

Florida TaxWatch Center for
Educational Performance and Accountability

2010 Legislative Briefing: Education Personnel Reforms

"The viability of Florida's economy is contingent upon an educated workforce. The dreams of families for their children's lifetime success are intertwined with academic accomplishment."

**Dominic M. Calabro, President & CEO
Florida TaxWatch**

There is much of which to be proud about K-12 education in Florida. Student achievement has been rising this decade, and the learning gap between minority and non-minority students has been closing. Missing from the list, though, is the pace of progress. Based on nine years of FCAT data, the Center for Educational Performance and Accountability (CEPA) at Florida TaxWatch finds that the state is more than a generation away from having students "grade-level" proficient in reading and math. Based on the current rate of achievement increase, the following represents the years needed to reach the mark:

READING	MATH
Grade 3 Reading: 17 years	Grade 3 Math: 7 years
Grade 7 Reading: 13 years	Grade 7 Math: 21 years
Grade 10 Reading: Eternity	Grade 10 Math: 25 years

This is unacceptable. Research shows that the major influencers of student learning are the effectiveness of the teacher and of the school administrator. Thus, it is logical to examine statutory elements related to education personnel when seeking to improve learning outcomes.

We can and must do better. Reforms are needed. A major education reform piece of legislation, Senate Bill 6, is currently making its way through the legislative process and has been a matter of contentious debate. Florida TaxWatch-CEPA believes the major concepts encompassed in the legislation hold the promise to provide a good starting point for necessary change and open the door for honest dialogue on how to better meet the needs of Florida's most precious resource – her children.

The Florida Constitution states that the education of children is a "fundamental value of the people" and thus requires the state to provide a high quality education system. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the Florida Legislature to judge the depth and degree to which this mandate is being met. The state is fortunate to have assessment tools and data systems that provide solid information for such analysis.

The 2010 Florida Legislature examined these longitudinal data along with existing statutes and policies. Lawmakers found that reforms were needed to improve the pace of student learning. This led to the drafting of Senate Bill (SB) 6, a comprehensive education personnel act that is 63 pages long and includes 33 citations of statute. Media coverage has largely focused on one aspect of the bill – performance based pay for teachers. However, there are many other substantive issues therein

contained. The full bill may be viewed via the web site at [.flsenate.gov](http://flsenate.gov). The following reflects major elements and a sampling of the suggested changes of SB 6:

Teacher Contracts: Eliminates tenure for new teachers; Provides for a probationary contract for up to one year; Prohibits the assignment of a beginning teacher to teach reading, science, or math if that teacher is not certified in that area.

Performance-based & Differentiated Pay: Requires that all salary schedules continue to be locally negotiated; Requires salary schedules be based on performance and prohibits using years of service or degrees held as salary schedule “steps,” though advanced degrees may be considered in fields addressing subject area knowledge for annual evaluation purposes; Provides for differentiated pay based on teaching assignments to high-priority locations, such as chronically low-performing schools, and for assignments in critical teacher shortage areas; Creates a Performance Fund for Instructional Personnel & School-based Administrators, using 5% of each district’s calculated FEFP.

Performance Appraisals: Requires more than 50% of a classroom teacher’s performance be based on learning gains of students and allows a district to use three years of learning gains data to evaluate teacher and principal performance; Provides that beginning in 2014-15, personnel may not be rated as effective or highly effective if students fail to demonstrate learning gains.

End-of-Course Assessments: Requires districts to develop/acquire & implement valid, reliable end-of-course assessments for grade levels and subjects not assessed on FCAT by 2013-14.

Professional Certification: Makes multiple technical changes to the certification process.

School District & Charter School Accountability: Provides conforming language for charter schools and “high-performing school districts.”

State-Approved Educator Preparation Programs: Makes changes for both the Colleges of Education (Initial Teacher Preparation Programs) and for Educator Preparation Institutes; Focuses on evidence of student learning gains.

This is by no means a complete summary of the bill, but rather an overview of some of its highlights. Additionally, the companion bill in the House of Representatives may differ on some of these issues. Both chambers will ultimately need to pass reconciled language, and the Governor will need to evaluate the bill as to veto status. Therefore, as of this date, SB 6 remains a work in progress.

Florida TaxWatch CEPA supports the major concepts encompassed in this bill. It reflects the major priorities upon which CEPA has based its research for the past few years. Fundamental support for a reform effort of this breadth and importance stems from the CEPA Advisory Board and Affiliates’, comprised of business leaders and innovative educators, critical recognition that “the magic happens in the classroom.” CEPA’s vision is for every Florida student to have an outstanding teacher led by an exemplary school principal.

The key concepts addressed in this legislation make a dramatic turn for the state toward systemic reform that recognizes the crucial need to “shake things up” through incentives and a decidedly different approach than the status quo. Florida simply does not have the luxury to “wait and see” whether the current generation of students somehow gets lucky and beats the historical trajectory as evidenced in FCAT scores. The state requires a competitive student population that will soon take on the responsibilities of a workforce poised to conduct business in a global economy.

