

## EDUCATION: A COMPARISON OF FLORIDA AND UTAH

*Kim Burningham, February 4, 2011*

In August 2010, Governor Jeb Bush was brought to Utah to speak at a luncheon sponsored by Parents for Choice in Education. At the luncheon, Bush called changes in Florida, specifically grading schools, “transformational.” (23) A Heritage Foundation report claimed policy changes in Florida led to significant student achievement improvement. The report urged the policies be widely adopted. (15)

The report is challenged, however. For example, Chatterji in a review out of Columbia University concluded: “the data and analyses presented do not provide any **meaningful** findings on the effects of comprehensive services at all.” (4, 16)

To consider adopting some changes based on the Florida experience, Utah must compare a large spectrum of information. Personally, examining the research, I draw the following conclusions:

Two main pieces of evidence suggest that the Florida model deserves imitation:

- Proponents of the Florida model most often point to progress in **4<sup>th</sup> grade reading** scores in Florida. According to the NAEP test, reading in Florida significantly improved between the turn of the century and today. (*See page 5.*)
- Secondly, those proponents may also cite the *Education Week*’s analysis, “**Quality Counts**” which gave Florida generally high marks in some areas, especially “standards and accountability.” Utah is ranked lower. (*See page 7.*)

However, I question the conclusions that some of these proponents draw, especially when they argue that grading of school should be implemented.

- **NAEP scores in other grades and subjects** do not show the same improvement as in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading. Indeed, in some areas of math and in all areas of Science, Utah scores higher. Some pundits jump to questionable conclusions because they focus only on the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading score. (*See pages 5-6.*)
- I find no evidence to verify that Florida’s reading improvement can be linked to “grading schools.” At least two other options exist. The first is **a large infusion of money in reading assistance programs** for early grades. (*See page 8 .*)
- Further, it seems much more likely to me reading scores improved **because 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students in Florida who could not read well were held back for a year in large numbers**. This significantly impacted the test score improvement on that one test. (*See page 5-6.*)
- Relative to the “Quality Counts” report, Utah does lead in other areas, specifically “Chances for success.” I believe this report prepared by *Education Week* gives strong

preference to areas also emphasized in Florida. In that sense, I find their statistics suffer from *circulus in probando reasoning*. The evidence, in some cases, turns out to be the same as the conclusions. (See page 7.)

Furthermore, other strong evidence leads me to believe that we should not follow certain features of the Florida model, while some other features merit consideration.

- In the first place, **Florida has spent large amounts of money** to implement their reforms. (Compare 22-28% [UT] increase to 69% [FL].) The grading of schools concept in Florida, for instance, was accompanied by large financial incentives that were provided to schools if they showed progress. Instead of promoting the grading of schools, I believe the Florida experience speaks to the importance of improved funding. (See pages 3, 4, 6, 7, 8.)
- Further, Florida has mandated **significant class size reductions** during the period. (Compare 18 [FL] to 24.5 [UT] in third grade.) It is as logical to claim the improvement in reading scores relates to class size reduction as it is to say it relates to grading schools. Does Florida remind us of how critical class size reduction is? (See page 4.)
- Also, in other comparatives, specifically **graduation rate**, Florida lags behind Utah. (Compare 74.3% [UT] to 66.9% [FL].) Both states need to encourage increased graduation, but the evidence suggests we are closer to that goal than Florida. (See page 3.)
- When comparing **ACT scores**, the Utah average score is higher than Florida and slightly rising. The Florida scores are lower and declining. (Compare 21.8 [UT] with 19.5 [FL].) See page 4.)
- Finally, **many other reforms** than grading schools were implemented in Florida. Some of them have been similarly adopted in Utah. Each reform should be evaluated independently. (See pages 4, 6, 7, 8.)

Evidence supporting my conclusions follows in the schematic comparison.

