

Lessons for Louisiana from Florida's K-12 Education Revolution

March 2012



By Matthew Ladner, PhD

THE FRIEDMAN
FOUNDATION
FOR
Educational
Choice

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Louisiana has emerged as one of the most fascinating states in the nation for education reform. The state's creative response to rebuilding the New Orleans education system in the wake of Hurricane Katrina is now considered a potential model for reformers across the nation. Gov. Bobby Jindal has carried the reforms further in pushing for "opportunity scholarship" vouchers in New Orleans, the grading of public schools A-F, and an effort to curtail social promotion of children needing additional reading intervention.

More recently, Gov. Jindal called for the adoption of one of the boldest parental choice measures ever: expanding the scholarship program statewide. Designed to help low- and middle-income families in underperforming public schools, this program would empower more parents to choose the best schools for their children.

In considering this proposal, Louisiana policymakers would benefit from studying the policy success of a neighboring state. Florida got a big head start on Louisiana in enacting reform, and the Sunshine State's success proves that Louisiana can do better. Gov. Jindal's 2012 choice initiative resembles a bolder version of one of Florida Gov. Jeb Bush's signature reforms: the A+ Opportunity Scholarship Program. The figures to follow demonstrate that the Florida program helped in improving the academic performance of struggling Florida public schools.

Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams will demonstrate the benefits of Florida's head start in adopting a comprehensive set of education reforms. In addition, evidence regarding the efficacy of parental choice programs around the nation will be provided.

Louisiana has adopted some key elements of the Florida reform strategy as part of the Pelican State's overall K-12 reform effort. The adoption of one the nation's largest parental choice plans will only help spur further improvement for students in need of more effective learning environments.

What Florida has done, Louisiana can do better.

School choice is like a catalytic converter accelerating the benefits of other education reforms.

- Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush

FLORIDA AND LOUISIANA: THE COMPETITION IN THE CLASSROOM

Louisiana and Florida compete fiercely on the athletic field. When the LSU Tigers line up to play the Florida Gators in an SEC showdown on October 6, 2012 in Gainesville, the teams will have the full attention not only of fans in Louisiana and Florida, but from across the nation.

The states compete in more than athletics, of course, as states are engaged in a global competition for economic growth. While Louisiana has held its own on the football field, Florida has won out in economic growth. One of the foundations for economic success is the public school system, and as will be demonstrated below, Florida's education reforms have succeeded in accelerating student learning.

Beginning in 1999, newly-elected Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and the Florida legislature began adopting far-reaching education reforms. Those 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 and private providers.

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.

This paper's focus will be on the critically important fourth-grade reading scores of Louisiana and Florida. Florida's scores should inspire action in Louisiana. The results only reinforce what already had been a compelling case: The actual proves the possible. Florida has radically improved student performance, especially among disadvantaged students.

The charts that follow utilize data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which gives tests of academic achievement in Reading and Mathematics (and occasionally other subjects) to random samples of fourth- and eighth-grade students in all 50 states. NAEP provides information about the scores of students in each state, and the average level of academic achievement. Education analysts broadly regard NAEP as the gold standard of K-12 testing. It wasn't until 2003, however, that all 50 states began taking NAEP's fourth- and eighth-grade Reading and Mathematics exams.

Some states, including Louisiana and Florida, gave the NAEP exams before it became a condition of receiving federal education funds in 2003. Since the mid-1990s, Florida's gains on the combined fourth- and eighth-grade Reading and Mathematics exams have been 26 percent greater than those in Louisiana. This faster rate of growth led to Florida outscoring Louisiana on all the main NAEP exams.

Of all the NAEP tests, education officials pay the closest attention to its 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 at a younger age. Educators summarize this phenomenon with an expression: In grades K-3, students learn to read. After third grade, children read to learn.

As a point of reference, students make approximately 10 points of progress on NAEP’s Reading test per year on average. In other words, if a group of fifth-grade students took NAEP’s fourth-grade Reading exam, they should score approximately 10 points higher than an identical group of fourth graders. Keeping that in mind will provide some perspective on the forthcoming charts. Also note that Florida’s reform program began in 1999, making the 1998 NAEP an informal baseline for comparisons between pre- and post-reform Florida.

