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**April 2008**  
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**Study Finds Loss of A+ Vouchers Hurts Public Schools**

A new empirical study examines Florida's A+ Program finds that the loss of vouchers has reduced the program's beneficial effects on public schools. Greg Forster, the study's author, says "The academic performance of failing public schools in Florida responded to changes in the status of vouchers in the A+ Program." Forster's research offers the first scientific analysis of the post-2002 voucher effects in the A+ Program.

The study is released jointly by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, the Foundation for Excellence in Education, and the James Madison Institute.

In 2002, before vouchers were widely available, the study finds the A+ Program produced reasonable improvements in failing public schools. But in 2003, the first year when substantial numbers of vouchers were available, the A+ Program produced dramatically larger improvements. Public schools whose students were offered vouchers outperformed other Florida public schools by 69 points on the state's developmental scale.

In later years voucher participation rates dropped due to procedural obstacles that prevented many eligible families from using vouchers. As a result the positive A+ Program effects were not so large as in 2003. In 2007, after the removal of vouchers, the A+ Program's positive impact on public schools dropped to below what it had been five years previously.

"Looking at the changing effects of vouchers across multiple years gives us a much deeper understanding of the role they played in the A+ Program," said Dr. Forster, a Senior Fellow at the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. "While Florida public schools continue to benefit from the program, it's clear that vouchers were a key element in the program's positive impact. The loss of vouchers has been a stinging blow to the performance of Florida's failing public schools."

The complete report is available [here](#):

- <http://www.friedmanfoundation.org/friedman/research/ShowResearchItem.do?id=10092>
- [http://www.performanceincentives.org/data/files/news/BooksNews/FINAL\\_TEEG\\_Y1\\_Report\\_\\_2808\\_correction.pdf](http://www.performanceincentives.org/data/files/news/BooksNews/FINAL_TEEG_Y1_Report__2808_correction.pdf)

## **2008 Finalists for \$1 Million Broad Prize**

### **Two Urban School Districts in Florida Honored for Significant Student Gains**

Five school districts are finalists for the 2008 Broad Prize for Urban Education, an annual \$1 million award that honors urban school districts across the country that are making the greatest progress in raising student achievement.

This year's five finalists are:

- Aldine Independent School District, near Houston
- Broward County Public Schools, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
- Brownsville Independent School District, on the Texas-Mexico border
- Long Beach Unified School District, Calif.
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools

The Broad (rhymes with “road”) Prize for Urban Education honors urban school districts that demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among ethnic groups and between high- and low- income students.

The winner of The Broad Prize, to be announced on Tuesday, Oct. 14 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, will receive \$500,000 in scholarships for graduating seniors. Each of the four finalist districts will receive \$125,000 in scholarships.

One commonality among this year’s finalists, all of which serve significant percentages of Hispanic students, is that Hispanic students made notable gains in each district on multiple indicators. For example, Hispanic students in all finalist districts both outperformed and showed greater improvement than their peers in similar districts in their respective states. In addition, all five made notable progress in narrowing achievement gaps between Hispanic students and their white peers.

In the running for the 2008 Broad Prize are two neighboring school districts: Miami-Dade County and Broward County, the nation’s fourth and fifth largest districts, respectively. This year’s finalists include three previous finalists, one of which is a former Broad Prize winner. This is Miami-Dade’s third consecutive year as a finalist, and the third time Aldine has been one of the top five districts since the Prize was first awarded in 2002. Long Beach, which won The Broad Prize in 2003, has been a finalist every year it has been eligible. In addition to Long Beach, previous Broad Prize winners include the New York City Department of Education (2007); Boston Public Schools (2006); Norfolk Public Schools (2005), Va.; the Garden Grove Unified School District, Calif. (2004); and Houston Independent School District (2002).

