

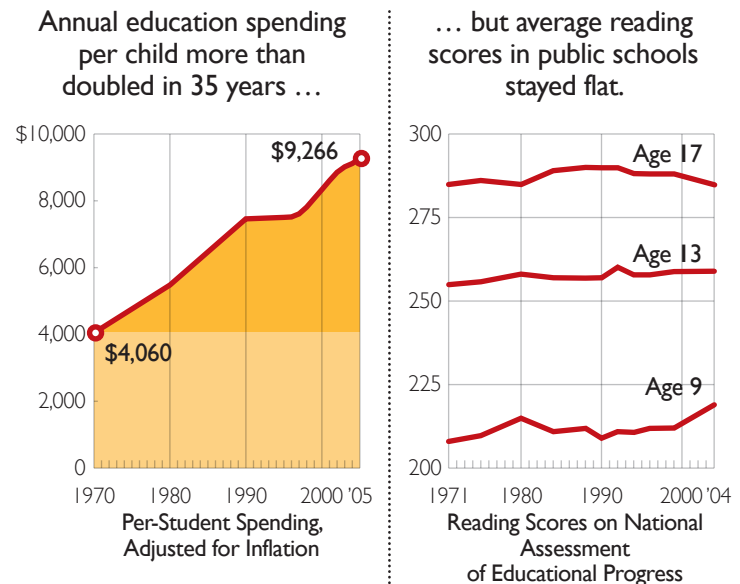
Education

All parents should have the opportunity to choose a safe and effective school for their children. Parents should have the freedom to decide how their children are educated, whether through public, private, religious, home, or virtual schools. Students should feel confident that their schools are safe, effective, and will enable them to reach their potential. At the same time, school leaders should be free to innovate and create a quality learning environment for children. Schools should have greater freedom to attract highly talented professionals into the classroom to become teachers.

Unfortunately, the public education system in America falls far short of these ideals. Spending is at an all-time high (on average, more than \$10,000 per student annually), yet we know that millions of children continue to pass through our nation's schools without receiving even a basic education. According to the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, a quarter of all eighth grade students scored "below basic" in reading; only 31 percent scored "proficient" or could be considered on grade level. In many of our largest cities, more than half of all students drop out before high school. International test scores show American students scoring in the middle of the pack, behind many of their peers who will someday be competing with them for jobs.

Taxpayers' Checks Doubled, But Johnny Still Can't Read

Higher spending on education hasn't translated into higher achievement for America's kids. From the time Johnny enters first grade in public school till he graduates, taxpayers will fork over more than \$110,000 to educate him. That's more than twice the cost in the 1970s, without pushing up average reading scores.



Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

But there is reason for hope. Education reforms that work to give families more choices and transform traditional public schools are having a powerful impact. School choice policies like scholarships, tax credits, charter schools, and virtual schooling are benefiting millions of children. Reform-minded states like Florida that have implemented aggressive education reforms like school choice, school accountability, alternative teacher certification, and merit pay have made dramatic progress in improving students' academic achievement. To solve the education crisis and ensure that all children have the opportunity they deserve, policymakers need to put children first in the education debate and enact policies like school choice that have the power to revolutionize American education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Return greater authority to state and local policymakers to promote effective state-level reforms to improve education. For decades, Washington has failed to promote effective education reform at the state level despite increasing federal spending and regulation of public education. Major initiatives like No Child Left Behind have created unintended consequences at the state level. Federal programs like No Child Left Behind should be amended to give state and local policymakers greater authority to decide how federal dollars are used to improve education while maintaining accountability for results.

2. Reform federal education programs to let states give parents greater freedom to choose a safe and effective school for their children. Major federal programs like Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act should be reformed to enable state and local policymakers to allow families to have more power to choose the best school and to let federal dollars follow students to their school of choice. Where the federal government has authority over public education, like in the District of Columbia, home of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program, families should be given greater freedom to choose the best school for their children.

3. Stop wasting federal tax dollars on ineffective programs and let resources be used more effectively to improve education. Too many federal tax dollars are being wasted on ineffective, duplicative, or unnecessary programs. Federal education programs should be streamlined and reformed to ensure that tax dollars are used in a manner that can actually benefit students.

4. Reform federal higher education and early education programs to provide better opportunities for students without increasing the deficit. Federal policymakers should resist efforts to

expand federal programs supporting higher education and preschool or early childhood education programs. Federal spending on higher education has skyrocketed over the past decade, and students and their families continue to struggle with runaway college costs. Dozens of federal programs costing more than \$20 billion annually on early childhood education and care have not delivered lasting results for benefiting children. Instead of expanding these or creating new programs, federal programs for higher education and preschool should be reformed to improve their efficiency and impact.

5. Enact education reforms that give families greater school choice options, including private school choice programs like tuition scholarships, education tax credits, and public school choice programs like charter schools and virtual or online learning.

6. Enact education reforms that will transform public education, such as holding schools accountable for results through state-level testing and public reporting, strengthening teacher quality through policies like alternative certification and performance pay, ending social promotion and providing aggressive remediation to ensure that children do not fall behind, and providing quality instruction to all children, including at-risk groups like English-language learners and special education students. The state of Florida has pioneered such an integrated reform model with impressive results (see Facts and Figures below).

