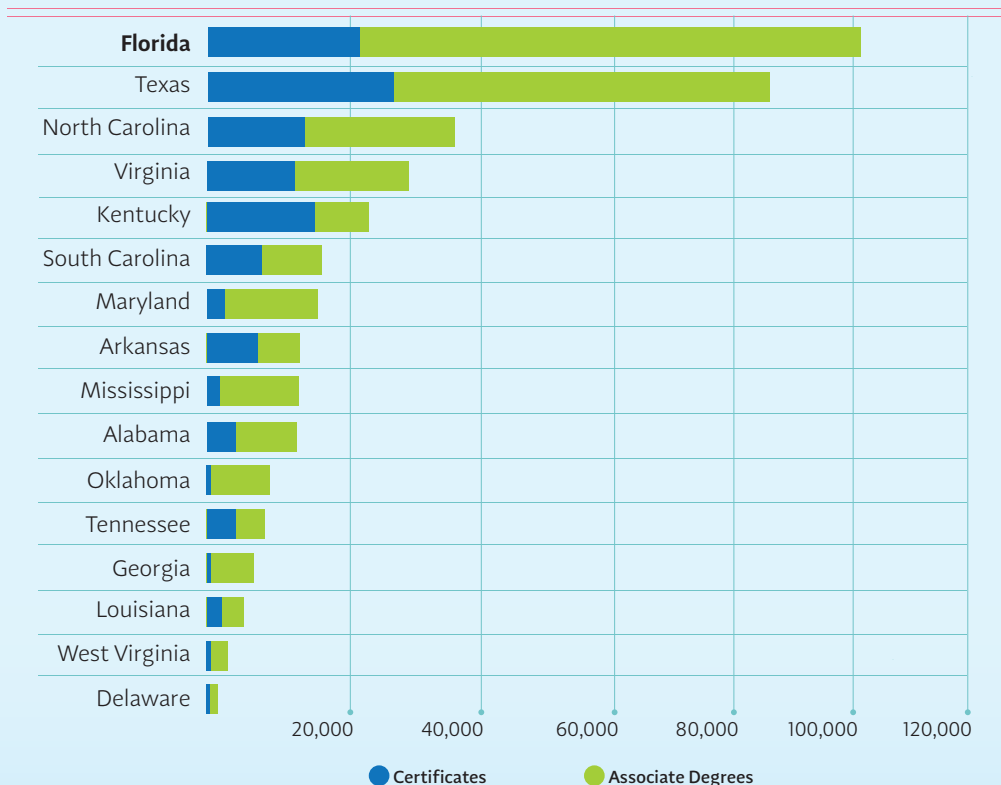
SUS Retention Rate is 2nd Among Ten Largest Public University Systems (2009-2010)



NOTE: Top ten systems on 2009-2010 baccalaureate degrees.
Source: IPEDS for full-time, first-time in college students.

NOTE: Top ten systems on 2009-2010 baccalaureate degrees.
Source: IPEDS for full-time, first-time in college students.

Associate's Degrees and Certificates Awarded (2012-2013)



Source: SREB State Data Exchange, 2014

Florida's state college system and universities are showing excellent results as well.

Florida state colleges (formerly community colleges) are leading the nation in number of associate degrees awarded, providing a low cost pathway for students to enter upper division universities and earn degrees. Florida has long been distinguished by providing a statewide articulation agreement allowing two-year graduates to enter state universities without taking additional courses. Students are taking full advantage of this policy and earning more associate degrees than in any other state.

Since 2002, Florida colleges have begun offering four year degrees to meet workforce shortages in areas such as health services, education, public safety, and information technology. Doing so has opened up lower cost opportunities for students to earn baccalaureate degrees in their communities and meet workforce shortages.

“Every Florida student deserves a quality education that will put them on a successful path toward college and career readiness. We know that in the next ten years, 65% of jobs in Florida will require some form of postsecondary education. The Florida Chamber Foundation’s From Excuses to Excellence report is further proof that in order to remain competitive, we must continue to push forward and set the stage for success.”