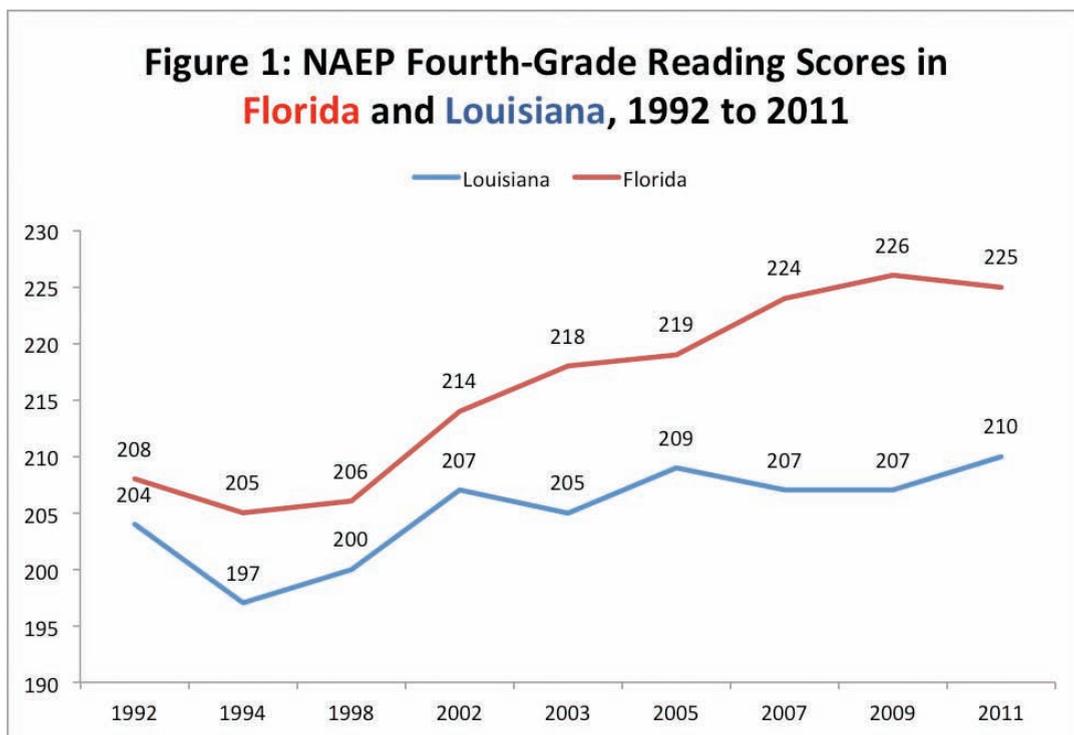


Figure 1 compares the NAEP fourth-grade Reading scores for all students in Louisiana and Florida from 1992 to the most recent assessment available in 2011. Back in the 1990s, both Louisiana and Florida had among the lowest statewide averages for reading in the nation. Between 1998 and 2011, Florida students made 19 points of progress in the average fourth-grade Reading scores. In other words, Florida’s fourth graders in 2011 displayed a level of reading achievement that would have been expected from Florida’s sixth graders in 1998. Louisiana fourth graders as a whole have shown about half the level of progress as their peers in Florida, a net gain of 10 points.

Every point on the NAEP exam is meaningful, as an examination of student subgroups will reveal. The federal government’s free and reduced-price lunch program serves as the best available indicator of family income in the public school system. Eligibility for the program varies by family size and is adjusted annually for inflation. In 2012, the maximum family income for a family of four to be eligible for a reduced-price lunch was \$41,348. Nationwide, 80 percent of students are eligible for free lunch, which carries a maximum family income of \$29,055 for a family of four.ⁱ

