

COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION POLICY, RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT

FLORIDA PUBLIC BROADCASTING SYSTEM

STUDY OUTLINE

Purpose

In a letter dated March 30, 2004 to the Council for Education Policy, Research and Improvement, Representative David Simmons, Chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education, requested that CEPRI “evaluate the current policies and procedures related to the Florida Public Broadcasting System and the extent to which state funds appropriated to the FPBS efficiently address the needs and priorities of all demographic components of the state’s population. By January 15, 2005, the Council shall report the results of this investigation to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House.”

Background

In 1973 the Legislature created the Florida Public Broadcasting Program System as described in 73-293, Laws of Florida. The system is administered by the Department of Education pursuant to rules adopted by the State Board of Education. The System’s purpose was to maintain quality high quality broadcasting capability for public television stations and public radio stations. The stations which comprised the System were licensed by the Federal Communications Commission to local communities, school boards, community colleges, or the Board of Regents. State funding was provided to assist qualified public broadcasting stations with operations, equipment, production and program distribution, construction of station facilities and a statewide interconnection system.

In 1980 the Legislature enacted Section 229.8051, F. S. to limit the expansion of public broadcasting in Florida. The statute stated that the state would not fund any public broadcasting services which would substantially duplicate stations receiving funds as of July 1980. The Department of Education’s Office of Public Broadcasting was given authority to enforce the law as well as to develop policies and procedures in implementing the system.

In 1990, the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission conducted a study of the Florida Public Broadcasting System and found that while the state was providing funding to stations whose broadcast signals substantially overlapped, those stations had avoided duplication of program services. The Commission recommended that a task force be commissioned to recommend a clear, comprehensive, educational telecommunications policy for the State of Florida. While the public broadcasting system has continued to grow, such a task force has yet to be formed.

In 2001, the Legislature revised the statute regarding public broadcasting in Florida. Section 1001.26 F.S. mandates that all public broadcast stations must meet Corporation for Public Broadcasting qualifications. New stations must either 1) provide a first service to an audience that does not currently receive a broadcast signal, or 2) provide a significant new program service as defined by rule by the State Board of Education.

Currently there are 25 public broadcasting stations eligible to receive state financial assistance. There are 13 television stations and 12 radio stations that comprise the Florida Public Broadcasting System. In 2003-004 the state provided over \$19 million of education funds (exclusive of university appropriations) to support public broadcasting. According to the Department of Education, twelve million Floridians listen to public radio and television programming every week. According to a survey conducted in Florida’s public schools by the Center for Educational Leadership and

Technology, public television is one of the most used and highest quality technologies provided by the Department of Education. Program costs to the stations have increased substantially over the last decade although state funding has remained flat.

In general, the Legislature has not sought to regulate the operation of Florida's public broadcast system very closely. The finances of Florida's public broadcasting stations are audited every year by an independent auditing agency, but otherwise statutory regulation has been light: for example, the State does not verify that community programming needs and station programming are matched, nor does the State regulate the distribution of community service grants to stations within the Florida Public Broadcasting System.

Issues to be Addressed

The basic issues to be addressed in this report are:

- Is the current funding methodology for the state's public broadcasting system the most cost effective?
- Should state education funds allocated to the broadcasting system be tied to programming with clearly established educational benefits?
- Do the State's public broadcasting services address the needs and priorities of all demographic components of the State's population?
- Are there specific benefits that can be enjoyed by a single statewide system that can be obtained for Florida's different systems such as joint purchasing and other economic advantages?
- Is the infrastructure in Florida at a state that will allow the most advanced telecommunication technology to be implemented by the Public Broadcasting System?

Methodology

- Literature review of all pertinent information on Public Broadcasting Systems
- Survey of other large states to determine their policies, procedures and systems for delivering public radio and television programming.
- Collection and analysis of expenditure and other financial data related to public broadcasting in Florida
- Interviews with key stakeholders
- Identify any aspects of educational programming that should be targeted for attention, ie. early learning, adult and career education.

Timeline

May 12, 2004, Ft. Lauderdale

Proposed work plan – issues to be addressed and timeline.

May - June 2004

- Identify contacts at House and Senate, Department of Education, the Florida Public Broadcasting System, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and local level focus groups.

- Clarify legislative intent

June – November

- Interviews with stakeholders
- Data collection including allocations and expenditure analysis for Florida Broadcasting System.
- Conduct Survey
- Literature Review
- Establish and interview focus groups

November 10, 2004, Ft. Lauderdale

- Draft report

December 8, 2004, Tampa

- Final Report