



Council for Education Policy
Research and Improvement

Recommendations for Inclusion as Strategic Imperatives for K-20 Long Range Planning

Submitted to the Florida Board of Education
by the Council for Education Policy, Research and Improvement

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Introduction

The goal of Florida's K-20 Education System is to achieve the highest level of student learning, the result of which contributes significantly to improving the economy and the quality of life in Florida. To achieve this goal, all available public and private resources must be used as effectively as possible to fund a student-centered, seamless education system, which provides all Floridians with access to and attainment of the highest quality learning in the country.

The following strategic imperatives will be most critical in achieving the desired goal:

1. **Governance and structure to optimize performance** – to ensure that the highest quality, most consistent leadership, which focuses on achieving the stated goals, guides the system.
2. **Status of the teaching profession** – to ensure that the critical link between the student and the system at all levels is provided by the highest quality and most motivated teachers available – in numbers sufficient to fully meet the needs of the system.
3. **Funding** – to ensure that the necessary resources are made available to the system based on the demonstrated capability to make efficient and effective use of resources and a clear definition of the adequacy and equity of funding needed for both operating needs and capital expenditures.
4. **Integration of education and economic/workforce development** – to ensure that there is a well thought out and clearly defined integration between the expertise and experiences provided by the educational system and the various employment needs and opportunities students will encounter.
5. **Character education and the learning environment** – to ensure that students emerge from the Education System not only with the necessary work related skills – but also with the skills, understanding and motivation to be successful on a personal basis as well as citizens making a strong contribution to a democratic society.
6. **Early Childhood and Primary Education** – to establish a seamless system of pre-kindergarten through grade three that ensures that all students are provided with the knowledge, attitudes and skills-particularly the fundamentals of reading-necessary for future learning and personal development.

The Education System cannot succeed without high quality governance that creates circumstances attractive and rewarding to high quality teachers at all levels. If those two fundamental conditions are met, then the system must be fully funded based on its demonstrated need for resources and capability to use those resources effectively – both for operations and for capital expenditures. Finally, a system that is well structured, staffed and funded must ensure that the end product of its efforts meets the needs of the workplace, of a democratic society and of the individuals who are part of both.

Governance and Structure to Optimize Performance

It is imperative to complete the comprehensive reform of governance structures to achieve educational objectives. The ultimate governance system must be one that supports the objectives of the reform effort. It must simultaneously coordinate broad policy development and funding while decentralizing operational control to provide a model that is efficient, effective, responsive and locally directed. Creating the new Florida Board of Education, university boards, Council for Education Policy Research and Improvement, Commission for Independent Education, sunsetting other structures and restructuring the Department of Education are all part of a strong beginning.

The Education System must have the highest quality leadership at all levels to ensure that the key factors for success in achieving a student-centered seamless system and the highest level of learning are defined clearly and dealt with effectively. Such leadership has not been typical of educational systems as a result of the historical confluence of:

- Disconnected, unwieldy structures without overall authority and accountability as to the use of resources and the achievement of results.
- Constraints on the quality of individuals in leadership positions – and their ability to lead.
- Unwieldy operating rules – including inconsistent legislative mandates and requirements.
- Levels and types of funding that preclude achievement of stated goals and/or create new requirements that drain available resources.
- A lack of clear mission and true accountability for achieving it.

Systemic reform of education in our state cannot be accomplished without significant and comprehensive emphasis on how it is governed, at what level, by whom, and how it all fits together. All other aspects of planning inevitably intersect and overlap with questions of governance.

Within this context, an examination should include a broad range of both concrete and abstract areas from an innovative perspective. Issues for analysis range from fiscal impacts of changing structures, to role definition at all levels, to accountability systems and performance measures. Given the absence of market-driven checks and balances, care must be given to assure that the system truly exists for its ultimate stakeholders – the citizens of Florida and their economic and social benefit – and is not dominated by unrepresentative interest groups. None of the other strategic imperatives will be able to be achieved if the fundamental structure and quality of governance is not sound.

Examples of areas for consideration include the following:

The goal of the school code revision should be to enhance the learning environment while moving the decision-making to the district and school levels. This will require well-trained and skilled leadership at the district and school levels and increased parental and community involvement.

Florida has adopted a variety of delivery strategies: the traditional public and independent schools, charter schools and districts, home schooling, school choice, and the Florida On-line High School.

Some of these options, like school choice and charter schools, are used to varying degrees around the state. Are we making optimal use of all of the methods of delivery available? Are there more innovative applications of these and related tools?