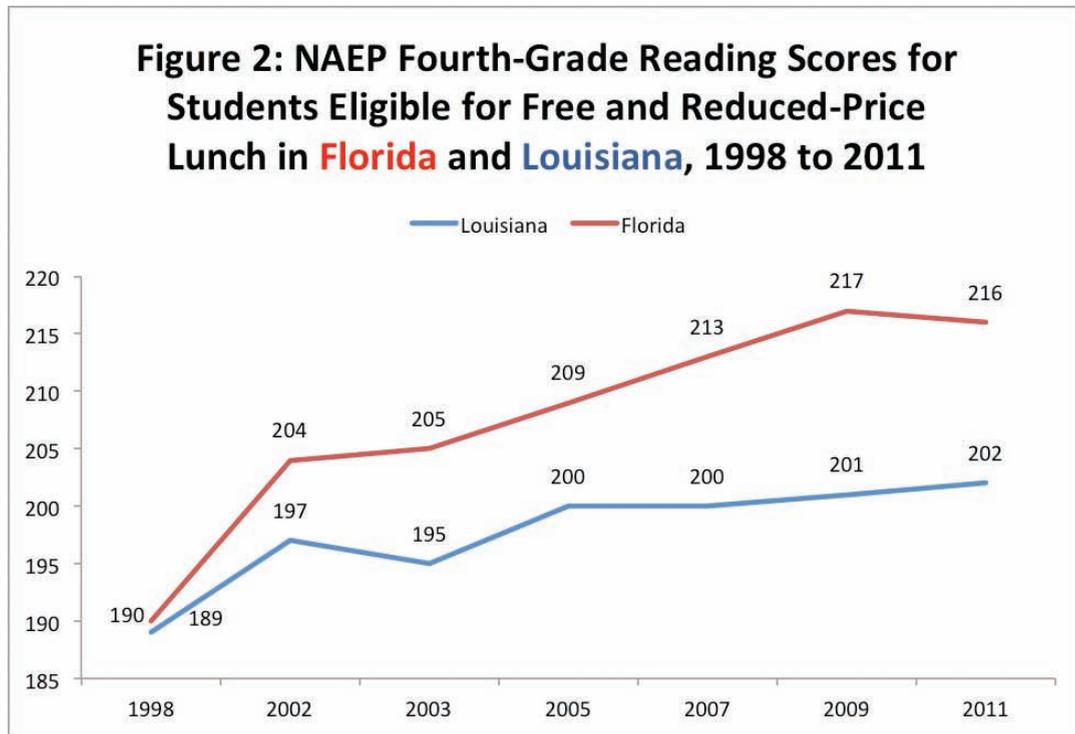


Figure 2 presents the reading trends for low-income students in both states between 1998 and 2011. In 1998, low-income students scored almost identically in Louisiana and Florida. In the most recent NAEP, however, Florida’s low-income students outscored their Louisiana peers by 14 points.

The 1998 scores for both states were simply dreadful. Fortunately, low-income students in both states have shown progress since 1998: 13 points in Louisiana and 26 points in Florida. In fact, progress among Florida’s students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch has been so strong that after 2005 they began to outscore the Louisiana average for all students.

Figure 3: NAEP Fourth-Grade Reading Scores for Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch in Florida and All Students in Louisiana, 1998 to 2011

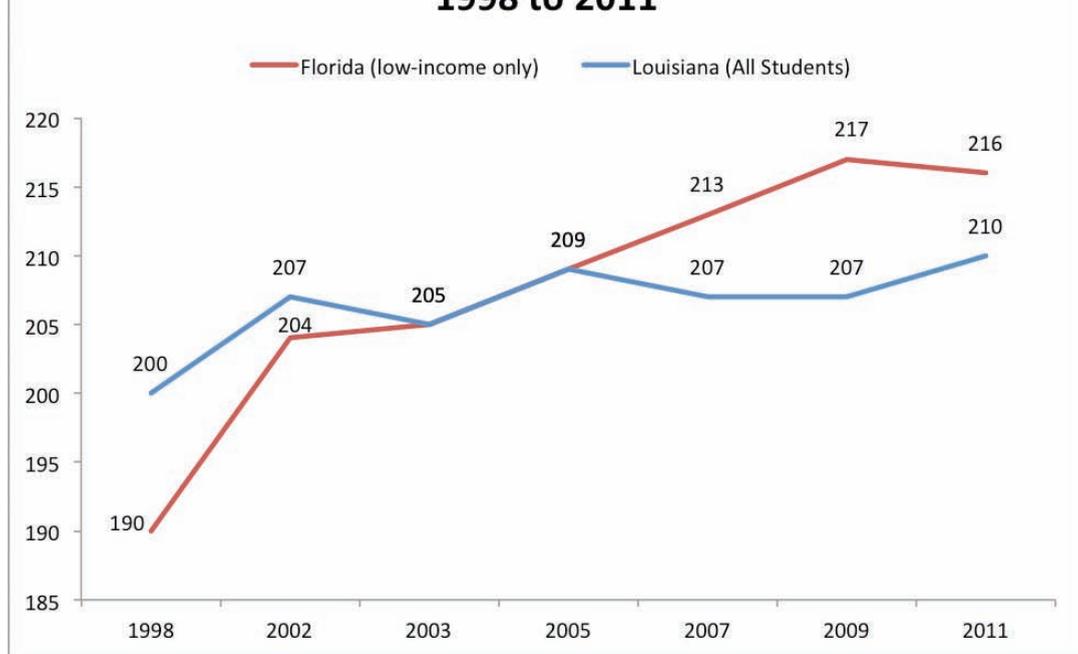


Figure 3 shows the trend for only low-income students in Florida plotted against all students (low-, middle-, and high-income) in Louisiana.

In 1998, Louisiana's average students outscored Florida's low-income students by about a grade level. By 2011, Louisiana was six points behind despite the fact that its students gained more than ten points.