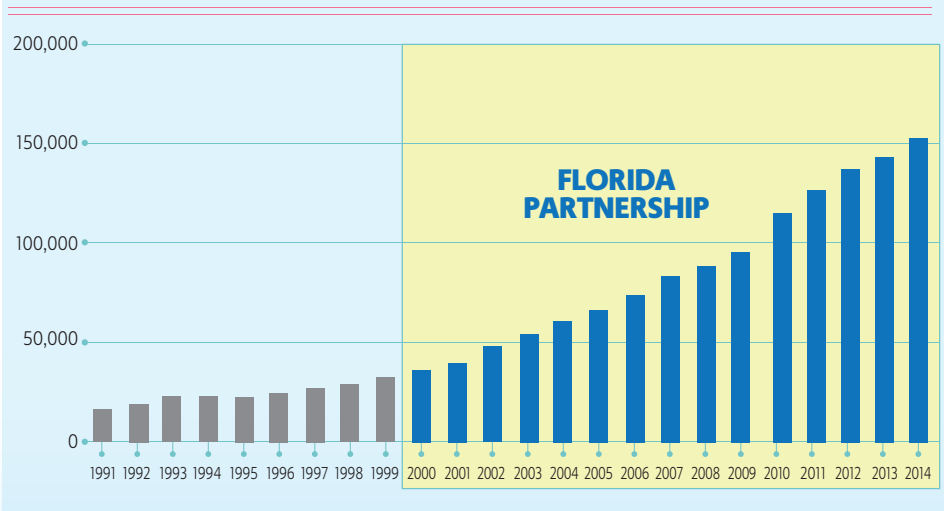
NICOLE WASHINGTON
State Higher Education Policy Consultant
Lumina Foundation

PROGRESS TOWARD COMPONENT 3: Challenging curricula with real world applications

New standards require a significant change in curricula. Today's schools are implementing new and much more rigorous curricula to meet these new standards. Courses are no longer bound to commercial textbooks, but are supported by a wide range of instructional resources that use technology to bring content to the forefront.

Florida is a national leader in the percentage of high school students taking and successfully earning college credits through Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment courses. In 1999, 32,831 students earned passing scores in AP courses. This figure rose to 138,611 by 2013. A full 27 percent of high school graduates earned college credit in AP courses compared to the national average of 20 percent, ranking Florida as fifth in the US.

Florida's increase in Qualifying Scores from 1992-2014 Presentation to the Florida Legislature



Source: College Board, 2014

Enrollment in AP courses is no longer reserved for the few in Florida. Fifty-three percent of Florida high school graduates have taken one or more Advanced Placement courses, a full 20 points higher than the national average of 32 percent. Students are being encouraged to take college level courses, earning free college credit. Research shows that students who have taken AP courses in high school have much better outcomes in higher education.

Florida also has the most robust dual enrollment participation of any of the 50 states. Dual enrollment courses are college level courses offered to high school students taught either in the high school or on a college campus. In 2010, 81 percent of high school students who took dual enrollment courses enrolled in a college or university the following year, compared to 45 percent who were not dual enrolled. These advanced courses earn free college credit for students and encourage them to continue their education.

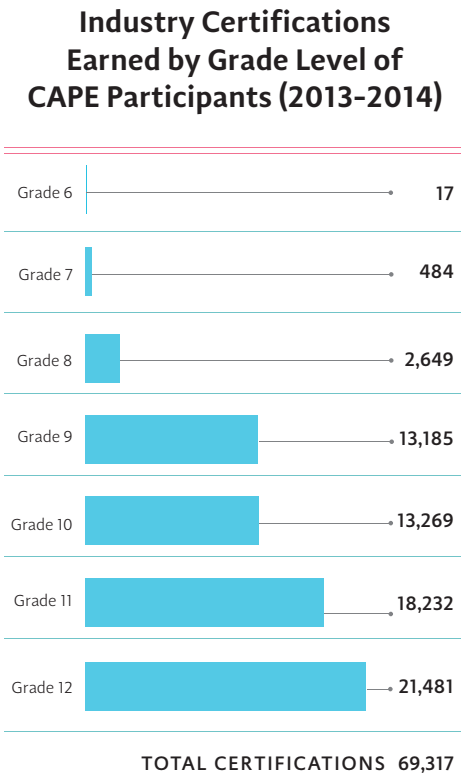
Dual enrollment and Advanced Placement courses not only propel students to greater heights, they also save money for taxpayers and families struggling with the costs of postsecondary education. These college level courses are provided to high school students at no cost. Success reduces time in college and cost of degrees. More and more students are graduating from high school with a full associate of arts degree, allowing them to enter a four-year university as a junior.