This new governance structure should ensure that the size and structure of our school districts, schools, and classes contribute to optimal student learning. Florida's school districts are among the largest in the country. In many counties superintendents and school boards are far removed from the learning environment at the schools in their districts. An intensive examination is needed as to the impact of this factor on schools, their responsiveness to community needs and the learning environment. Alternate models including smaller 'mini-districts' with far less operational bureaucracy and a policy-making capacity that is closer to the subject communities should be identified and contrasted with Florida's current structure. Studies have shown that school size can have a significant impact on student learning and retention. Are there optimal sizes and structures for schools that would lead to optimal performance by students? In the same fashion, do class size and the method of delivering instruction make a difference in student learning?

With regard to alternative delivery methods, the role of educational technology must be considered as a means to enhance traditional instructional delivery methods to maximize student achievement and faculty performance. It is possible to provide a variety of technology tools that can assist in the teaching and learning process. The degree to which technology becomes an integral part of the learning process at all levels of education warrants careful consideration, as does the need to ensure that teachers are adequately trained on the hardware and software that become part of the learning environment.

In a K–20 seamless education system, articulation from one learning environment to another (for example, high school to community college, community college to university, etc.) should not present any barriers to student progression or learning. Barriers need to be identified and removed. This includes a re-examination of the appropriate division breaks among educational levels (i.e., elementary, middle school, high school and postsecondary education).

Status of the Teaching Profession

It is imperative that Florida develop a strategy for the recruitment, training, professional development, supervision, and effective incentive driven compensation for teachers that meets the need not only for the number of teachers but for their ability to help the state's students meet the goals of the educational system.

The effectiveness of the individual teacher – from kindergarten through graduate school – is the critical element affecting the level of learning achieved by students in Florida's Education System. Teachers are at the heart of the learning process, and having the best teachers available at all levels of the system requires a complete and innovative review of their status.

The key elements that require review, analysis, and reform include:

- Ensuring a safe and rewarding environment.
- Methods of training and ongoing professional development.

- Management development, support, accountability, and involvement in decisions that impact the learning process in the classroom.
- Methods of certification and pathways to instruction.
- Methods of compensation.

There is ample documentation as to the shortage of teachers in the K-12 sector – and a looming shortage of teachers at the postsecondary level. However, the primary focus should not be on quantity – it should be on creating an environment in which a high level of learning can take place and teachers are properly rewarded for achieving that result. If that is done, teachers of the highest quality will be attracted to Florida’s Education System in numbers that fully meet the growing need. An intensive, detailed examination and a fundamental reform of the recruitment, preparation, development, supervision, and compensation of the teaching profession in this state should be an integral part of the overall strategy.

The overarching goal of Florida teacher preparation programs and school districts must be to ensure that every Florida teacher is fully prepared to teach upon entering the classroom and is continuously assessed and mentored after entering. Effective pre-service training for teacher candidates that emphasizes academic subject matter content, classroom management, and student assessment skills and requires extended internship experiences in schools must be examined. Collaborative partnerships among school districts and the state’s postsecondary teacher preparation colleges and programs can be extremely effective and must be studied for best practices and promoted.

A crucial component of job satisfaction for teachers is the maintenance of a working environment that is safe and healthy for students and teachers and that is conducive to teaching and learning. Other important factors for review include the involvement of teachers in school-based and district-based decisions that affect the performance and development of their students.

Funding

Given the reality of finite resources and an absolute public need, a practical, sound and “outside the box” strategy toward funding in both an operational and capital basis is an absolute imperative.

Additional funding for education is not in and of itself the solution to the challenges facing our educational system. The efficient and effective use of fiscal resources, as well as the equity and adequacy of funding, must be considered in any planning effort. Funding encompasses the allocation and expenditure of dollars from all sources. Any quality education system requires sufficient infrastructure investment and maintenance. The efficient use of space and facilities will be needed to address the population growth demands of Florida. This investment must be made in a timely manner to ensure that the highest quality of learning occurs.

Support for all levels of education must be rationally allocated to sustain high quality learning opportunities and measurable results for Floridians. Mechanisms for assessment, collection, distribution, and allocation of these funds must be reviewed for efficiency and mission appropriateness. The impact of performance as a funding issue must be studied and addressed as a

tool in the overall strategy. All available federal, state, and local public and private resources should be used effectively to meet the educational needs of the State.