This year, 100 of the largest urban school districts nationwide were eligible for The Broad Prize. The five finalist districts were selected by a review board of 19 prominent education researchers, policy leaders, practitioners and executives from leading universities, national education associations, think-tanks and foundations. The review board evaluated publicly available academic performance data compiled and analyzed by MPR Associates, Inc., a leading national education research consulting firm, and selected the five districts that stood out in areas that included:

- Academic performance and improvement on state exams compared with other districts in the state with similar low-income student populations

- Closure of income and ethnic achievement gaps
- College readiness indicators such as graduation rates, SAT, ACT and Advanced Placement exam data

Over the next two months, teams of educational researchers and practitioners led by SchoolWorks, an educational consulting company, will conduct site visits in each finalist district to gather qualitative information, interview district administrators, conduct focus groups with teachers and principals and observe classrooms. The teams will also talk to parents, community leaders, school board members and union representatives. A selection jury of prominent individuals from business, industry, education and public service will then review both the performance data and the qualitative site visit reports to choose the winning school district.

For more information about The Broad Prize, this year's finalists and the review board, please visit [www.broadprize.org](http://www.broadprize.org).

## **National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Assesses Writing**

### **Florida's Minority Students Rank Top of the Nation in 2007 NAEP Writing Results**

*The performance of Florida's eighth graders moved the state to ninth in the nation overall*

Florida's Hispanic students rank second in the nation, and African-American students fourth, in the number of students scoring Proficient and above on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Grade Eight Writing assessment. Overall, Florida improved its ranking to ninth in the nation for students scoring Proficient and above; two places higher than in 2002 and 16 places higher than in 1998.

The results also indicate that Florida is now equal to or above the national average in nearly every scoring category and student subgroup. In comparison, Florida's 1998 NAEP Writing performance placed it equal to or below the national average in these same measures.

A score of *Proficient* and above on the NAEP Writing assessment indicates a high level of student performance in this subject area. Students who achieve this score have

demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of that knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter. A score of *Proficient* and above on the NAEP assessment is comparable to a score of 4.5 – 5.5 (out of six) on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) Writing essay.

Details:

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assesses writing for three purposes identified in the NAEP framework: narrative, informative, and persuasive. The NAEP writing scale ranges from 0 to 300.

- In 2007, the average scale score for eighth-grade students in Florida was 158. This was higher than their average score in 2002 (154) and was higher than their average score in 1998 (142).<sup>1</sup>
- Florida's average score (158) in 2007 was higher than that of the nation's public schools (154).
- Of the 45 states and one other jurisdiction that participated in the 2007 eighth-grade assessment, students' average scale score in Florida was higher than those in 23 jurisdictions, not significantly different from those in 18 jurisdictions, and lower than those in 4 jurisdictions.<sup>2</sup>
- The percentage of students in Florida who performed at or above the NAEP *Proficient* level was 36 percent in 2007. This percentage was not significantly different from that in 2002 (32 percent) and was greater than that in 1998 (19 percent).

The percentage of students in Florida who performed at or above the NAEP *Basic* level was 88 percent in 2007. This percentage was greater than that in 2002 (84 percent) and was greater than that in 1998 (78 percent).

- In 2007, male students in Florida had an average score that was lower than that of female students by 22 points. This performance gap was the same as that of 1998 (22 points).
- In 2007, Black students had an average score that was lower than that of White students by 22 points. This performance gap was not significantly different from that of 1998 (24 points).
- In 2007, Hispanic students had an average score that was lower than that of White students by 17 points. This performance gap was not significantly different from that of 1998 (14 points).
- In 2007, students who were eligible for free/reduced-price school lunch, an

indicator of poverty, had an average score that was lower than that of students who were not eligible for free/reduced-price school lunch by 21 points. This performance gap was not significantly different from that of 1998 (23 points).

- In 2007, the score gap between students at the 75th percentile and students at the 25th percentile was 50 points. This performance gap was not significantly different from that of 1998 (49 points).

## **Billions at Stake as Coalition of Educators and Administrators Shakes Up the 403(b) Retirement Marketplace**

*Other States Eye Model Plan as Deadline for Compliance with New IRS Regulations Nears*

Billions of dollars may be at stake for the 90 or more investment companies that currently offer tax-sheltered 403(b) accounts to Florida educators, as a first-of-its-kind “preferred provider” program nears adoption in Florida’s 67 school districts.