## Comparison of education systems: FLORIDA vs. UTAH

Issue	Utah	Florida
<b>Number of pupils in public schools</b>	In 2008: 576,000 (2)	In 2008: 2,667,000 (2)
<b>Funding in general</b>	<p>Funding for education in Utah increased by either 22 or 28 percent between 1999 and 2006.</p> <p>If it is just state funding, the increase was 22%. If it is total funding, the Utah numbers reflect a 28% increase. (28)</p> <p>The “Quality Counts” report: Utah (despite an A grade in equity) ranked 47<sup>th</sup> in school finance. In spending, Utah received 40.8 points out of a possible 100, the lowest with an F. (7)</p>	<p>Funding for education as a whole increased 69 % between 1999 and 2006 or \$7.7 billion. (11)</p> <p>The “Quality Counts” report: Florida ranked 31<sup>st</sup> in school finance. In spending, Florida received 55.1 points out of a possible 100, also low with an F. (7)</p>
<b>Per pupil expenditure</b>	In 2008: \$5,765.00 per pupil 51 <sup>st</sup> in nation National Average: \$10,529	In 2008: \$9,035.00 per pupil 27 <sup>th</sup> in nation (Florida spends 157% of what Utah spends per pupil.)
<b>Per pupil \$ spent on instruction</b>	Utah: \$3718.00 per pupil National Average: \$6,211	Florida: \$5440.00 per pupil
<b>Per pupil \$ spent on support services</b>	Utah: \$1705.00 per pupil National Average, \$3,635 (24)	Florida: \$3,200.00 per pupil (24)
<b>Graduations rate</b>	In 2008: 74.3% (5, 24)	<p>In 2008: Florida 66.9% (5,25)</p> <p>“Florida ranks 47<sup>th</sup> in the nation in high school graduation rates. Only 57.5% earned a regular diploma, with the national average being 69.2 % No improvement in over 10 years.” (17)</p> <p>Jeb Bush, Florida, claimed higher: 71.9% (8)</p>

<b>Class size</b>	<p>Average third grade class in Utah: 24.5 students</p> <p>Average 8<sup>th</sup> grade language arts class has 29.0 students</p> <p>Average 11th grade language arts class has 30 students (21)</p>	<p>Florida limits class sizes to 18 in grades K-3,</p> <p>to 22 in grades 4-8, and</p> <p>to 25 in high school core subjects.</p> <p>In 2002, the constitutional amendment in Florida limiting class sizes passed, and implementation began in 2003-2004. The limits were to be in effect by 2010-2011. Districts have been working on this reduction the entire time. Florida has appropriated \$2.9 billion dollars between 2003 and 2011 to reduce class sizes. (4, 21)</p> <p>The Florida State Board of Education levied \$31 million in fines against 28 school districts for violating the class-size limits. (10)</p> <p>Because of class size requirements, some Florida schools are turning to virtual schools where no teacher is involved; a facilitator handles technical problems. (9)</p>
<b>Graduation requirements</b>	4 English, 3 math, 3 science, 3 social studies, 1.5 fine arts, 1 CTE, 2 PE/Health, .5 computer, 6 required electives = 24 (27)	4 English, 4 math, 3 science, 3 social science, 1 fine arts, 1 PE/health. Plus electives and credits in major area of interest = 24 (17)
<b>ACT scores</b>	<p>2010:</p> <p>% taking the test: 71%</p> <p>Utah student composite average 21.8</p> <p>Average reading score: 22.5</p> <p>5-year trend: Utah slight increase 21.7 to 21.8 (1)</p>	<p>2010:</p> <p>% taking the test: 65%</p> <p>Florida composite average: 19.5</p> <p>Average reading score: 20.1</p> <p>5-year trend: Florida is declining: 20.3 to 19.5 (1)</p>

<p><b>NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) reading</b></p>	<p>Utah reading scores in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade have remained approximately the same between 1998 and 2009 (13)</p> <p>Utah's 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading score in 2009 is 219 ("no significant change") National average: 220 (19)</p> <p>Utah's 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading score in 2009 is 266. ("Increased.") National Average: 262 (19)</p>	<p>Reading improvement in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade improves significantly. 205.7 in 1998; 225.7 in 2009 Between 1998 and 2009, Florida closed the achievement gap between white and black students by 17 points in fourth grade reading, and by 23 points among Hispanic students. (21)</p> <p>Florida's 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading score in 2009 is 226 ("No significant change") (19)</p> <p>Florida's 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading score in 2009 is 264 ("Increased") (19)</p> <p>"The decision to look only at grade 4<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP Reading scores" when talking about improvements resulted in inflated conclusions. The evidence on Florida's NAEP achievement trends and gaps is mixed when other grade levels and subject areas are examined..." (4)</p>
<p><b>NAEP mathematics scores</b></p>	<p>Utah's 4<sup>th</sup> grade math score in 2009 is 240 ("No significant change") National average: 239 (18)</p> <p>Utah's 8<sup>th</sup> grade math score in 2009 is 284. ("Increased.") National Average: 282 (18)</p>	<p>The achievement gap in math remains stable. (20) The test score date on all subjects and grade levels were not as positive as in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading. (4)</p> <p>Florida's 4<sup>th</sup> grade math score in 2009 is 242 ("No significant change") (18)</p> <p>Florida's 8<sup>th</sup> grade math score in 2009 is 279 ("No significant change") (18)</p>