Figure 4: NAEP Fourth-Grade Reading Scores for Black Students, Florida and Louisiana, 1992-2011

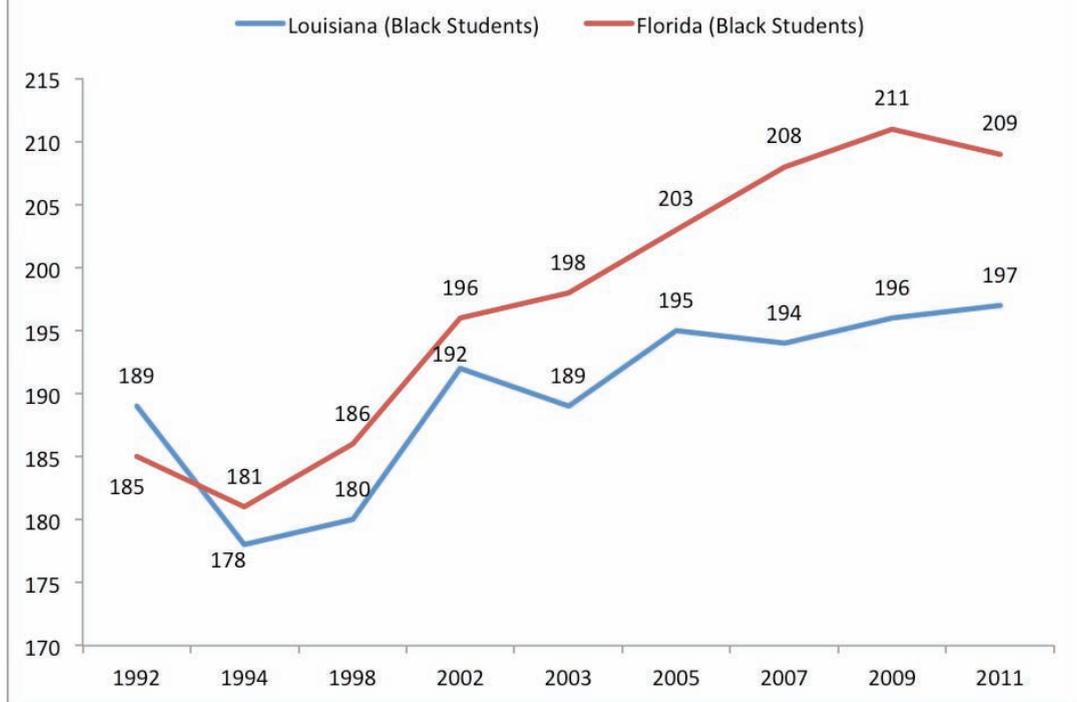


Figure 4 plots the NAEP fourth-grade Reading scores for Black students in Louisiana and Florida. In 1998, although scores were terribly low in both states, Louisiana’s Black students held a four-point lead on their Florida peers. In 2011, however, Florida’s Black students held a 12-point lead on Louisiana despite the gains made by the Pelican State.

Today, Florida poor students outscore the statewide NAEP Reading score for all Louisiana students. Moreover, Florida’s Black students are in a statistical tie with Louisiana’s statewide average (210 for all students in Louisiana, 209 for Florida’s Black students).

THE FLORIDA FORMULA FOR IMPROVED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

No single reform explains Florida's impressive results. Rather, the state employed a multifaceted strategy:

- **Parental Choice:** A wide array of programs provide Florida children with options regarding the education of their children, including broadly available private school choice programs, a strong charter school law, and a high-quality set of digital learning policies.
- **School Grading:** Florida grades all district and charter schools based on overall academic performance and student learning gains. Schools earn letter grades of A, B, C, D or F, which parents can easily interpret.
- **Social Promotion:** Florida curtailed the social promotion of students out of the third grade based on their reading abilities. If a child cannot read, the default becomes that he or she will repeat third grade and receive intensive interventions until he or she demonstrates basic skills to be promoted.
- **Teacher Certification:** 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.
- **Incentive Funding:** Florida lawmakers created financial incentives for schools to move up a letter grade or remain an "A"-rated school, and provided bonuses to schools and teachers for when children pass Advanced Placement exams.

Because reformers face challenges in every state, it is important to note that Florida's reformers advanced their agenda despite fierce opposition. The Florida Education Association, an affiliate of the nation's largest teachers' union, strongly opposed key elements of the reform strategy.

In recent years, Louisiana lawmakers have adopted major reform elements informed by the Florida experience, including the grading of public schools and the curtailment of social promotion. And although Louisiana lawmakers have pursued parental choice options incrementally, Florida lawmakers went broader making more than half of public school students eligible for its private choice programs.

