The Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. ICW promotes the rigorous educational standards and effective job training systems needed to preserve the strength of America’s greatest economic resource, its workforce.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world’s largest business federation representing the interests of more than 3 million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations.

The National Chamber Foundation, a nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, is dedicated to identifying and fostering public debate on emerging critical issues. We provide business and government leaders with insight and resources to address tomorrow’s challenges.
Are ALL children receiving a high-quality education in Florida?
Not yet.

Florida is a national leader in education reform. It has high standards, strong teacher effectiveness policies, and expansive school choice options. It has made unprecedented gains over the past decade in student achievement and closing the achievement gap. The state leads the nation in students participating in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, especially among low-income and minority students. Its fourth graders ranked second in the world on an international reading assessment and Florida’s largest minority groups have also shown increased performance on AP examinations and reductions in achievement gaps. Florida’s A–F school grading system provides transparent information about its schools and has served as a model for many other states seeking to emulate Florida’s success.

Nevertheless, there is still work to be done to ensure that all students are prepared for college and the workforce. For every 100 Florida students, only 76 will graduate from high school, only 51 will attend college, and only 32 will earn a baccalaureate degree within six years. Florida ranks 38th nationally in graduate students pursuing science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) degrees and 31st in residents with STEM degrees.

Proficiency rates overall, and those of disadvantaged students, are low, especially in science. Too many teachers are rated as effective under the state’s teacher evaluation system, particularly in low-performing schools. While parents are empowered with numerous school choice options, there isn’t a parent trigger law that enables them to initiate a charter school conversion.

Florida needs to build on its impressive record of achievement gains as it implements even more rigorous standards and assessments of college and career readiness. It cannot afford to lower standards or abandon its commitment to raise expectations and increase educational options for students.
Florida

### Florida Schools at a Glance

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total enrollment</td>
<td>2,691,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools</td>
<td>4,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of school districts</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of charter schools</td>
<td>574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who receive free or reduced lunch</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the state received a No Child Left Behind waiver?</td>
<td>YES (conditional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the state a Race to the Top Grant recipient?</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How are Florida schools failing the business community?

Florida needs more educated workers to fill high-skill jobs.

- Sixty-three percent of jobs in Florida will require a career certificate or degree by 2020, but only 35% of adults in the state currently have these qualifications.\(^7\)
- By 2018, the number of STEM jobs in Florida will increase by 19%. Forty-nine percent of those jobs will be computer occupations.\(^8\)
- Of students who enroll in two- or four-year public colleges or universities, only 14% graduate on time.\(^9\)
- On average, a high school graduate in Florida earns $7,115 more each year than a high school dropout. In 2011, approximately 83,500 students did not graduate from high school, equaling lost lifetime earnings of $9.5 billion.\(^10\)
- If half of the dropouts had managed to graduate, the additional spending and investments by these graduates would be enough to support as many as 4,000 new jobs and increase the gross state product by as much as $597 million by the time they reach their career midpoints.\(^11\)

Not enough students graduate from high school prepared for college or the workforce.

- Only 75% of all students statewide and only 65% of low-income students graduate from high school in four years.\(^12\)
- More than 100 high schools are considered “dropout factories” because graduation rates are 60% or below from 2008–10.\(^13\)
- Only 18% of the class of 2012 achieved a score on the ACT that indicated they are ready for college-level courses, compared to a national average of 25%.\(^14\)
- Fifty-four percent of students attending two-year colleges needed remediation.\(^15\)
- If Florida’s high schools prepared students for college, the state could save as much as $224 million in college remediation costs and lost earnings.\(^16\)
Not enough students attend high-quality schools and meet standards for proficiency in reading and math.

- The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) show that most students are not proficient in reading, math, or science.
- Florida faces significant socioeconomic achievement gaps. On the NAEP assessment, 76% of low-income fourth-grade students are not proficient in reading, and 84% of low-income eighth-grade students are not proficient in math. Seventy-two percent of eighth graders lack proficiency in science, and only 12% of students demonstrated a mastery (score of 4 or 5) of Florida science standards.
- Thirteen percent of middle schools and nine percent of elementary schools are rated as D or F schools.

What is Florida doing to improve schools and prepare students to meet college- and career-ready standards?

Implementing state standards and assessments aligned to college- and career-ready standards.