These are incredibly positive developments that place Florida students in a far better position to meet new demands of the workforce, which demonstrates the competitive edge to maintain prosperity and quality of life.

Even though more students are being prepared for college and careers, concerns remain over the number of students who require remedial courses in college. These courses carry no credit, but cost tuition. Remedial courses reteach students content they should have learned in high school. Approximately half of high school graduates who took the college placement exams (required for students without passing SAT and ACT scores) required remedial courses. Remedial courses cost taxpayers and families of students hundreds of millions of dollars in unnecessary costs. In 2013, the Florida Legislature made remedial courses voluntary for entering college students.

In recent years, the implementation of the Career and Professional Education Act (CAPE) has led to an explosion of middle and high school career and professional academies with curricula standards matching industry certifications. As a result, the number of high school graduates who earned an industry certification in a career field has risen from 803 in 2008 to 69,317 in 2014. Career academies integrate academics with application in diverse fields ranging from information technology, health services, broadcasting, engineering and finance. These real world applications not only make learning more interesting and relevant, but also prepare students to develop their talents and pursue dreams.

These career and professional academies have grown as a result of schools being more responsive to students as customers. Schools have shifted from take it or leave it curriculum offerings to a more responsive approach to student interest and market demands for a more skilled workforce. This is a seismic shift in thinking among educators.



Source: FDOE Student Information System, 2014

PROGRESS TOWARD COMPONENT 4: Competent and inspired teachers

Experts agree with the Florida Chamber Foundation that the teacher is the most important and influential factor in the education of students. Florida has been recognized as a national leader in policies that promote teacher quality. The National Council on Teacher Quality rated Florida's teacher quality policies as a B+, the highest grade given to any state. The ratings found that Florida did an excellent job at preparing and evaluating teachers, requiring content knowledge, retaining teachers and adequately dealing with ineffective teachers.

“Florida implemented their reforms eight to 10 years ago, and we’re able to look at what they did—what worked and what didn’t. So we have the value of tested ideas.”

SENATOR RICH CRANDAL
R-Mesa, Arizona

At the institutional level, schools are using new tools to identify areas of ineffective teaching and responding with real time training. Academic coaches in reading and mathematics are highly effective in modeling good teaching strategies, finding resources for teachers to use and helping teachers improve technique. New teachers are often given support and mentoring to ensure that they make a smooth and successful transition from teacher preparation to the classroom. More and more, teachers are being given leadership roles in meeting school objectives for improvement.

Teachers are collaborating on curricula development and sharing lessons and ideas with one another via technology. A teacher in the most remote rural school now has access to model lessons, strategies and instructional materials that contribute to effectiveness in the classroom. Teachers work in teams to solve problems and help one another. The classroom isolation many teachers felt is becoming a thing of the past in Florida, just like the land-line telephone.

While Florida has experienced severe teacher shortages over the last several decades, the shortages now are in targeted high need areas of special education, mathematics and science. There is also a shortage of teachers with higher levels of content knowledge and innovative teaching skills. More rigorous curriculum standards require a significant upgrade of the upcoming and existing teacher corps.

PROGRESS TOWARD COMPONENT 5: Leading edge instructional technology

Increasingly schools abound with technology. Most classrooms now have technology readily available to students and teachers. Schools are using mobile laptop carts to ensure access as they gear up with more technology. Lessons come alive with internet feeds onto classroom smart boards, allowing student access to top experts in any field of study. New tools are available for students to learn engineering principles; virtual labs are being developed allowing students to test concepts without having advanced equipment in the school; and students are using mobile technology for research and real time problem solving.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools is leading the way by providing tablets to students to use daily in and out of school. This trend will certainly take off, as society and the workplace become more technology dependent. Schools now have wireless internet access for all. Parents are benefiting from a more transparent culture by communicating with schools using social media and mobile technology.

The integration of technology into education is growing rapidly and will continue expanding as new tools and approaches to learning are developed. Students are often leading the way with innovations developed through career academies and business partners. Nothing secures knowledge greater than applying it in new and interesting ways. While significant progress has been made, we are just beginning to revolutionize education through technology as envisioned in a world class education system. No student or classroom should be without realizing the potential of bringing learning into the real world environment.