Gov. Jindal's current choice proposal focusing on economically disadvantaged students in schools receiving a grade of "C" or below would constitute one of the largest choice programs in the nation. The recent and small experiments in parental choice in Louisiana provide promising, but limited, information concerning the possible impacts of a broader choice policy. The older, broader, and much more studied Florida parental choice effort, however, demonstrates that choice benefits both program participants and public school students.

PARENTAL CHOICE IN FLORIDA: IMPROVING LEARNING AND SAVING TAXPAYERS MONEY

Florida's private school choice programs allow low-income and special-needs children to receive assistance to attend private schools of their parents' choosing. The state's tax-credit scholarship law allows Florida corporations to receive tax credits for donating to nonprofits that, in turn, provide private school scholarships or transportation assistance. That program assists 37,000 low-income students in attending the school of their parents' choosing—through both private tuition assistance and public transportation aid for district school transferees. It is the largest program of its kind in the nation.

In 2002, the nonpartisan, left-of-center Collins Center for Public Policy concluded the program would save the state \$3,844 for each student using a tax-credit scholarship. The Center estimated the credit would save Florida taxpayers more than \$55 million per year and more than \$600 million over 10 years.ⁱⁱ In 2007, the Center updated its report and found its 2002 estimates of taxpayer savings had been confirmed.ⁱⁱⁱ

The McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program also stands as the nation's largest school voucher program, in terms of enrollees, sending nearly 23,000 students with special needs to the public or private school of their parents' preference. Florida also has the largest online learning program in the nation, with more than 80,000 students taking one or more courses online.

Charter schools are another important mechanism to provide parental choice. Charter schools are public schools without attendance boundaries that typically are governed by a school-specific independent board of directors. States provide charter schools with funding on a per-student basis, meaning that unless they find parents willing to entrust their children to the care of the school, the school will be financially unable to continue operations.

Like many states, Florida has an active charter school environment, with 427 charter schools serving more than 150,000 students. Charter schools are open to all students; however, students who are unhappy with their experience in public schools are more likely to transfer into them.

Both Florida and Louisiana have been moving forward with charter schools, although neither state is yet among the national leaders. Florida boasts 427 charter schools to Louisiana's 96, and has almost five times as many charter school students as Louisiana. As percentages of the total student population in each state, Florida is only slightly ahead of Louisiana with both states having approximately five percent of students attending charter schools.

PARENTAL CHOICE IMPROVES PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES IN NEW ORLEANS AND FLORIDA

In 2008, a bipartisan group of Louisiana lawmakers, including Republican Gov. Jindal and Democrat sponsors Rep. Austin Badon and Sen. Ann Duplessis, passed the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program (SSEE). The law is a means-tested voucher for students attending public schools ranked as failing in Orleans Parish. The program serves 1,800 students at 33 private schools in Orleans Parish.

The SSEE Program provides a voucher worth up to \$6,300 or a participating private school's tuition – whichever is less – for K-3 students with family incomes below a maximum of 250 percent of the federal poverty level, which equates to \$53,000 for a family of four. The law specifies that the private schools must have been in existence for at least two years before being eligible to participate in the program.

Given the relative youth of the program, scholars have not yet had the opportunity to study it in depth. A careful “apples to apples” study is absolutely necessary to provide a credible evaluation of any program. A program such as SSEE, which makes only students attending failing schools eligible for choice, should be expected to have students who are well behind in their learning. Therefore, comparisons between those students and school-wide averages will prove entirely misleading.^{iv} In those cases, analysts must study students similar to one another, as other random-assignment studies have done.

Encouragingly, in December 2011, the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) reported the results of a survey of New Orleans parents using vouchers. The survey showed a very high satisfaction rate – 93.4 percent – among parents with children in the SSEE. The survey also found that 94.3 percent of respondents are happy with their children's academic progress in the program. Additionally, 99 percent of respondents indicated that their children feel safe and welcome in their current schools.^v

Florida's choice programs have been the subject of a number of scholarly studies to evaluate not only parental satisfaction, but also test score trends and impacts on public schools. A careful analysis of test score gains by David Figlio of Northwestern University found a modest, but statistically significant, cumulative gain for Florida students using tax-credit scholarships. Figlio employed a regression discontinuity design to analyze the data, and his finding of a small but statistically significant academic gain fits with the larger literature of random-assignment studies, which find small year-to-year gains that accumulate over time. Choice program participants make small but cumulative gains compared to students in the “control group,” who applied for but did not receive scholarships through the lottery process.