At the postsecondary level, affordable access should be achieved through comprehensive, balanced tuition and financial aid policies that recognize the shared responsibility of all involved in addressing the common goals of increased access and opportunity, retention of our best students, incentives for better high school preparation, and increased numbers of individuals with postsecondary credentials. The state's overall strategy should include a comprehensive review of tuition and financial aid policies, including but not limited to the role of the university boards of trustees and community college boards, as well as an integration of those policies with the state's workforce and economic development objectives. There should be institutional flexibility to meet market demand and capacity, while throughout the K-20 system, funding should be flexible but accompanied by standards and quantifiable outcomes, which will serve as indicators of progress and success.

Capital spending for development must be thoroughly reviewed and compared to that taking place outside of the public sphere. Any and all procedures and requirements that increase cost and/or delay completion significantly must be closely examined as to their necessity for safety, health, and welfare implications and modified if possible to allow for the most efficient, focused, and expeditious use of capital funds. It is important that projected student population calculations from school districts, community colleges, and universities be combined with current facilities utilization information in order to maximize the use of existing facilities while planning for additional space. With these two factors in place, future K-20 capital outlay projects for new construction need to be planned so that appropriations may be accomplished within a timeframe that meets the projected required space need for instructional, research, and administrative purposes.

As this planning process is executed, appropriate standards for incorporating state-of-the-art affordable and justifiable instructional environments, including information technology infrastructure, must be included for all new classroom and support facilities. Such standards must be tuned to address any unique requirements across school districts, community colleges, and universities. Any such standards portfolio should place emphasis on having multi-media technology presentation capability, in addition to more traditional classroom presentation techniques, in all public education classrooms and appropriate support facilities.

The deployment of sophisticated instructional technology will require an improved infrastructure for delivery. Such enhancements need to be incorporated with appropriate measurement criteria so that tracking of emerging standards and their relevance to imparting knowledge can be adequately assessed across school districts, community colleges, and universities. As enhancements to technology products occur, existing processes for facilities management of the physical plant utility infrastructure in school districts, community colleges and universities must adequately provide for properly assessing existing instructional facility utilization and rendering decisions on the need to enhance both campus and classroom technology infrastructure to accommodate new and improved information management and presentation capabilities.

Integration of Education and Economic/Workforce Development

It is imperative that Florida's educational system be comprehensively and strategically linked to both the economic development of the state and that of its workforce. The inseparable merger of

opportunity, prosperity, and workforce readiness with personal fulfillment, social structure costs at all levels, and quality of life makes sophisticated educational planning in this area mandatory.

A skilled workforce will be a primary determinant of the state's ability to respond to the demands of the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century. The degree to which Florida's education system is aligned with the state's workforce and economic development needs will largely define the state's future.

Florida should have an effective means to correlate educational strategy and planning with the needs of our state and people as to economic development, the preparation of students for the workforce, the maximization of our quality of life, and the positive evolution of our communities. The economy and employment capacity of Florida significantly impact the lives of Floridians and influence the intangible goals of education. It is critical that the education system is effectively integrated with current and future employment needs and opportunities. The overall education strategy should include the identification or development of effective forecasting models and sources to construct a continually evolving projection of the state's economic needs and opportunities that contests the adequacy of the seamless educational system and components in readying Florida's young for the future as well as continuing education and retraining for the current workforce.

A strategy for the use of such tools should be developed to continually re-analyze our delivery of educational services in light of the information provided. From the development of new programs to impacts on faculty development, to the allocation of funding, to policies regarding postsecondary tuitions and financial aid, higher education appropriations and other areas, this type of information and analysis should be a part of planning at a macro level.

Further, the idea that "the only path for students to follow is the traditional route to a four-year college degree" has become the perceived standard for educational success. The problem with this notion is that not all students have the desire nor need for a college degree. Preparation that is non-traditional and better integrated with a student's readiness for the workforce may be more appropriate and beneficial for significant numbers of Florida's students. However, in the current environment, many students with different skills and abilities may not be well served. This problem in Florida may be evidenced by only 62 percent of ninth graders completing public high school in 1999-2000. Whether students drop out or are "pushed" out because of the lack of viable alternatives presented to them by the current education environment, these students leave the system generally without any marketable skill, and thus limited job prospects, a situation with profound implications for these students, for the economic development of the state, and significant educational and social costs.

For this situation to be reversed, a comprehensive strategy needs to be devised for Florida's technical and academic education as it relates to workforce development. Students who do not have college as a goal should, as early as possible, be advised of and provided with alternative choices in the direction where their interests and aptitudes may lie. Students need to know there are many paths to success other than the traditional route to college. They also need to be instilled with a passion for lifelong learning, as the changing economies of the future will require vastly different skills than those for which we have trained them in the present. For example, technical education may be refocused from adult career oriented education to high school career oriented education. Students could enter career education during high school and continue to learn math, English,

science, and history, but in a more applied sense. This would keep students engaged, help them see the real world connections, and eventually lead to higher achievement and satisfaction for students. Such an approach is not mutually exclusive to a preparation for higher education for these students and must be thoroughly examined.