The program is sending shockwaves through the investment marketplace, as school districts across the nation struggle to meet new IRS regulations that take effect next January 1. These new regulations not only require significantly greater oversight and monitoring by the districts, but invalidate all current plans not in compliance with the new regulations. The change potentially affects more than 1 million Florida educators and their families.

“It shouldn’t come as any surprise that Florida is the incubator for a change of this magnitude,” said Wayne Blanton, Executive Director of the Florida School Boards Association. “A plan of this caliber has been a long time coming for school employees. We’ve got the best vendors offering the best products at the best prices. In terms of shaking up the marketplace, on a scale of 1 to 10, I’d rank this a much-needed 11.”

Dubbed the “Model Plan,” the five investment companies selected by the state’s “Big Four” education associations -- the Florida Education Association, the Florida School Boards Association, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents and the Florida Association of School Administrators – were vetted by two independent consulting firms, the association representatives and a group of school district risk managers.

The state’s K-12 teachers and education staff professionals (ESPs) currently contribute about \$380 million annually to their 403(b) retirement accounts. The balance in these accounts is said to be in the billions of dollars in Florida alone. District employees will

not be permitted to make any new contributions to unauthorized plans after the January 1 deadline.

“Educators, and the school districts themselves, are sometimes overwhelmed by the sheer number of investment plans they have available to them and may not necessarily have the time or resources to discern which offer the best value,” said Blanton. “The new IRS regulations present a golden opportunity for school districts to approach investment plans with a simpler, more cost-effective process that offers the highest quality investment plans.”

Florida’s education associations were among the first in the nation to recognize the impact of the pending regulations. Coming together under the umbrella of the Independent Benefits Council (IBC), the associations set an ambitious agenda:

- Development of a Model Plan that would meet the IRS requirements and decrease or eliminate the cost of compliance to local school boards.
- Begin with a clean slate and select a handful of “Best in Class” investment companies that would be authorized to offer products to local school districts.
- Negotiate favorable rates for teachers and ESPs, who have been paying markedly higher fees than other professionals.
- Ensure that the plans offered to teachers would offer a wide range of investment options.

The school boards in Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties soon will be deciding whether to adopt the Model Plan, to amend and adopt the Model Plan, or to go it alone. A great deal is at stake for educators, as the Model Plan is predicted to put billions of dollars into their investment accounts over the next 20-30 years that otherwise would have been paid in vendor fees.

While some of the larger districts may have had the clout to negotiate lower rates than smaller districts, no existing plan in any of Florida’s 67 districts offers teachers and ESPs anything comparable to the Model Plan.

All five of the Best in Class vendors, which include AIG Retirement, AXA, PlanMember Financial Corporation, American Century Investments, and Waddell & Reed, have signed Letters of Commitment, which adopting school districts can rely on and reference in executing individual agreements with Model Plan vendors. Commitments include:

- Providing the best plan available in Florida K-12.
- Upgrading all existing contracts to newer, enhanced products.
- Selling only the products they bid under the Model Plan (no bait and switch).
- Reduced fees to all adopting school districts as statewide plan assets grow.

- Guaranteed rates for three years.

Additionally, the Best in Class vendors demonstrated the ability to provide superior performance in the following categories: plan conversion and implementation, administrative services, account administration services, investment options, participant services and expense charges. They also were evaluated on company experience. During the evaluation process, each of the Best in Class vendors provided full fee disclosure broken down by proposed investment and were scored on their average total expense ratios.

“This is the first time in the nation that a plan this comprehensive and with such outstanding terms will be offered to educators,” said Tom Herndon, IBC spokesperson and former Executive Director of the State Board of Administration. “More of educators’ dollars – perhaps billions more in Florida, alone – will be available to them when they retire.”