PROGRESS TOWARD COMPONENT 6: Culture of continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is the backbone of Florida's education strategy. It provides the basis for all components of the education system, from teacher preparation to customizing education to student needs. The goal of greater learning is never ending. At every turn improvement must be incentivized.

Continuous improvement, however, is not without its drawbacks. As standards are raised school grades decline for a while. It takes time to adjust instruction to meet higher expectations. These events spur renewed calls for delay, or repeal.

At the student level, we all expect continuous progress. Adults should believe in their young people and continually encourage them to reach higher goals. Where this has occurred, students have made startling advances, causing adults to encourage more students to excel. Schools are supporting students more than ever by giving them help when needed and opportunities to grow. Few things are more motivating than expressing excitement over the possibilities of what one can achieve.

“If we had progressed at the same rate Florida did, we would be national leaders instead of muddling around in the middle of the pack still. We cannot wait another day in this state to begin achieving the kind of progress our kids are going to need to win in life.”

GOVERNOR MITCH DANIELS
Indiana

PROGRESS TOWARD COMPONENT 7: Accountability tools that measure performance of school systems

The advent of school grading in 1999 sent shock waves through Florida's education system. Prior to that, schools were rated and given labels that few recognized, followed by numerical ratings that no one understood. School grades from A to F are immediately understood. This performance tool has motivated school districts and schools to put teaching and learning in overdrive. The only way to improve a school grade is to improve student learning.

Results were dramatic and immediate. Not only did schools rated an F in the first year seek instant improvement, but the same effect was felt by almost every school. Suddenly a premium was placed on hiring more highly effective teachers and principals. Financial incentives funded through lottery revenues served as rewards for improvement and high achievement. And most radically, schools could not reach their goals without the lowest achieving students making progress. The attention given to struggling students was nothing less than transformative. Their achievement has gained national recognition by outpacing peers in almost all other states.

School districts also receive grades based on their overall student achievement. The public relations spin has become either unnecessary or ineffective as student performance tells the story like nothing else. School districts point to improvements in student learning rather than relying on flashy new programs and other input measures.

PROGRESS TOWARD COMPONENT 8: Supportive communities

This component has been the most difficult to achieve largely due to special interest groups. Although Florida students have made tremendous strides, opposition to the accountability system by special interest groups has continued. In each of the past 15 years, different interest groups have leveled criticisms of such components as school grades, state assessments, third grade reading policy, teacher evaluations, school choice, and rigorous standards. Florida policy leaders, the Legislature, and reformers including job creators and employers, have been able to keep Florida on the right track—and results have continually improved.

Special interest groups do not appreciate the challenges the business community faces every day in terms of finding talent and remaining competitive. Their focus on job security and working conditions blinds them to the true needs of today's students and tomorrow's workforce. **Florida and the U.S. simply cannot afford to allow education to be controlled by such a myopic view of the education enterprise.**

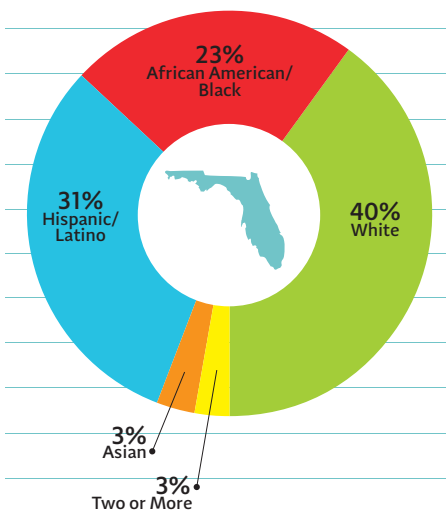
Conflict has occurred over requiring teacher evaluations to be based partially on the learning gains of their students. To omit student learning gains from a teacher's evaluation leaves the process subjective and ineffective. It is understandable that a change of this magnitude causes concern. But the reality is that we must measure what really matters. Not objectively measuring effective teaching sends the simple message that it's inconsequential. Our students' future matters to them, to us, and to our future way of life.

Parents hear constant complaints about this development ranging from tests being unfair to the scale being unfair. The development process has been refined for years and is now seen as a solid standard for ensuring fairness among all teachers, regardless of the students they teach. Student performance is measured against similar classroom characteristics and students' past performance.