FACTS AND FIGURES

- According to the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 26 percent of eighth graders scored “below basic” in reading, and 29 percent scored “below basic” in mathematics.
- Estimated national high school graduation rates show that as many as one in four students drop out before graduation.
- The United States spent more than \$631 billion on K-12 education in 2007, or approximately 4.6 percent of GDP.
- On average, the United States spends more than \$10,000 per pupil every year in public schools.
- Since 1970, average per-pupil expenditures in American public schools have more than doubled (after adjusting for inflation), yet long-term measures of students’ academic achievement like test scores and graduation rates show very little improvement.

■ A growing body of academic research evidence shows that school choice policies are working, improving students' academic achievement and improving families' satisfaction with their children's school. For example, the Department of Education published an evaluation in 2009 of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program which showed that participating students had made statistically significant improvement in reading compared to their peers who did not receive scholarships.

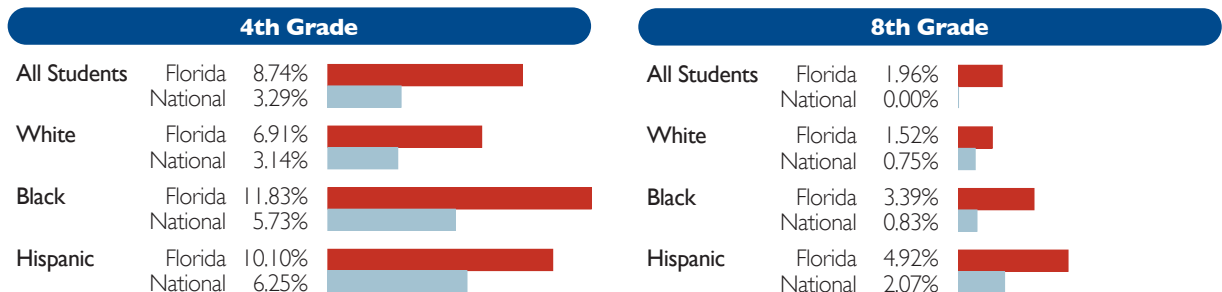
■ Total federal spending on K-12 education topped \$72 billion in 2008. Yet in 2009, Congress approved unprecedented increases in federal spending on education. Total education spending for all levels included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was nearly \$100 billion.

■ This year, 23 private school choice programs are benefiting families in 15 states and the District of Columbia. More than 170,000 children are benefiting from a myriad of private school choice programs, which include scholarships to attend private schools, special needs scholarships, and corporate and individual tax credits. In addition to private school choice options, millions of children are also benefiting from other school choice policies such as public school choice, charter schools, virtual education, and home-schooling. Forty states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws, 46 states have policies supporting public school choice, and over 1.5 million children are home-schooled. In addition, virtual education has seen a dramatic rise in popularity, and currently millions of students are now benefiting from online learning.

■ The state of Florida has implemented the most sweeping and aggressive education reforms of any state over the past decade. Florida's students have made impressive improvement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Significantly, the biggest gains have been made by

Reading Improvement in Florida

Percentage Increase in NAEP Reading Scores, 1998–2007



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP Data Explorer; at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata> (January 5, 2009).

minority students. As of 2007, Florida's Hispanic students had higher fourth grade reading scores on the NAEP exam than the average of all students in 15 states.

■ While teacher unions continue to actively oppose school choice, a 2008 Harvard University study for *Education Next* found that 65 percent of teachers supported tax credit programs that benefit both public and private schools. A third of polled teachers supported universal vouchers, and less than half opposed vouchers.

■ Private School Choice: Private school choice includes policies like vouchers, scholarships, or education tax credits to help parents enroll their children in a private school of choice. Fourteen states and Washington, D.C. currently offer some form of private school choice.

■ Public School Choice: Public School Choice allows parents more opportunity to choose the best public school for their children. Forty-six states have enacted some form of open enrollment policy to facilitate choice within the public education system.

■ Charter Schools: Charter Schools offer parents an alternative to traditional public schools. Charter Schools are publicly funded schools that agree to meet certain performance standards set by the government but are otherwise free from the rules and regulations of the traditional public school system. Forty states and the District of Columbia have charter schools.

■ Online Learning: Technological advances have created new opportunities for parents to choose virtual education or distance learning programs for their children. Online Learning allows students to learn on the computer instead of in a classroom. Nine percent of all public schools nationwide offer some distance learning, and 15 percent of rural communities offer distance education.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

School Choice in America

An interactive Web site that shows how each state gives parents the ability to choose a safe and effective school for their children.

<http://www.heritage.org/research/education/schoolchoice>

Dan Lips, "School Choice: Policy Developments and National Participation Estimates in 2007-2008," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2102, January 31, 2008, at

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/bg2102.cfm>

Matthew Ladner and Dan Lips, "How 'No Child Left Behind' Threatens Florida's Successful Education Reforms," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 2226, January 7, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/bg2226.cfm>

Eugene Hickok and Matthew Ladner, "Reauthorization of No Child Left Behind: Federal Management or Citizen Ownership of K-12 Education?" Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 2047, June 27, 2007, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/bg2047.cfm>

Dan Lips, "Reforming No Child Left Behind by Allowing States to Opt Out: An A-PLUS for Federalism," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 2044, June 19, 2007, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/bg2044.cfm>

Dan Lips, Jennifer Marshall, and Lindsey Burke, *A Parent's Guide to Education Reform*, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/upload/EducationReform-web.pdf>

Dan Lips, "D.C. Opportunity Scholarships Boost Reading Scores, Family Satisfaction," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2391, April 10, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/wm2391.cfm>

U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_389.asp

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