Florida adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts and math in July 2010. The state is on track to implement these standards and aligned assessments by the 2014–15 school year. One of the three student achievement goals for Florida’s Race to the Top grant is to significantly improve student performance specific to college readiness and success by doubling the percentage of incoming high school freshmen who graduate from high school, go to college, and achieve at least a year’s worth of college credit. The state awards incentives for schools and teachers based on the number of students who take college-level exams and score at certain levels.
Florida

Common Core State Standards in reading and math. Florida is committed to implementing standards in reading and math aligned to the CCSS by the 2014–2015 school year. Florida has developed a transition schedule that started with kindergarten instruction aligned to CCSS in the 2011–12 school year and added first grade the following year. Grades 2–12 will be added in the 2013–14 school year with full implementation in all grades by 2014–2015.

Assessments aligned to CCSS. Florida is a governing state in the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and plans to transition to the PARCC assessment by the 2014–2015 school year.

College- and Career-Ready Graduation Requirements. Florida high school students have multiple options for earning a standard diploma. Students can choose a traditional four-year, 24-credit program; a three-year, 18-credit college or career preparatory program; an Advanced International Certificate of Education Program; or an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program. Regardless of the degree program, all students must earn a certain GPA and pass both the Grade 10 FCAT reading assessment and the end-of-course assessment requirements.

What to Watch:

? Staying the course. Will Florida and each individual district maintain its commitment to the current timeline for implementing CCSS standards and the PARCC assessments? Or will those calling for a delay be successful?

? Will increased standards and assessments lead to improved college and career readiness? As a result of increased expectations, will more students graduate ready to attain postsecondary credentials and meet the demands of the labor market?

Holding all schools accountable for meeting state standards.

Florida uses a point system to award a letter grade (A–F) to every school in the state. The system prioritizes growth of the lowest achieving 25% of students and graduation rates, particularly those of at-risk students. Schools risk having their score lowered by one letter grade if they miss targets such as failing to make required learning gains. Florida’s school grading system includes scores from reading, mathematics, writing, and science assessments.

Florida’s School Grading System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elementary and Middle Schools</th>
<th>High Schools</th>
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</table>
| Up to 800 points (Middle schools up to 900): | • 50% based on academic achievement in core subjects  
• 50% based on growth in reading and math, of which 50% is based on all students and 50% based on the lowest 25%. | • 25% based on academic achievement in core subjects  
• 25% based on growth in reading and math of lowest 25% of students  
• 50% based on college- and career-ready indicators. |
|                           | To receive an A, an elementary school would need at least 525 points; a middle school would need at least 590 points. | A high school would need 1,050 points to receive an A. |
Florida

✓ **High-achievement goals.** Florida has established four annual measurable objectives (AMOs): (1) school grades, (2) school and subgroup performance targets, (3) targets for progress of the lowest performing 25%, and (4) performance relative to other high performing states and nations. These goals will be reported for all schools, districts, and the state.

✓ **Accountability for all students.** Florida reports assessment results by student subgroups. For accountability purposes, it will use a “super” subgroup of the lowest 25% of students. Schools must show that 50% of students in this group have made learning gains.

✓ **Consequences for low-performing schools and districts.** Schools that receive D or F grades must implement school turnaround interventions. F schools must implement one of five turnaround options specified by the state. Supplemental educational services are available for the 2012–13 school year.

✓ **High School Accountability.** The college readiness measures in Florida’s school grading system provide an additional incentive to schools and local education agencies (LEAs) to prepare all graduates for college. It measures student access to and performance in rigorous, accelerated coursework as well as college readiness exam performance. Since the creation of this accountability system, the state has seen an increase in dual enrollment course offerings and in student participation in ACT, SAT, and IB courses. Minority groups have also shown increased performance on AP exams and their achievement gaps have been reduced. However, the state is including students who graduate without a regular diploma in its graduation rate calculations that are used for school grading purposes and has been required by the U.S. Department of Education to include only graduates with regular diplomas as part of their waiver.

✓ **Annual evaluations based on student achievement.** Florida requires that all teachers receive annual performance evaluations where the dominant criterion is student achievement—50% of teacher evaluations must be based on value-added student growth.

What to Watch

? **High school graduation rates and accountability.** Under its conditional waiver, Florida has until March 29, 2013 to modify its rule for calculating high school grades and graduation rates to include students who earn a regular high school diploma, as well as students with disabilities.

? **Availability of school and district grading reports.** The current system is not yet able to provide parent-friendly school grading reports for the most recent school year.

? **The lowest achieving schools need to get better!** Too many students are in poorly performing schools. Will the interventions for struggling schools and districts help? Will the accountability system identify the right schools, particularly after the transition to new standards and assessments?

Improving teacher effectiveness.