The transition to new standards and assessments has caused concern as well. Superintendents and others are calling for delays in moving forward even though the state has made accommodations in past transitions. There is fear that student achievement and school grades will decline, which is undoubtedly a temporary by-product of any transition to higher standards.

As Florida Chamber President, Mark Wilson said while testifying to Florida's State Board of Education, "Don't press pause on our students." If an enterprise doesn't strive for higher goals, it cannot keep up with competition. Performance almost always follows expectations when adequate tools and supports are in place.

**Florida Student
Demographics (2015)**



Source: Florida Department of Education, 2015

As stated in *No More Excuses*, Florida's job creators and employers have an important leadership role to play in garnering community support. Public understanding of our gains and how we have achieved them is critical to building support. Clear understanding will not come from the media without proponents engaging them. Job creators and employers do not have to become experts in all facets of the system, but can express confidence that the current path we're on has yielded directionally correct outcomes and will continue to do so. Relying on experience and universal principles of continuous improvement in a rapidly changing world, job creators and employers will hire these students in the future, so who better to make the case for staying the course?

Florida policy makers have listened to concerns from all sides and have made changes that have improved the system without compromising quality. For example, the legislature has limited mandated school testing to no more than five percent of a student's instructional time, simplified school grades to make them more understandable, and reduced the impact of including student performance into teacher evaluations. In previous years, the State Board of Education has mitigated the impact of raising standards by not allowing school grades to drop more than one grade letter. These responses to complaints are often not widely known.

School districts and schools have tremendous flexibility in school operations and instruction. Many have adapted to changing needs in creative ways. One middle school principal responds to students who make suggestions for improvement by asking for a proposal and allowing them to take the lead and bring the idea to reality. Students become empowered and confident to take responsibility, plan, organize and execute in such learning environments. What employer would not want employees with these skills?

“Florida job creators and employers have an important leadership role to play in garnering community support. Job creators and employers will hire these students in the future, so who better to make the case for staying the course?”

TONY CARVAJAL
Executive Vice President
Florida Chamber Foundation

EDUCATION CHOICES

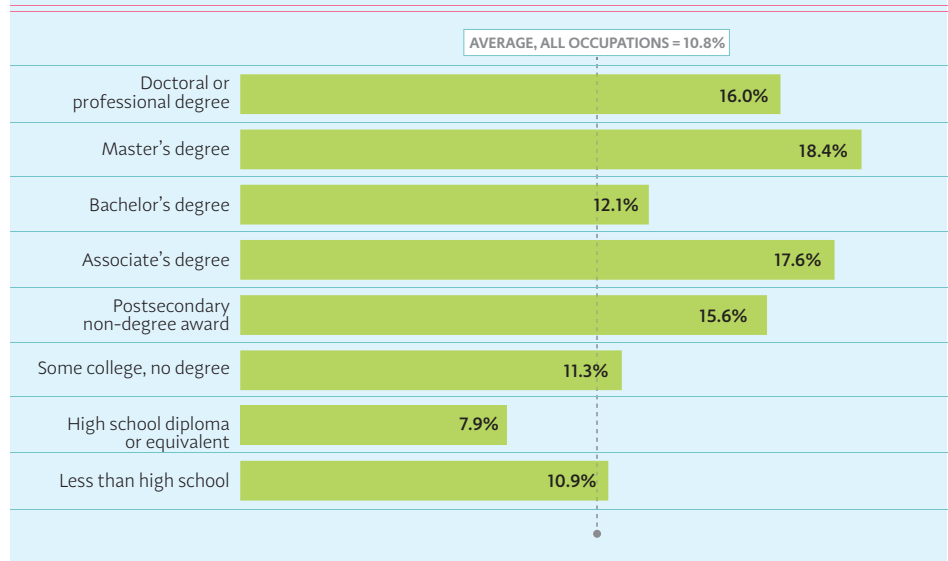
Just as public schools are offering more diverse education experiences that meet the needs of a broader range of students, parents are getting more choices outside the traditional public school network. Florida's Tax Credit Scholarship Program, enacted in 2001, gives tax credits to corporations for funds donated as scholarships for disadvantaged families, allowing them to transfer their children from failing schools to more effective private schools. Education savings accounts provide funds to parents of students with disabilities to purchase approved services from sources other than the local public school. The McKay and Gardiner Scholarship programs provide private school options for students with disabilities whose public schools are not meeting their unique needs.

