



NEWS

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EDUCATION INNOVATION CREATING POWERFUL RESULTS *Program Bringing Higher Achievement with Lower Costs*

TALLAHASSEE — An education innovation that uses teams of teachers in multiple grade level clusters is providing greater reading and math achievement, especially among minority students, while reducing third grade retention. That's the conclusion of the latest research by Florida TaxWatch into the Project CHILD program, in place in 40 elementary schools in Florida.

"This report identifies ways to achieve high levels of performance that are sustainable and keeping with the high quality of education required by voters in the 1998 constitutional amendment," said Dominic M. Calabro, President of Florida TaxWatch. "Project CHILD seems to be a vaccine to prevent the widespread problem of Third Grade retention. As we know, prevention is the best medicine."

Project CHILD (Changing How Instruction for Learning is Delivered), developed in 1988 at Florida State University, integrates technology and hands-on active learning into reading, writing, and math classes in elementary schools. Seventeen years later, more than 600 teachers are using the program with 14,000 students across the United States.

"We applaud the Legislature for an investment that has paid off," said Dr. Sarah (Sally) Butzin, founder and Executive Director of the Institute for School Innovation, who created the Project CHILD system with state seed money. "CHILD is an example of using innovation to make real and meaningful improvement to teaching and learning," she said.

Florida TaxWatch, through its Center for Educational Performance & Accountability, evaluated the academic progress of CHILD students in each of the last four years and found impressive, statistically significant year-to-year student achievement by students participating in the program.

Clear Performance Results

The latest fourth year research measures the impact of Project CHILD on students' achievement in SAT-9 and FCAT reading and math tests, compared to Non-CHILD students at twelve schools in Marion and Osceola Counties.

In Marion County Schools, on SAT-9 and FCAT reading tests for Grades 1 through 5 in the two years, African American and economically disadvantaged CHILD students performed better nine out of ten times compared to their Non-CHILD counterparts. Hispanic and White CHILD students outperformed their counterparts eight of ten times.

On the math tests in Marion County Schools, Hispanic CHILD students exceeded their Non-CHILD counterparts eight out of ten times, followed by White CHILD students with higher scores seven times. Both African American and economically disadvantaged CHILD students outperformed their counterparts six times.

In Osceola County, on all SAT-9 and FCAT reading tests for Grades 1 through 5 over two years, African American and Hispanic CHILD students outperformed their Non-CHILD counterparts six out of ten times. On math tests, Hispanic CHILD students outperformed Non-CHILD counterparts six times out of ten and economically disadvantaged CHILD students did better seven times.

"It's not how many, it's how well you teach," said Calabro. "A quality process and quality content lead to quality results. This is quality over quantity."

"At Cypress Elementary School in Osceola County, we went from a "D" to a "B" school in three years, with Project CHILD as a focus," said Tom Greer, Osceola County School Board member and Chairman of the Florida School Board Association.

TaxWatch research also noted that the CHILD schools in the Marion County School District were simultaneously using another innovative system, the Continuous Improvement Model (CIM). 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 is releasing a study of the CIM program in late March.

David Griffin, who served as Secretary of the Florida Lottery during Governor Jeb Bush's first term, and currently serves as a member of the Florida TaxWatch board, stated, "Project CHILD helps Florida achieve the goals of educational success we all believe are essential for economic productivity. I am so impressed with Project CHILD's results for all children served that I've agreed to serve as a volunteer on the board of the Institute for School Innovation. Florida has every reason to invest in educational innovations that work, and Project CHILD is at the head of that class."

Past TaxWatch Research on Project CHILD

Florida TaxWatch has conducted four studies of Project CHILD. Phase I, which compared CHILD and non-CHILD schools with class size as a variable, documented the program's overall positive effects despite having larger class sizes. Phase II, which substantiated results in Phase I, demonstrated that CHILD is a cost-effective program.

Phase III showed that Project CHILD would result in significant per student cost savings if expanded to other schools throughout Florida. The CHILD model with a class size of 30 students would accrue annual savings of more than \$4 billion over the traditional class size of 20 students. This occurred prior to the class size amendment.

Research also revealed a third grade retention rate 60% less in CHILD classrooms versus the general elementary school population in Florida. A September 2003 Briefings by Florida TaxWatch found, that had CHILD been implemented statewide in 2003, the savings generated by reducing third grade retention of regular education students in both the Non-Title I and Title I programs would have been \$129,015,494.

"These considerable savings could be used to purchase five high schools costing \$25 million each or hire 2,637 new teachers, with benefits, at state average," said Calabro.

How Does Project CHILD Work?

Today's conventional approach in elementary school classrooms involves a single teacher working with a single grade level for a single year using predominantly textbook-driven teaching materials.

The CHILD system replaces convention with innovation. Teachers work in teams of three with each becoming a specialist in reading, writing, or mathematics. Subject-focused teachers form cross-grade clusters (K-2 or 3-5) to facilitate standards-based skill articulation and in-depth diversified learning. There are three classrooms in a cluster – one for reading, one for writing, and one for mathematics. One classroom serves as each student's home base – usually grade specific. After a brief whole-group teacher-directed lesson, students work at six learning stations to practice and apply lesson content using computers and hands-on activities along with textbooks and paper-pencil work. Students rotate through the three-cluster classrooms, spending 60-90 minutes on each subject, and then returning to their home base for instruction in science and social studies.

Students stay with their cluster team of teachers for three years, allowing the teachers to become very familiar with each student's strengths, learning styles, and needs, thus helping all students to maximize their academic potential. Also, one of the six classroom stations is a Teacher Station where the teacher can work with individual students and small groups for additional instruction as needed.

CHILD instructional materials are aligned with state standards and intensive training of local staff, provided by the Institute for School Innovation.

Groups including the U.S. Department of Education's National Diffusion Network and the Georgia Innovation Program have recognized CHILD as an effective instructional management program.

Indeed, schools in other states are taking notice of Florida's achievements. A Kentucky elementary school that implemented the CHILD Program school wide was one of six winners of the prestigious and highly competitive National School Change Award last year.

"We commend the 15 school districts in Florida, their school boards and superintendents currently using Project CHILD to teach 13,500 children," said Calabro. "They've demonstrated a willingness to break out of mediocrity and embrace a method that works."

The Florida Legislature, by providing \$2 million in start-up funding, could double the number of Project CHILD students over the next school year, from 13,500 – 27,000. After the initial start-up costs, schools using Project CHILD are self-sustaining.

"Florida has an opportunity to continue to be a trend-setter," said Butzin. "Project CHILD is ready to grow. We are dedicated to continue to bring education success to many more students in the years ahead.

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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