One of the under-appreciated features of the random-assignment literature: The studies usually fall apart after three or four years because of attrition in the control group. The window into the academic benefits of choice is therefore limited. Figlio's employment of a different analytical technique confirms previous findings, and may open the door to more long-term assessments. Figlio's conclusion echoes previous random-assignment studies of choice programs:

These differences, while not large in magnitude, are larger and more statistically significant than in the past year's results, suggesting that successive cohorts of participating students may be gaining ground over time.^{vi}

The descriptive statistics for participating students in the study show that poor and minority students were overrepresented in the program participants. Far from taking the best students, Figlio's research demonstrates that the Florida program succeeded in helping those students most in need. A previous study by Dr. Figlio found significantly higher rates of parental satisfaction among participating families.^{vii}

RESEARCH DEMONSTRATES THAT PARENTAL CHOICE IMPROVES PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Gov. Jindal’s proposed scholarship program builds upon the most immediate precedent in the New Orleans SSEE program. Scholars have been able to study similar choice programs designed to provide options to children attending underperforming public schools. Scholars have found clear evidence that they help to drive improvement in public schools.

In addition to its tax-credit scholarship program and special-needs scholarship, Florida’s reformers passed the nation’s first scholarship program for children attending failing public schools. The A+ Plan for Education provided vouchers, or Opportunity Scholarships, to students in chronically failing public schools, which, in Florida’s case earned two “F” grades in any four-year period.

Empirical research proves that Florida’s choice programs contribute to improved performance in its public schools. A Manhattan Institute study, published in 2003, evaluated Florida’s A+ Plan and the effect it had on the state’s public education system—specifically, the effects from competition caused by school choice. The study employed a sophisticated research technique known as a regression discontinuity design to compare the academic trends in schools having earned a single “F” grade with very similar schools.

The schools with just one “F” stood under threat of having their children gain the ability to transfer using an Opportunity Scholarship if the school earned a second “F” grade. A comparison group of schools were schools that had barely scored a “D” grade (and thus faced no immediate threat of vouchers). The study found that public schools “facing voucher competition or the prospect of competition made exceptional gains on both the FCAT and the Stanford-9 test compared to all other Florida public schools and the other subgroups...”^{viii}

In 2007, the Urban Institute published a similar analysis of the A+ Plan and its impact on Florida’s public schools. The authors found that after school grading began, student achievement improved at an accelerated rate in schools graded “F.”^{ix} Importantly, the authors discovered that reforms undertaken by the low-performing public schools contributed to the improvement: “[W]hen faced with increased accountability pressure, schools appear to focus on low-performing students, lengthen the amount of time devoted to instruction, adopt different ways of organizing the day and learning environment of the students and teachers, increase resources available to teachers, and decrease principal control.”^x

In 2008, Dr. Greg Forster of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice published a new study evaluating the effect of the A+ Plan on public schools threatened by the possibility of losing children through the school voucher option.^{xi} Forster evaluated the performance of public schools from the 2001-02 school year through the 2006-07 school year. The extended time period analyzed in the study allowed Forster to evaluate how the elimination of vouchers impacted public school performance after 2006, when the voucher option was deemed unconstitutional and, thus, removed.

Forster reports that before vouchers were made available, the A+ Plan spurred modest improvement in public schools. But the program produced dramatic gains in threatened public schools once vouchers were incorporated: “In 2002-03, public schools whose students were offered vouchers outperformed other Florida public schools by 69 points.”^{xii} In the years that followed, as voucher participation rates dropped because of procedural obstacles, the positive effect of competition was less significant. Forster’s analysis found that “[t]he removal of vouchers caused the positive impact on public schools to drop well below what it had been even in 2001-02, before vouchers were widely available.”^{xiii}

Dr. Forster also conducted an empirical investigation of the Ohio EdChoice program, which provides scholarships to students in failing public schools. In 2006-07, its first year of operation, the Ohio program produced substantial academic improvements in Ohio’s most stubbornly underperforming public schools. Positive effects were detected in some grades, and no negative effects were detected in any grades.

The positive effects were substantial in size, but incremental in scale. If the effects accumulate over time, as has been the case in other evaluations of choice programs, Forster estimated that in three to four years the voucher-eligible schools will have improved by one standard deviation (equal to one-sixth of the distance between the top-scoring and bottom-scoring schools in Ohio).^{xiv}

A 2008 study by Dr. Jay Greene and Dr. Marcus Winters of the University of Arkansas found that competition caused by another school choice program spurred positive academic gains for special-needs children in public schools.^{xv} The researchers evaluated the competitive effect of Florida’s McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program on public schools. They report that “public school students with relatively mild disabilities made statistically significant test score improvements in both math and reading as more nearby private schools began participating in the McKay program.”^{xvi}

Multiple testing experiments evaluating the impact of private school voucher programs in other communities have shown that students receiving vouchers improve academically, and none has found any evidence of academic harm.^{xvii} Moreover, additional evaluations have found that increasing competition through school choice options (both private school choice and charter schools) leads to improvement in traditional public schools threatened by competition.^{xviii}

FLORIDA SPECIAL-NEEDS CHILDREN BENEFITTING FROM CHOICE SINCE 1999

Opponents of parental choice often claim that the public school students “left behind” will suffer as money is “drained from the public school system.” Since 2001, Florida has been offering children with disabilities all of their state money in the form of a voucher. Last year, five percent of children with disabilities utilized the program. That’s right; only five percent after a decade. Does that make the McKay program a failure? Hardly—the program has been a substantial success.