Florida's economic development demands a variety of skilled workers, most of which do not require a bachelor's degree. For projected occupational needs through 2008, less than 20% of the projected new job openings are in occupations that require university level education. For high school graduates who are adequately prepared and sufficiently motivated, a bachelor's degree may be an appropriate choice. However, a large percentage of graduates, approximately 40%, will not be found in any education sector immediately following graduation. Ensuring that these students have adequate skills is an important function of the K-20 system as it relates to integrating what is needed in Florida's workforce and what is being produced by Florida's education system.

Character Education and the Learning Environment

It is an absolute imperative that Florida's educational strategy recognize that we are not just preparing people to work, but are educating current and future citizens, parents and community leaders. The product of what we do will help shape our lives and those of our children and grandchildren for years to come.

Florida's education system must provide an environment in which individuals are able to develop their capabilities to the fullest, not only as students, lifelong learners and workers, but also as members of families, social institutions, and as citizens who contribute to our democratic society.

In addition to what is viewed as a traditional academic or vocational curriculum, the K-20 education system in Florida should instill in our students a variety of skills that will assist them in being happy, fulfilled, and successful on a personal basis as well as being citizens that make strong contributions to democratic society. Preparation in decision-making, critical thinking, creativity, compassion, leadership, dealing with defeat and success, and a strong sense of values and personal responsibility should be dealt with across the curriculum and at a co-curricular and extra-curricular basis at all levels of education.

As a co-requisite to academic planning, a strategy should be developed for implementation throughout the educational system that recognizes the school as a relevant community in which students not only learn about these values and character development issues but also actually learn to employ them in the context of the school community and the community at large. Without violating the legal boundaries of church and state and without infringing upon the primacy of parents in the raising of their children, the educational system must support the development not only of good students but also in a larger sense of productive people and contributing citizens.

To that end it is essential that the state recognizes that a strong and comprehensive character development strategy is one of the most effective tools for prevention of school violence, creation of a positive learning environment, of an appropriate working environment for educators, and of an educational system that not only fosters economic security and development but liberty and the general welfare.

Early Childhood and Primary Education

It is imperative that Florida's new K-20 system of education begins with a strong foundation for learning. While every level of education is important, it is pre-kindergarten, first, second and third grade that form the basic building blocks for success in school.

The convergence of several unique forces in Florida share the potential to strengthen the foundation of early childhood and primary education. These forces include the following:

- An innovative K-20 organizational approach that is beginning to align all levels of education.
- Two new Constitutional Amendments that will be providing voluntary, universal pre-kindergarten for four-year olds, and reducing class size.
- A rigorous state statute that is requiring all 3rd graders to be reading on grade level to be promoted to the next grade.
- The promising Just Read, Florida! Initiative which is bringing scientific-based reading research into classrooms.

When combined with the leadership of a second-term governor who has chosen reading to serve as the first of his administration's three goals, these forces position Florida to launch its K-20 educational system with a re-focused, more responsive and coherent approach to early childhood and primary education.

Realizing this unprecedented opportunity for strengthening the early years of learning requires an intense focus on reading. Although readiness for reading begins at home, new studies show that pre-kindergarten programs make a difference. The newest addition to the early childhood and primary education continuum, pre-kindergarten not only strengthens the social, emotional and physical skills of young children, but it boosts language acquisition and accelerates cognitive development. Kindergarten builds upon what was begun at home and in pre-kindergarten by adding an understanding of the relationship between printed letters, words and sounds. First grade provides an introduction to formal instruction in reading, speaking, listening and writing. Second grade extends the rate of reading fluency and comprehension that is developed in first grade. Early childhood and primary education culminates at the end of the third grade when students make the critical transition from learning to read to the reading to learn that is required to master the subject content of fourth grade and beyond.

With approximately one-half of Florida's elementary, middle and high school students reading below the level required for sustained success in school, the Governor, Legislature, State Board of Education and Board of Governors have challenged the K-20 educational system to accept a shared responsibility for ensuring that every child become a reader by the end of third grade, every student be able to read at or above grade level by 2012 and every high school graduate be prepared to enter post-secondary education or the workforce. Reaching these goals begins with a dynamic system of early childhood and primary education with reading at its core.