In March 2011, Florida passed the Student Success Act, sweeping education legislation that, among other things, aimed to improve the quality of instruction, administration, and supervision in Florida schools by implementing a rigorous system of teacher and principal evaluations. The law established student performance as an important factor in rating teacher performance. It included consequences for “unsatisfactory” performance, including termination. The Student Success Act effectively eliminated teacher tenure and established a new, performance-based teacher compensation system.

Florida plans to use its School Public Accountability Reports (SPAR) to provide detailed information on A–F school grades. However, it has not been updated to provide the most recent school grades based on the newly revised accountability system.
Tenure tied to performance. In Florida, teacher tenure has been replaced with annual professional services contracts. Decisions about contract renewal are required to be informed by teacher evaluations and student achievement.27

Pay for performance. Florida requires teachers to play a significant role in how school districts determine salaries. Unlike other states that provide performance pay in the form of bonuses, in Florida, local salary schedules must ensure that the most effective teachers receive salary increases greater than the highest annual salary adjustment available. By July 1, 2014, district school boards shall adopt a performance salary schedule that provides annual salary adjustments for instructional personnel and school administrators based upon performance evaluation results. Florida also provides additional pay for teachers who transfer to low-performing schools.28

Performance-based teacher policy. In Florida, classroom performance must be the top criterion when districts determine which teachers to lay off during a reduction in force; seniority can only be considered after a teacher’s performance is taken into account.29

Dismissal for ineffectiveness in the classroom. A contract with an established teacher in Florida may be cancelled if there is proven ineffectiveness. Just cause for dismissal includes: two consecutive annual performance evaluation ratings of “unsatisfactory”; two annual performance evaluation ratings of “unsatisfactory” within a three-year period; three consecutive annual performance evaluation ratings of “needs improvement”; or a combination of “needs improvement” and “unsatisfactory.”30

What to Watch:

1. Effectiveness of evaluations. A good deal of teacher policy in Florida depends on new teacher evaluations and the results of the performance ratings. The state’s first release of statewide evaluation results showed nearly 97% of teachers across Florida were rated “effective” or “highly effective”—much less differentiation in teacher performance than might be expected. With mounting criticism suggesting the system isn’t working to distinguish highly effective teachers from ineffective ones, how will Florida adjust its evaluation requirements, implementation process, or other policies moving forward?

2. Funding high performance. Will the availability of funds to reward high performing teachers increase?

What options are available for parents who want something better for their child? School choice, charter schools, and online learning.

Florida is a national leader in school choice opportunities. Parents in Florida have access to a wide range of educational options, including charter schools, online learning, and opportunity scholarships.

Charter school law. Currently more than 200,000 students are enrolled in 574 charter schools in 44 Florida districts. There are no limits on charter school growth.

Parent trigger. Florida has a law that allows parents to petition for charter conversion, but it requires a vote of teachers as well. Attempts to pass legislation that would allow a majority of parents to bring about a charter conversion have not been successful.
Public school choice and private school vouchers. Florida enacted the Opportunity Scholarship Program for students in failing schools in 1999 as part of the A+ Education Plan. However, in 2006 the Florida Supreme Court declared the private school choice option unconstitutional. Students in a failing school may attend a higher performing public school, but they no longer have the option to transfer to a private school. Under the McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program, students with disabilities have the opportunity to attend a participating private school. There are currently 24,000 students participating in this program.  

Tax Credit Scholarships. Florida provides state tax credits for contributions to nonprofit scholarship funding organizations that in return award scholarships to eligible children from low-income families.

Online Learning. The Florida Virtual School (FLVS) is an online public school that offers more than 120 online courses to public, private, charter, and home school students in grades K–12 free of charge. 148,000 students used these services in the 2011–12 school year.

What to Watch:  
Universal digital education. The State Board of Education’s major focus for the 2013–14 school year is the Education Technology Modernization Initiative. A key objective of this initiative is to ensure that students have the tools they need to succeed taking computer-based assessments, since many classrooms still depend on pencil and paper for everyday instruction. The initiative also includes significant funding to increase Internet bandwidth and wireless access in schools.  

Parent Trigger Legislation. Will the legislature take up parent trigger legislation again, and will it be enacted?

How are state education leaders selected?

State and local governance in Florida.  
The Commissioner of Education, Dr. Tony Bennett, was appointed by the State Board of Education to oversee education in Florida in December 2012. The Florida State Board of Education has seven members who are appointed by the Governor. See: http://www.fldoe.org/board/members.asp for more information.
Endnotes


13 Alliance for Excellent Education. (2012). *Florida High Schools.*


16 Alliance for Excellent Education. (2012). *Florida High Schools.*


20 Ibid.


23 Ibid.


27 Ibid.