For additional information, visit the Model Plan Web site, [www.themodelplan.com](http://www.themodelplan.com)

## **State-Funded Preschool Enrollment Passes One Million Mark, Yet Most 3- and 4-Year-Olds are Denied Access to Public Preschool Programs**

### **Survey Shows 12 States Offer No Programs, Others Falter; Gains are Threatened by Possible Recession**

State-funded preschools served over one million children last year, yet public pre-K was unavailable for most 3- and 4-year-olds, according to the annual survey released by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, *The State of Preschool 2007*

(<http://nieer.org/yearbook/>) ranks all 50 states on the percentage of children served and spending per child. It also compares the number of quality benchmarks each state meets for the 2006-2007 school year. The survey found that enrollment, quality and state spending per child increased.

Yet, 12 states offered no state-funded preschool education and others faltered in their commitment to the quality of their early education programs. The report showed that nationally less than half of all 4-year-olds were enrolled in government-supported preschool education programs and one quarter received no preschool. For 3-year-olds the

situation was worse, with only 15 percent enrolled in public programs and 50 percent receiving no early education.

Children from wealthy families can attend expensive private preschools while the federal Head Start program and most state-funded preschool education is targeted at lower income families.

Research shows that high-quality preschool education for disadvantaged children improves later high school graduation rates and college attendance, employment opportunities and earnings, even marriage rates. It lessens future crime, delinquency and teenage pregnancy. In economic terms, high-quality preschool education returns to the individual and the public up to \$17 for each \$1 invested. New studies find educational benefits for middle-income children as well.

**Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming** have no state-funded programs. Serious problems also exist in four states – **California, Texas, Florida, and Ohio** – that are home to one-third of all American preschoolers."

**California, Texas, Florida, and Ohio** are among only seven states that meet less than half of NIEER's quality benchmarks. All four spend less than the national average per child. **Texas** and **California** do not limit class size. **Ohio, Florida** and **California** do not require preschool teachers to have education comparable to public school teachers. **Ohio** serves not even 5,000 of its nearly 150,000 4-year-olds.

On a more positive note, the yearbook reported that in 2006-2007:

- Average state spending per child was \$3,642, halting a trend of declining per-child commitments that had persisted since at least the 2002-2003 school year.
- More than one million 3- and 4-year-old children attended state-funded preschool education programs.
- Thirty states increased enrollment. Nationally, enrollment was up by 80,000.
- Eight states met higher quality standards. Yet, some states still require preschool education teachers to have little more than a high school diploma.
- Of the 26 states that served 3-year-olds, enrollment increased in all but five states. Overall enrollment of 3-year-olds was up 10 percent, mostly due to increases in **Illinois**, which became the first state to commit to serving all 3-year-olds.

Pre-K funding could be attached to state funding formulas for K-12 education to ensure that funds increase proportionally with enrollment as it expands and that funding per child is more dependable the authors say. They also said the federal government could play a vital role by providing an inducement to states to expand enrollment, particularly

at age 3, by offering matching funds.

The 2007 *Yearbook* pointed out that one-quarter of all 4-year-olds and half of all 3s had no access to preschool education. State and federal regular preschool education, special education and Head Start combined served 39 percent of the country's 4-year-olds, and some attend private programs, leaving one-quarter of 4-year-olds with no preschool program at all. At age 3, state and federal programs combined to serve only 15 percent. Even with some others attending private programs, 50 percent of 3-year-olds had no access to a preschool education.

Other key findings in the yearbook include:

***Access:***

- Enrollment increases in most states tended to be modest, but some states made large gains. Enrollment increased by 52 percent in **Tennessee**, 33 percent in **Pennsylvania**, and 17 percent in **Illinois, Florida, and New York**.
- State pre-K programs served 22 percent of 4-year-olds and 3 percent of 3-year-olds nationwide.
- Three states with "Pre-K for All" served more than half of their 4-year-olds: **Oklahoma** (68 percent), **Florida** (58 percent), and **Georgia** (53 percent). When Head Start and preschool special education enrollments are taken into account, **Oklahoma** served 90 percent of all 4-year-olds; **Florida**, 71 percent; and **Georgia**, 65 percent.