These choice programs have two things in common. The first is that they are designed to be in response to student needs that are not being met by their zoned school. The second is they are provided at a lower cost than public schools on a per student basis. With the exception of public charter schools under contract with school districts, private school options do not require state or local funding for facilities. These are a win-win for Florida parents and taxpayers.

“During the past decade, Florida has seen tremendous progress in better serving our students and fostering an impressive talent supply pipeline. However, we cannot remain complacent. We must continue to work to ensure that every student, regardless of zip code, receives a high-quality education and is prepared to succeed in college and career. This report outlines the path our state must embrace to improve our educational system for all Floridians.”

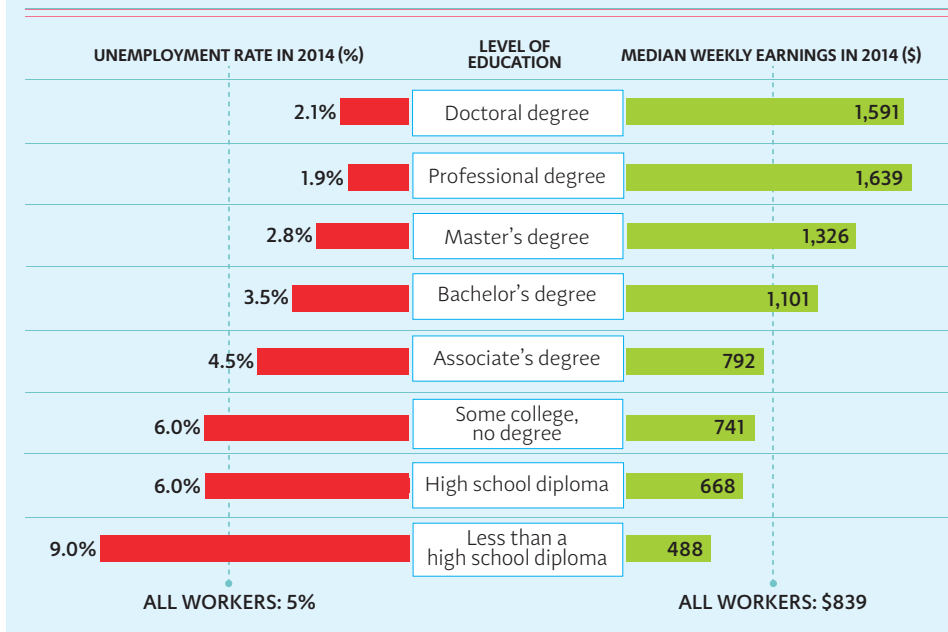
CHARLES HOKANSON
Senior Vice President &
Chief Policy Officer
Helios Education Foundation

Growth in Jobs by Education Level, Projected from 2012-2022



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections Program

U.S. Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment (2014)



NOTE: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor

CHALLENGES REMAIN: A NUMBER OF THINGS TO WATCH

To Florida's credit, it is one of the most diverse states in the country. We have proven that significant gains can and have been made by all students regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic background. Yet we must remain diligent to ensure all young people benefit from an excellent education. Florida schools must be dynamic and remain focused on student learning.

Education champions and others pushed Florida onto a path of excellence in 1994. Florida's job creators and employers can keep our education system moving toward world leader status.

Well educated people, regardless of zip code or family background not only earn more money, but also remain employed, pay taxes and contribute to our economic growth and overall quality of life. They tend to create more jobs and become community leaders. These demands aren't just faced in the U.S. but also on a global scale.

Student achievement is measured on international exams such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS). We believe these international comparative benchmarks allow parents, students and job creators to assess how students are performing against other students around the world.

Our kids aren't competing with the kids next door anymore. They are growing up in a world where they are competing with talent from India, Brazil, China and every corner of the globe.

Our knowledge economy is raising the bar on what it means to be prepared for success in careers. Florida students will get the preparation they need only if education standards become more aligned with those of the National Assessment of Education Progress. The race against time is accelerating with stakes becoming higher than ever.

It's not just a matter of personal achievement. It is also an issue of national security. The Pentagon is deeply concerned that an estimated 70 percent of the nation's 18-24 year olds are not qualified to enter the military because they are undereducated, have criminal records or are lacking physical fitness.

