



# **NEWS**

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**CONTACT:** Robert Weissert  
Director of Communications  
& External Relations  
850-222-5052, ext. 20  
850-321-5052 (cell)  
robert@floridataxwatch.org

## **Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance and Accountability Releases 2009 Budget Cost Savings Recommendations Report**

**TALLAHASSEE** — While state officials are working to cut over \$2 billion from the upcoming 2009 budget – including via cuts in state education spending – a Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance and Accountability report released today finds that there are tremendous cost-savings opportunities from within the state education system through the elimination of duplication, unnecessary bureaucracy, and excessive spending on non-instructional services and activities, among other recommendations.

“Every dollar we can redirect into the classroom can actually increase student performance,” said Dominic M. Calabro, President and CEO of the non-profit, non-partisan research institute and government watchdog. “We must free ourselves and our children from excessive bureaucracy that gets in the way of classroom instruction,” Calabro added. “The ideas detailed in this report will actually help the state provide *better education* to our children at *less cost* to the taxpayers of Florida. That’s smart business and smart policy.”

The report, *"The 2009 Budget Crunch: Making Good Decisions in Bad Financial Times,"* released today at a press conference at the Capitol reveals that of the \$17.57 billion Florida spent on daily educational operations in a single year, 19.7 percent – nearly 2 percentage points higher than the national average – was spent on non-instructional operations, such as transportation, food services, and maintenance. The report outlines ways to reduce that amount in order to reinvest the money in classroom instruction, to which Florida allocated only 65.4 percent of the total annual educational operational budget compared to the national average of 66.1 percent.

“We need to put the money where the action is, in the classroom,” said Senator Stephen Wise, R-Jacksonville and Chair of the Senate Committee on Education and PreK-12 Appropriations, at the Florida TaxWatch press conference to coincide with the release. Dr. Wayne Blanton, Executive Director of the Florida School Boards Association, added that “flexibility can help keep cuts out of the classroom.”

The report provides additional recommendations for substantially cutting costs in Florida's public education system without harming classroom instruction, including capitalizing on economies of scale (through purchasing consortiums), competitively shopping in the private sector for necessary non-instructional activities and services, and conducting compliance, performance, energy & utilization audits to generate cost savings that lead to increased dollars for learning.

The report explains how schools have been quick to build new facilities in response to the class size reduction mandated by the state constitution, noting that Florida spent over \$12 billion between 2003 and 2007 on school construction due to the class size reduction provision. Although there are cheaper ways to reduce class sizes and comply with the requirement than new construction, only 25% of school districts utilized these cheaper alternatives.

"These recommendations are the result of collaboration between experienced educators, dedicated researchers, and preeminent business leaders that all care deeply about education," Calabro explained.

The role that technological advancements can play in delivering classroom instruction more economically and efficiently is another important finding of the report, and the finding relates back to an earlier study by the Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance and Accountability released in late 2007. That report, "*A Comprehensive Assessment of Florida Virtual School (FLVS)*," found virtual instruction to be a credible alternative to traditional schooling as regards both student achievement and cost-effectiveness.

The report also highlights top state educational priorities of Florida TaxWatch such as the Voluntary Pre-kindergarten Program (VPK), Class Size Amendment Reduction reform, the emerging Preeminent Principals Program, virtual education, and the Prudential-Davis Productivity Awards.

In addition to the cost savings recommendations, the report repeatedly emphasizes the need to stay focused on student learning during these tight budget times and the use of scientific methods and principles in determining which programs deserve investment of taxpayer dollars.

The report is available at [www.FloridaTaxWatch.org](http://www.FloridaTaxWatch.org).

**MEDIA NOTE:** Dominic M. Calabro, President and CEO of Florida TaxWatch, will be available later in the afternoon for interviews. Please contact Robert Weissert at 850-222-5052.

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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 at 33.7% and climbing, 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.

Florida TaxWatch is a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan research institute that over its 29 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 state and local government. Its support comes from homeowners and retirees, small and large businesses, philanthropic foundations, and professional associations. On the web at [www.FloridaTaxWatch.org](http://www.FloridaTaxWatch.org).