<b>NAEP Science scores</b>	<p>Utah's 4<sup>th</sup> grade science score in 2009 is 154 ("Higher") National average: 149 (20)</p> <p>Utah's 8<sup>th</sup> grade science score in 2009 is 158. ("Higher") National Average: 149 (20)</p>	<p>Florida's 4<sup>th</sup> grade science score in 2009 is 151 ("No significant change") (20)</p> <p>Florida's 8<sup>th</sup> grade science score in 2009 is 146 ("Lower") (20)</p>
<b>Grading Schools</b>	<p>State issues the U-PASS Accountability System School Report which measures both proficiency and progress. Grading is issued by percentages. (26)</p> <p>No financial incentive accompanies the growth.</p>	<p>State report card for each school; grading is issued by letter grades: A-F (3, 14)</p> <p>In 2006 financial incentive accompanied the grades: Schools that move up a grade get \$100 per student. This cost Florida \$157.6 million in 2006; between 1999 and 2006, \$852.7 million. (11)</p>
<b>Policy of student retention</b>	<p>Utah has no statewide policy of student retention. In a few districts retention is utilized.</p>	<p>The program (A+) that started grading schools ended social promotion in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. (3, 14)</p> <p>14-23% of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students (largely black and Hispanic) were held back if performing poorly on reading test. The "increase in grade retention rates spuriously inflated the average scores of grade 4 students...[S]creening out the weakest readers, along with the presence of unknown number of older grade repeaters in the grade 4... changes the composition of the students tested in grade 4 and invalidates comparisons." (4)</p>

<p><b>AP classes</b></p>	<p>Utah gives no bonuses for taking or passing the AP test.</p> <p>27.7% of the graduating class in Utah took an AP test.</p> <p>18.5% of the graduating class earned a 4 or higher on an AP test. (6)</p> <p>The pass rate is 69.8%</p> <p>National rate of passage: 58% (29)</p>	<p>Florida encourages taking of the AP test: Bonuses of \$50 for every student passing AP given to teachers up to \$2000 per year, plus \$650 per AP passing student for each school. In schools rated D or F, an additional \$500 per AP passing students is awarded. (14)</p> <p>40.2% of the graduating class in Florida took an AP test.</p> <p>21.3 % of the graduating class earned a 3 or higher on an AP test. (6)</p> <p>The pass rate is 53%</p>
<p><b>“Quality Counts” rating</b></p>	<p>38<sup>th</sup> in 2008 38<sup>th</sup> in 2009 41<sup>st</sup> in 2010</p> <p>In the most recent report, Utah gets a “C+” in “Standards, Assessments, and Accountability.”</p> <p>In achievement ranks Utah gets a “D+.”</p> <p>In “Chance for Success” Utah gets a “B-“ (7)</p>	<p>14<sup>th</sup> in 2008 10<sup>th</sup> in 2009 5<sup>th</sup> in 2010</p> <p>Education Week prepares the “Quality Counts” report, a report which supports preferences of that organization.</p> <p>In the most recent report, Florida gets an “A” in “Standards, Assessments , and Accountability” (indicative of the preference of Education Week)</p> <p>In achievement ranks Florida gets a “C+.”</p> <p>In “Chance for Success” a “C.” (7)</p>

<b>Various other reform measures</b>	Utah has enacted some but not all of the changes implemented by Florida. Specifically, Utah has programs involving testing, charter schools, virtual education, a pilot regarding performance-based pay, alternative certification, and reading assistance	In 1999, Florida enacted changes that included increased funding, grading schools, increased testing, rewarding successful schools, providing support for failing schools, eliminating social retention, increasing funding for remediation and school safety, raising teacher standards, providing rewards for superior teachers, choice, charter schools, virtual education, reading assistance, mentoring of struggling schools, middle school requirements, and alternative certification. (3, 4, 21)
<b>Early reading assistance programs</b>	Utah's education reforms have focused on improving reading skills in the early grades. Districts have increased reading coaches and improved reading assessment systems. The Utah funding in the current fiscal year reached \$28 million. (21)	In Florida's Reading assistance program, 64 of the state's schools were targeted for special help (managerial assistance, reading coaches, additional training for teachers) that cost \$25 million (\$390,000 per school). (21)
<b>Performance based pay</b>	Utah is currently involved in a pilot program related to performance-based pay.	Merit pay offered up to 10 % of teacher's pay in bonuses (Initially funded at \$147 million.) As of 2006, differentiated pay mandated in each district. (3. 14)
<b>Common Core</b>	Utah has joined	Florida has joined (12)

Footnotes:

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