***Quality:***

- **North Carolina** and **Alabama** once again met all 10 of the NIEER quality standard benchmarks. Eight additional states--**Arkansas, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington**--had a state-funded pre-K initiative meeting nine of the 10 benchmarks.
- Of the 38 states with preschool education programs, **Kansas** met the fewest benchmarks, three. **Arizona, California, Florida, Maine, Ohio, and Texas** met only four.
- Fewer than half the 38 pre-K states required all lead teachers in their programs to hold a bachelor's degree. Eight states did not require any state preschool teachers to have bachelor's degrees -- **Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Minnesota, Ohio, and Washington**.

***Resources:***

- The average state spending per child enrolled was \$3,642. Compared to the previous year, this is an increase of \$175 per child before adjusting for inflation (and an increase

of \$32 after adjusting for inflation).

- Of the 38 states with preschool education programs, state pre-K spending ranged from just over \$3 million in **Nevada**, a state with about 72,000 3- and 4-year-olds, to \$533 million in **Texas**, which has about 758,000 3- and 4-year-olds.
- States still spent much less per child on pre-K than on K-12.
- States continued to vary greatly in their per-child spending. **New Jersey** was the top ranked state, spending \$10,494 per child. Twelve states continued to spend nothing on state pre-K.

*The State of Preschool 2007* is available at  
**<http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf>**

State Profiles are available at:  
**<http://nieer.org/yearbook/states/>**

Florida profile:  
**<http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf#page=50>**

## **Technology Counts 2008**

*Technology Counts* is a joint project of *Education Week* and the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. As in previous years, the EPE Research Center surveyed the states to assess the status of K-12 educational technology across the nation in the areas of access, use, and capacity. The report assigns grades to the states for their technology performance overall and in those three categories. The state report assembles key findings from the survey and other sources.

Florida's scores:

Access to technology B-  
Use of technology A-  
Capacity to use technology B  
Overall grade B

Complete Florida report:

## **School Board of Brevard County, Florida**

Located along Florida's eastern seaboard, Brevard County is home to Cape Canaveral. The economy is focused primarily on the federal government's space program, with ancillary defense and aerospace contractors playing a significant role in the economy. The county's proximity to Orlando coupled with the presence of the Kennedy Space Center and numerous beaches help to spur tourism activity and provide a sound employment base. Population growth has been steady, increasing 12% since the 2000 census to 534,359 through 2006. Income levels are slightly below average and the unemployment rate, at 3.3% in 2006, has historically been below that of the state and nation. The unemployment rate has increased on a year over year basis from 3.2% in December 2006 to 5.0% in December 2007. The county cites a slowdown in the construction as being a key factor in the rise in unemployment. District student enrollment has been moderate averaging 0.5 % over recent years with negative growth in the past two years.

Financial management is sound, leading to stable operations and solid reserve levels. The district ended fiscal 2007 with a small general fund operating deficit of \$1.7 million, due to an acceleration of their annual insurance payment, and a healthy unreserved general balance of 4.7% of general fund spending and transfers out, well in excess of the district's policy requiring an unreserved general fund balance of at least 3%.

Despite state aid being reduced twice during the year for a total of \$14.0 million, the district expects to end fiscal 2008 with balanced operations. State revenue sources generated roughly 55% of district general fund revenues in fiscal 2007. Growth in taxable assessed valuation (TAV) has been strong, averaging 15% annually since fiscal 2000 with more pronounced growth of 23% and 27% in fiscal 2006 and fiscal 2007, respectively. However, growth slowed to 4% in fiscal 2008 and the county expects growth to slow going forward.

The district's overall debt levels are low at \$1,785 per capita and 2.4% of TAV. Amortization is slow at 25% in ten years, although not uncommon for a Fitch-rated Florida school district. The district's five-year capital improvement plan (CIP) is manageable, totaling \$532 million, although some capital needs are expected to be deferred due to slowing enrollment growth.