However, the path to prosperity today presents a much steeper climb. The world is changing at a faster rate. We must shift into high gear to develop the knowledge and talent necessary to lead these global changes. Two major goals command our attention and primary focus.

“For Florida to remain competitive, we must prepare our students with the education and training they will need to excel in Florida's workforce and in life. The Florida Chamber Foundation's From Excuses to Excellence report outlines why the business community must engage in our state's education system early, in order to continue building one of the nation's strongest talent pipelines.”

JENNIFER GROVE
Community Development Manager
Gulf Power Company

1) Keep Florida on the path toward continuous improvement and strong accountability and

2) Accelerate education performance to produce talented high wage earners who drive economic growth, prosperity and sustainable communities.

To accomplish the first goal, we must understand the challenges to maintaining the reforms that have been so effective. The most pressing challenges today are:

► **The business community's important miscalculation.**

Simply put, our assumptions in 1994 were both wrong, and right. Our calls for system reform and focus on better outcomes was right, urgent and mattered. Where we were wrong was in our assumption that all adults inherently understood the reasons why employers are uniquely interested in students' education and in preparing them for future jobs. Most business leaders thought that preparing kids for careers, livelihood and sustainability in a growing knowledge economy would be obvious. Apparently, it was not. Employers have understandably and undeniably fallen short in their need to constantly communicate with employees, elected leaders, media, educators and others on why education is the most important business issue of our generation.

► **Critics are expressing low confidence in the new state assessment tools.**

Accusations have been levied almost every year against state assessments over the past 15 years. These assessments meet rigorous development standards and reviews by multiple outside experts who have continually supported their validity. The critics are arguing perceptions versus reality.

► **Special interest groups have filed lawsuits aimed at eliminating policies that have produced record-breaking results.**

Numerous attempts to bring down reforms have taken place over the years and most have failed. The latest lawsuit claims Florida does not have a high quality education system despite the preponderance of evidence to the contrary.

► **Critics of Florida's array of education choices remain committed to taking away alternatives to traditional schooling.**

Freedom of choice is basic to our free society in just about every endeavor except education. Florida is a recognized leader in parents having choices of schooling options and should remain so. School choice, regardless of parents' income or zip code, provides needed competition for the education system. Parents, not government, are best positioned to help children achieve success in education. School choice is the best way to ensure local control.

“Before Florida implemented this simple reform, nearly half of their fourth graders were functionally illiterate. Now 70 percent are reading at grade level or higher. We can do the same thing for Oklahoma students.”

SENATOR CLARK JOLLEY
R-Edmond, Oklahoma

► **Some school boards have considered opting out of state assessments.**

The assessment opt-out movement gets headlines, but only serves to shy away from cooperation and accountability. It deprives parents of the right to know how well their children and their schools are performing. When adults fight to eliminate choice and accountability, they are hurting our children's future. This movement seems to be an obstacle to helping us further close Florida's skills gap.

► **Efforts persist to weaken, pause or eliminate school grades.**

Everyone wants their school to receive high marks, but school grades maintain credibility only by focusing on student achievement and learning. The strength of Florida's school grading system is that it is student-focused. All indicators represent either student progress or achievement. This focus should be kept strong, avoiding inclusion of soft input measures that satisfy special interests. At all costs, Florida's A-F accountability system should be kept and continually enhanced.

► **There is pressure to set lower bars for proficiency on the new Florida Standards Assessments that have replaced FCAT 2.0.**

We need benchmarks and standards that will serve Florida students well in the future. In other words, we are hopeful that the energy and resources of interest groups can shift away from fighting higher standards and shift to helping our kids, and therefore Florida's future economy, to be globally competitive. Florida's definition of proficiency should continue to align with the National Assessment of Education Progress.

► **Increased curricula rigor has come under broad attack.**

Unfortunately, the national movement to take school standards to the next level has been politicalized and described as a federal takeover of local education. It is important to understand that Florida is in complete control of setting its own standards and assessments and has conducted hearings across the state, gathered ideas from thousands of people and has made changes when and where warranted. We recommend efforts be made in Florida to oppose federal involvement in curriculum design or classroom regulations.