A survey of parents with children participating in the McKay program found very high rates of satisfaction with their children’s “choice” schools.^{xix} Figure 5 shows how Florida students have fared academically in recent years. The figure charts the combined NAEP learning gains for special-needs students on all four main NAEP exams (fourth- and eighth-grade Reading and Mathematics) for the entire period in which all states took NAEP.^{xx}

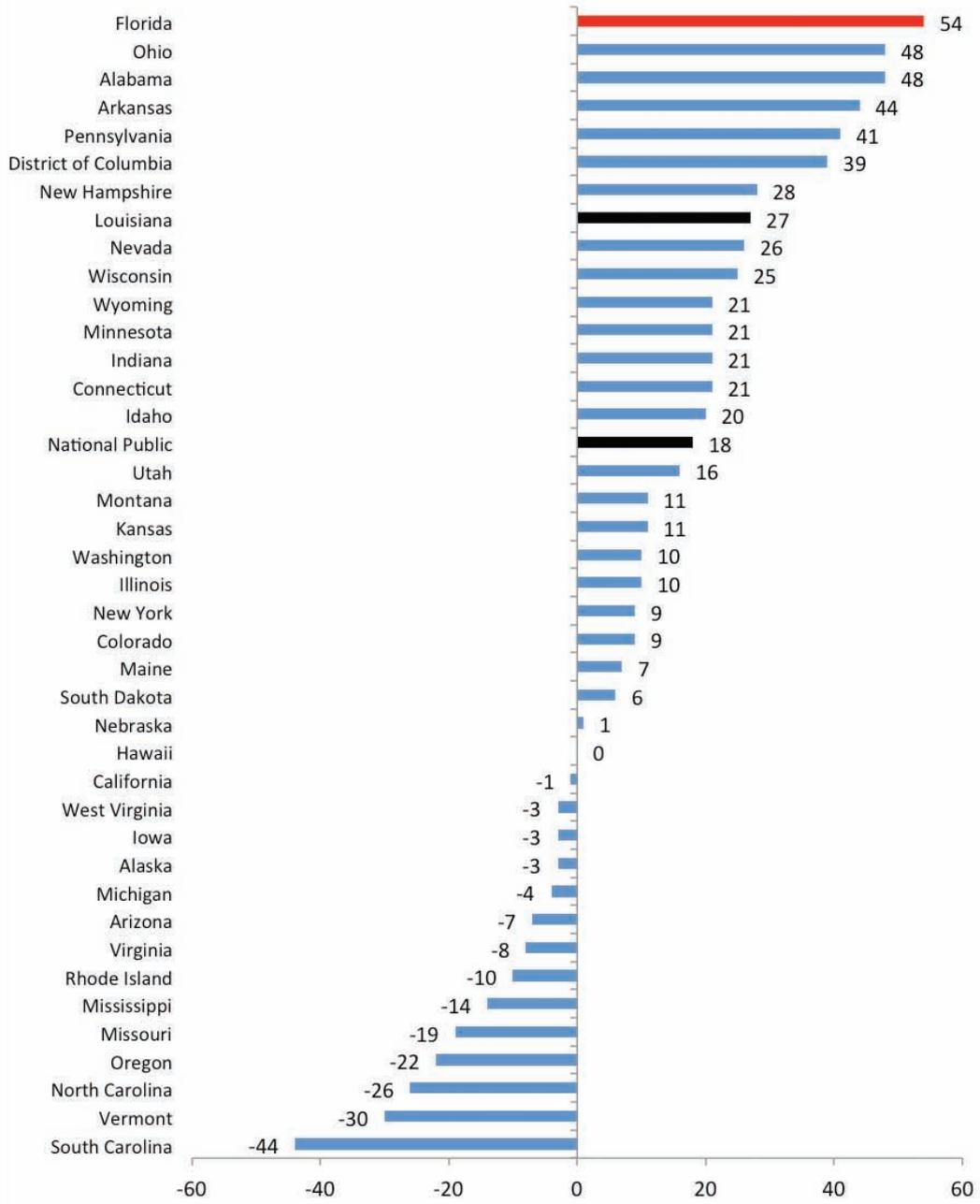
If school choice has been harming the education of special-needs students in Florida, it is difficult to discern from their test scores. Florida’s special-needs students made the most progress in the nation between 2003 and 2011. Although other policies Florida enacted almost certainly contributed to those gains, it is hard to claim that choice did them any harm.