## **Orange County Schools, Florida**

Orange County's local employment base has diversified moderately with increases in the business and professional services, healthcare, and education fields. This has somewhat reduced the county's susceptibility to downturns in the tourism industry due to the presence of Walt Disney World, the largest employer. The unemployment rate has fallen in each of the past four years after spiking in the early part of the decade; however, the January 2008 rate of 4.3% (preliminary) was a full percentage point above the January 2007 rate, signaling a weakening economy. County income levels are slightly below the state and national figures, reflecting the large proportion of lower paying service sector jobs that cater to the tourism market.

District financial operations are sound. Fiscal 2007 ended with a \$20.7 million general fund surplus, bringing the unreserved general fund balance to 10.6% of spending (\$135.9 million), a strong level for a Florida school district rated by Fitch. The surplus resulted from careful fiscal management, including prudent expenditure controls, as well as higher than budgeted ad valorem tax revenues and unfilled teacher and administrative positions. Fitch believes that the district's reserve levels position it well to manage revenue pressures associated with a softening economy, reflected in weak county sales growth data, and state funding reductions led by the broader housing market downturn. County taxable assessed value (TAV) has grown an average of 13% annually over the past five fiscal years, including strong 17.2% growth in fiscal 2008; preliminary estimates for fiscal 2009 show more modest 4% TAV growth. The fiscal 2008 general fund budget grew 5.1% over fiscal 2007, reflecting mainly increased instructional costs related to the class size reduction amendment. The district expects to end the current fiscal year with breakeven financial operations.

The district's overall debt levels are moderate at \$3,769 per capita and 3.7% of TAV. Excluding approximately \$2.7 billion of overlapping debt of the county and underlying municipalities, direct debt ratios are moderately low at \$1,236 per capita and 1.2% of TAV. Debt amortization is below average, with 32.1% of principal retired over 10 years, and increased COP payments in future fiscal years could pressure financial operations. However, the district's debt burden should remain manageable due to the board's practice of extensive pay-as-you-go funding of capital projects. The fiscal years 2008-2012 capital improvement plan (CIP) identifies \$2.5 billion of capital investments, including the construction of 15 new schools. Approximately 19% of the CIP is funded with additional COPs proceeds; pay-as-you-go sources contribute the remainder. Slowing economic growth is reflected in declining impact fee revenues, which may hinder growth-related capital plans. However, modestly declining enrollment figures compliment this trend. The district does not plan to prefund its moderate \$132.8 million other post-employment benefits liability through the use of a trust.

## **Two New Academic Projects by the School Board of Broward County, Florida**

### ***Colbert Elementary School to break ground on \$14 million Administration/Student Services Facility project; Fort Lauderdale High School set for \$29 million***

Cubellis has been selected by the School Board of Broward County as the Professional Architectural Consultants for two new academic projects in the school district: Colbert Elementary School and Fort Lauderdale High School.

The \$14 million construction project of a new Administration/Student Services facility at Colbert Elementary School will include Administration, a Media Center, an Art Lab, a four-classroom ESE Suite, Custodial spaces, a Dining Facility, a Music Lab, covered PE play area, play courts and play grounds. The \$29 million concurrent replacement for Fort Lauderdale High School will be completed in two phases consisting of design services for the construction of a three-story classroom building, inclusive of administration suite, demolition of existing buildings, construction of athletic complex and new parking complete with drop-off lanes.

### **Colbert Elementary Buildings Ready for Demolition to Create New Facilities**

After the demolition of a few of the schools older buildings, the construction plans call for a new Administration/Student Services Facility of 30,542 SF complete with: administration, a media center with related spaces, an art lab, a four-classroom ESE Suite, custodial spaces, textbook storage, and student, staff and public restrooms. The Dining Facility plans include: kitchen/cafeteria multipurpose room and stage with related spaces, teacher dining, student and staff restrooms, a music lab, and custodial receiving. Construction will be concluded with a covered PE play area with related spaces, play courts and play grounds.

The Colbert Elementary School and Fort Lauderdale High School awards follow other successful Cubellis projects for the School Board of Broward County, including Colbert Elementary School (Phase I), AC Perry Elementary School, Harbordale Elementary School, Deerfield Beach High School, and Pompano Beach Middle School.