



NEWS

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LINK BETWEEN SPENDING AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT ELUSIVE *Focus Should be on Where to Spend the Money*

TALLAHASSEE — Despite relatively low public education funding, student achievement is on the rise in Florida. That's the conclusion of new research by Florida TaxWatch which also shows student achievement here surpassing several other states that outspend Florida in education.

The report "*Florida's Financial Commitment to K-12 Education: How Much Money is Enough?*" compares Florida's education funding to other states and the link between education spending and student performance. It recommends that Florida's limited resources be directed to those classroom programs and practices proven to increase student achievement.

"This report is of interest because until Florida had an accountability system in place, we didn't know whether putting more money in education would help student achievement," said Dominic M. Calabro, President of Florida TaxWatch. "Our goal now is to find ways to improve student academic achievement and to do so by a more cost-effective and accountable use of taxpayer money."

The report acknowledges that Florida faces certain challenges – estimated spending of billions of dollars more each year just for class size reduction and a growing population of about 60,000 students annually - that other states do not. At the same time, the report notes, caring for the needs of Florida's elderly, the poor, and the limited English proficient, threatens to put the needs of those groups on a collision course with the needs of our children over state government dollars.

The report also found:

- Florida's public education system is making progress, in terms of student achievement and efficiency.
- Although Florida ranked 43rd in the country in per student spending in 2000-2001, its level of student achievement ranked above 12 other states that spend more money than Florida, including Texas and California.
- Florida educates 1 in every 20 children in the nation.
- Higher levels of funding do not guarantee higher student achievement.

- State policymakers should vigorously pursue the answers to the difficult questions of fiscal efficiency in educational spending.
- Florida's policymakers must guarantee funding sufficient to educate Florida's diverse student population to the high standards of Florida's A+ Plan and the No Child Left Behind Act in order to deliver on the promise of Florida's future economic viability. This will require fiscal discipline, fiscal accountability, fiscal effectiveness, and fiscal efficiency.
- Florida spends disproportionately more of its state and local dollars on corrections, police and fire protection, and health and hospitals than on public schools and public welfare.

"CEPA will use the information in this research report to recommend actions to improve the education system as it exists today and how to spread that to all 67 school districts in Florida," said Tom Slade, Chairman of CEPA Advisory Committee. "We believe this report and others will make meaningful contributions to educational reform in our state," he said.

The report, the second in a series by the Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance & Accountability, notes that it is critical for the state to determine what types of expenditures result in higher student performance, due to unprecedented strains on educational funding.

"If we fail to rise to this challenge, Florida's future workforce will be locked into under-employment and lower-wage jobs, unable to meet the increasing demands placed upon them for the health and economic well-being of Florida's citizens and businesses," said Calabro.

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The Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance and Accountability produces research and makes recommendations regarding issues pertaining to educational policies/practices and fiscal accountability toward improved financial and student performance in Florida's pre-K-12 schools.

Florida TaxWatch is a private, non-profit, non-partisan research institute that over its 25 year history has become widely recognized as the watchdog of citizens' hard-earned tax dollars. Our 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 Government. On the web at www.floridataxwatch.org