► **Claims teacher annual evaluations that rely partly on student learning results are unfair.**

Great teachers are essential to Florida's careers and they deserve our full support. Job creators and employers understand the necessity of tying job performance to evaluations. If a teacher's main priority is to teach a year's worth of knowledge in a year's worth of instruction time, then why would taxpayers who pay teacher salaries not expect to measure that kids are actually learning? Forty-five states in the U.S. have incorporated student performance into teacher evaluations. This development has long been needed and represents a more professional, benchmarked and accountable system. At almost every public hearing, great teachers expressed appreciation for higher standards and a focus on learning.

► **State accountability has hurt education by causing “teaching to the test,” narrowing curricula, and eliminating extended learning activities due to state assessments.**

These kinds of responses to accountability are often misguided. Enlightened teachers and administrators realize that robust and challenging instruction is the key to performing well on more rigorous assessments and into the real world where tests are called job evaluations. Schools of choice that emphasize the arts, math and science, career academies and real world experiences are growing and succeeding.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Many of the *No More Excuses* recommendations for local action remain relevant today. They worked well then and will again. Many are geared toward developing communities and community leaders that are supportive of the effective reforms.

Building community support involves helping others understand the benefits students have reaped over the past. Being open to new ideas that strengthen and not weaken education rigor helps build collaboration and trust.

Florida will be better at preparing its young people if communities, driven by job creators, act on the following recommendations:

- Identify education champions who may earn a second Super Bowl of Education ring,
- Train education champions on current issues and strategies to make Florida a world leader in education,
- Infuse champions into school decision forums such as school boards, district advisory councils, school advisory councils, and select study groups,
- Champions spearhead public awareness campaigns in their civic groups, editorial pages, legislative delegations, city and county commissions, the PTA, and local chamber of commerce activities,
- Utilize resources from graphic designers, printers and marketing experts to develop awareness materials in your community,
- Solicit talent to produce public service announcements, talk radio interviews and link awareness to community events and celebrations,
- Focus efforts largely on local school districts and communities,
- Enlist the active support from other business and civic leaders, state college presidents, university presidents, higher education boards, private school leaders and others,
- Facilitate making connections among early learning providers, K-12 educators, state colleges, workforce programs and universities to promote cooperation and alignment designed to benefit students and institutions,
- Take a win-win approach by articulating benefits of a world class education for all students, and
- Activate partnerships with schools to enrich student learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

It's been 21 years since the Florida Chamber Foundation set the rallying cry for pending education reforms when it first published *No More Excuses*. The Chamber Foundation report presented a vision for a world class education system in Florida and called on Florida's employers to become champions in making the vision a reality.

A great deal has been accomplished over the past two decades to improve Florida's education system. Florida has adopted bold reforms to set high standards, measure progress, hold schools accountable for student learning, provide parents more effective options to public schools, produce more high performing graduates, and expand industry aligned certifications in a variety of career fields.

In many ways, Florida's education system went from the laughing stock of America in 1994 to a system being applauded nationally in 2015. Florida has gained nationwide attention for improving student learning and adopting effective education policies.

Although we should all be proud of our educational accomplishments, there is one major problem.

Florida's education system is not yet good enough to meet the challenges of global competition and doesn't yet provide the level of talent needed by job creators and future employers.

Our research has revealed that the key to global competitiveness and the future of economic development is excellence in education. Talent development and education is a key pillar in the Six Pillars Framework the Chamber uses to guide discussions and actions necessary to secure Florida's future. We are no longer competing with our neighbors, but with innovators around the world. Therefore our education system must also be competitive globally. Florida's job creators and employers must be strong champions in their communities for promoting higher education standards, creative career and professional academies, student internships, and talent development.

RELEASE DATE:
February 9, 2016

CONTRIBUTORS:
***Supported in part by
a grant from the
U.S. Chamber of
Commerce Foundation.***

***This report was
made possible with
funding support
from the Committee for
Economic Development.***

*“When it comes to
economic development,
talent is quickly replacing
the tax incentive as the
economic development
tool of choice.”*

MARK WILSON,
FLORIDA CHAMBER PRESIDENT

FROM EXCUSES TO EXCELLENCE

Another Call to Action for Job Creators and Employers to Sustain Educational Accountability, Continue Boosting Student Learning and Close the Skills Gap



SECURING FLORIDA'S FUTURE

136 South Bronough Street • Tallahassee, FL 32301

www.flfoundation.org • 850-521-1200

FLORIDA
CHAMBER
Foundation