



# NEWS

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## **TEXAS INNOVATION SHOWS PROMISE IN FLORIDA SCHOOLS** ***“Continuous Improvement Model” Closing Minority Achievement Gap***

**TALLAHASSEE —** The Continuous Improvement Model (CIM), an innovative education program developed in Texas, is showing dramatic movement in narrowing the achievement gap in black students in the Marion County, Florida school district, which is using the program. That’s the conclusion of a Florida TaxWatch scientific evaluation, which noted impressive increases in the county’s FCAT scores as well.

“This program takes the concept of ‘No Child Left Behind’ to heart,” said Dominic M. Calabro, President of Florida TaxWatch, at a morning news conference to release the evaluation. “Using data to develop a proactive plan for each student, it’s bringing a new level of focus and accountability to improving student performance, one child at a time.”

TaxWatch studied the first year implementation of the Continuous Improvement Model for the 2002-2003 school year in Marion County. The program is now in its third year.

“This was a tremendous undertaking by Marion County,” said Betty Coxe, Executive Director of the Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance & Accountability, which conducted the scientific evaluation. “The most significant findings were results achieved the first year with African-American students.”

While first-year efforts of any new program often show mixed results and this program was no exception, the report found:

- Black students narrowed the achievement gap in reading in all grades 3-10 by up to 11.63 points.
- Black students narrowed the achievement gap in mathematics in all grades 3-10 by up to 14.72 points.
- Success for Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students was not particularly evidenced, and there were some significant declines.

“We’re encouraged with the TaxWatch findings, though not surprised,” said Jim Yancey, Superintendent of Marion County Schools. “We set out to close the achievement gap between student groups, and

clearly the TaxWatch independent evaluation agrees our Continuous Improvement Model helped us achieve this to varying degrees, especially with our Black students in both reading and math," said Yancey. He added that the district still has to close the achievement gap with other minority students, especially their Hispanic students.

"These results are most promising," said Jim Warford, Florida's K-12 Chancellor, at this morning's news conference. Warford, as Superintendent of Marion County Schools in 1999, brought the program to the school system. "Reaching these minority and underserved children is of greatest importance because these are the same people who are going to take care of us in the future."

The Continuous Improvement Model was developed in the Brazosport, Texas school district, as part of a structured effort to ensure academic proficiency in all students. It involves an eight-step process to regularly assess student performance. CIM treats students individually by assessing how much they're learning at regular intervals. Based on these assessments, students who haven't mastered the material are given immediate remediation while those who have reached mastery level receive enrichment to challenge them further.

"What CIM allows us to do is put the kids first and fix the problem," said Ingrid Hanley, a teacher of twelve years, who instructs a fourth grade ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) class at Belleview Elementary School in Marion County, using the CIM model. "CIM forces us to look at the big picture and fix not only the problems of the moment, but of a lifetime."

"Schools that align their curriculum with standards, test their students often, and continually tailor the instruction to the needs of those students do improve and succeed," said Calabro. "The Continuous Improvement Model in Marion County Schools is achieving that success."

The results achieved using CIM in the Brazosport, Texas school district over the course of a decade have been impressive: the percentage of economically disadvantaged, Hispanic and Black students passing the Texas state writing, reading, and math assessments have risen 21%, 27%, and 33% respectively.

The scientific evaluation done in Marion County was more vigorous than in Brazosport and the yardstick used for student achievement was FCAT, a tougher standard than TAAS, its Texas equivalent.

"This is a program that was developed by teachers and is a common sense approach to teaching children," said Warford, who as Florida's K-12 Chancellor has since expanded the program beyond Marion County to low performing schools around the state.

"Florida must identify and replicate programs, policies, and practices that explicitly result in increased student achievement and must identify and eliminate those that do not," said Coxe.

The research report noted the CIM could also be useful for identifying teachers and principals whose students are failing to make adequate yearly progress. CIM provides a framework for new ways to teach all students and can be used to better train teachers and principals to help more students achieve. The report recommends doing so and using successful teachers as mentors to other teachers.

"Whether you look at student learning gains, mean test scores, or Level 3 achievements, CIM is a leading factor for higher achievement in every one of these areas," said Yancey. He noted that the success with CIM came because teachers overcame limited or no resources, tough time schedules, and full implementation across the board to benefit students. "There were plenty of challenges then and plenty still today," he said.

"It holds every teacher accountable for teaching according to the Sunshine State Standards," said Stacy Houston, a teacher and reading coach at Belleview Elementary School in Marion County who has spent

the last two years working exclusively with K-3 children and reading, using the CIM model. "We've given individual students the extra help they've needed."

CIM relies on individual diagnostic testing. The report notes that the FCAT does not provide data useful for diagnosing individual students' academic weaknesses. It urges the state to provide curriculum aligned with the Sunshine State Standards and develop diagnostic assessments by qualified personnel.

TaxWatch research also noted that some schools in the Marion County School District were simultaneously using another innovative teaching system called Project CHILD. This system uses teams of teachers in multiple grade level clusters and is providing greater reading and math achievement, especially among minority students, while reducing third grade retention.

Project CHILD and CIM added value to each other's program, with higher test scores by Marion County CHILD students over their counterpart CHILD students in Osceola County. Florida TaxWatch released a study of the Project CHILD teaching method earlier this month.

The TaxWatch CIM report notes that it will take multiple years with careful monitoring to determine the exact impact CIM has on student performance in the Marion County Schools.

"We're committed to following through with CIM, realizing the eight-step process has simply become part of what we do everyday," said Superintendent Yancey. "It's no longer a "special" program. It's part of our routine, but it's also part of our responsibility to our students, our parents, and our community."

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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](http://www.floridataxwatch.org)