The magic of the McKay program, and choice more generally, is that children don’t actually have to use it to benefit from it. Parents of children with disabilities now have the ability to vote with their feet if they think their schools have served their children poorly, or if another school would do better. The fact that only five percent of parents use this option doesn’t matter much because all parents have the ability to use it. The best swords stay in their sheaths.

Already, under federal special education law, two percent of children with disabilities nationwide attend private schools at school district expense. Generally speaking, they were the kids with parents who had the ability to hire excellent attorneys who specialize in federal disability law. Sometimes these families have sued districts successfully to access a private school; sometimes a consensual agreement is reached for a private placement. Sometimes it is consensual and other times it is “consensual” in the sense that districts are pretty good at figuring out when they would lose a lawsuit and decide to cut their losses.

In any case, McKay gives parents who don’t have expensive lawyers power—the power to leave. McKay children stopped being a largely captive audience and became more like a client whom schools can lose if they fail to satisfy them.

Figure 5: Combined NAEP Gains (Fourth- and Eighth-Grade Reading and Mathematics) for Special-Needs Students, 2003-2011



TRANSPARENCY TO ALL AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO PARENTS

If enacted, Gov. Jindal's choice proposal would be one of the largest private choice programs in the nation. Research provides confidence that it would increase student learning for students directly using the scholarships and for students attending schools facing healthy competitive pressures.

Louisianans should support expanded choice opportunities while considering the devilish details of this and future bills. For instance, the ultimate goal of choice supporters should be to provide options to all students. No one would ever propose means-testing district or charter schools, meaning that they ought not to support cutting off access to private options based upon family income. It would be much more appropriate for policymakers to reflect equity concerns by varying scholarship amounts (larger amounts for poorer students) than to have a hard cut-off for eligibility. Most public school financing systems do the opposite (provide wealthier children with more taxpayer dollars), making a sliding-scale voucher proposal a radically egalitarian proposition relative to the status quo.

Much of the early focus surrounding the Jindal proposal has focused on the issue of accountability: That is, how will participating private schools be held to account? Louisiana lawmakers should review the powers already available to the state superintendent of education, then contemplate whether further steps are necessary to provide parents and taxpayers with academic and financial transparency. Lawmakers must take care, however, to preserve the academic independence of private schools. The aim of a private choice program is to expand the options available to parents, not to encourage private schools to become identical to public schools.

Transparency is necessary for publicly-funded programs and helps optimize the working of markets. School voucher programs have a public purpose—to educate students—and thus should include reliable methods for judging the efficacy of the program. In public schools, such a reliable method was absent for many decades, but today all 50 states have a set of academic standards and state accountability tests tied to those standards.

The job of a parental choice program is not simply to do a better job teaching the Louisiana academic standards—even though they will often do so. Rather, the role of a private choice program is to serve as an opt-out of the public system. In the case of the Jindal proposal, the opt-out is for economically disadvantaged students in low-performing Louisiana schools.

Louisiana has private schools that have been educating students longer than the state has existed. Requiring them to provide the state LEAP test to all students would create an incentive to rearrange their curriculum to match the state standards. This can and should be avoided.

Ursuline Academy, a Catholic school in New Orleans, was founded in 1727 and is the oldest Catholic K-12 school in the United States. Ursuline Academy will have to decide year to year whether they would like to make spaces available to students with vouchers. Requiring Ursuline students to take the state exam could provide an incentive for the school to alter its curriculum to match the state's. It would be a wiser decision to allow parents, if Ursuline chooses to participate, to choose between the state curriculum or Ursuline's methods and curriculum. After all, any institution approaching a third century of operation has stood the test of time far longer than the current academic standards of any state.

A national norm-referenced test, such as the Stanford-10, would make no curricular demands upon private schools, and could provide the appropriate level of transparency. Louisiana's choice supporters should tread carefully in striking the proper balance between public transparency and the need for private school independence.

FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD IN K-12 EDUCATION REFORM

In December 2006, the New Commission on Skills and 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, doing a better job.”^{xxi}

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.”^{xxii} 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. Louisiana’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, also 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, Louisiana cannot achieve global competitiveness through minor tweaks of a largely underperforming system. Florida’s broad efforts and resulting outcomes prove this, and parental choice was a crucial part of the reform.

Fortune favors the bold. A brighter future awaits Louisiana’s students if her adults will continue to take strong action to improve the performance of public schools.

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