A Final Thought

Reviewing the state's students' performance data, Florida does not have the luxury to wait and see if what appears to be working, albeit slowly, somehow speeds itself up. The number of years that remain before the state's students may (or may not) perform on grade level are unacceptably long. New approaches toward improvement based on data as drivers and taxpayer accountability need to be implemented, refined, and continually measured and adjusted.

The state's decision makers are taking bold steps to alter the status quo, including another measure passed by the Senate, SB 4, to increase high school graduation standards. This legislation would phase-in a requirement for students to take geometry, two years of algebra, biology, chemistry or physics, and an additional science course. Encouraging these "basics" in education are of fundamental importance to our students' real world educations.

Concerns and backlash expressed from affected parties on this comprehensive reform effort are certainly warranted—these changes are dramatic and fraught with details that may or may not have unintended consequences. But, as significant change is often painful and scary, especially in efforts of this magnitude, it is also necessary for Florida to push for reforms that ensure the state's students are well armed to thrive and excel in the world's economy. This package remains a work in progress, but as the Legislature continues to weigh the legislation's pros and cons, it is important to point out that while incredibly ambitious, SB 6 is also crafted with enough time to adjust, as needed, with refinements. While some components of the bill will begin July 1, 2010, full implementation of this bill will not occur until July 1, 2014.

Encouraging teacher and principal excellence is a state priority of the highest order and statewide experiments of this magnitude, well grounded in solid principles – including teacher quality, competition, incentivized pay, rewards and recognition, data driven results, and taxpayer accountability – must be implemented.

"The pace of student learning in Florida absolutely must be increased. It is the only way to allow children and families to fulfill their dreams and for the state to continue to prosper."

David Mann, CEPA Chairman

About Florida TaxWatch CEPA

Florida TaxWatch's Center for Educational Performance and Accountability (CEPA) was formed in acknowledgement of two key realities: the growing portion of education funding in the state budget, currently roughly one-third, and of the profound fiscal and economic impact that quality PreK-20 education has on Florida's competitiveness, both nationally and internationally. CEPA conducts research, issues publications, and engages in meaningful actions to promote exemplary student achievement within a cost effective environment. CEPA analyzes and makes recommendations about educational policies, practices, and expenditures as regards their contributions to improved financial and student performance in Florida's schools. CEPA also identifies specific educational issues that affect the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of state government, local school districts, and postsecondary institutions. Finally, CEPA brings together partnerships and collaborations in a concentrated effort to effect positive and dynamic change in Florida's system of PreK-20 education.

About Florida TaxWatch

Florida TaxWatch is a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan taxpayer research institute and government watchdog that over its 30-year history has become widely recognized as the watchdog of citizens' hard-earned tax dollars. Its mission is to provide the citizens of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and education on government revenues, expenditures, taxation, public policies, and programs, and to increase the productivity and accountability of Florida Government.

Florida TaxWatch's research recommends productivity enhancements and explains the statewide impact of economic and tax and spend policies and practices on citizens and businesses. Florida TaxWatch has worked diligently and effectively to help state government shape responsible fiscal and public policy that adds value and benefit to taxpayers.

This diligence has yielded impressive results: in its first two decades alone, policymakers and government employees implemented three-fourths of Florida TaxWatch's cost-saving recommendations, saving the taxpayers of Florida more than \$6.2 billion -- approximately \$1,067 in added value for every Florida family, according to an independent assessment by Florida State University.

Florida TaxWatch has a historical understanding of state government, public policy issues, and the battles fought in the past necessary to structure effective solutions for today and the future. It is the only statewide organization devoted entirely to Florida taxing and spending issues. Its research and recommendations are reported on regularly by the statewide news media.

Supported by voluntary, tax-deductible memberships and grants, Florida TaxWatch is open to any organization or individual interested in helping to make Florida competitive, healthy and economically prosperous by supporting a credible research effort that promotes constructive taxpayer improvements. Members, through their loyal support, help Florida TaxWatch bring about a more effective, responsive government that is accountable to the citizens it serves.

Florida TaxWatch is supported by all types of taxpayers -- homeowners, small businesses, large corporations, philanthropic foundations, professionals, associations, labor organizations, retirees -- simply stated, the taxpayers of Florida. The officers, Board of Trustees and members of Florida TaxWatch are respected leaders and citizens from across Florida, committed to improving the health and prosperity of Florida.

With your help, Florida TaxWatch will continue its diligence to make certain your tax investments are fair and beneficial to you, the taxpaying customer, who supports Florida's government. Florida TaxWatch is ever present to ensure that taxes are equitable, not excessive, that their public benefits and costs are weighed, and government agencies are more responsive and productive in the use of your hard-earned tax dollars.

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