



## **High Academic Standards: The 21st Century Diploma Initiative**

The quality of Florida's education will determine our economic destiny. With tourism declining and the life sciences, biotechnology and aerospace sectors emerging as the state's most promising economic engines, Florida is quickly moving toward an economy that values and rewards knowledge. Innovation and invention – not just goods and services – are the coveted commodities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To grow and sustain a workforce that will meet the needs of this more dynamic and competitive marketplace, Florida must better prepare students for college and the workforce, adopt a more rigorous curriculum, increase graduation rates, lower the number of students dropping out of school, add value to our high school diplomas and, most importantly, close the achievement gap.

### **The Cost and Consequences of Inaction**

#### **A. Jobs Lost to Emerging Economies around the World**

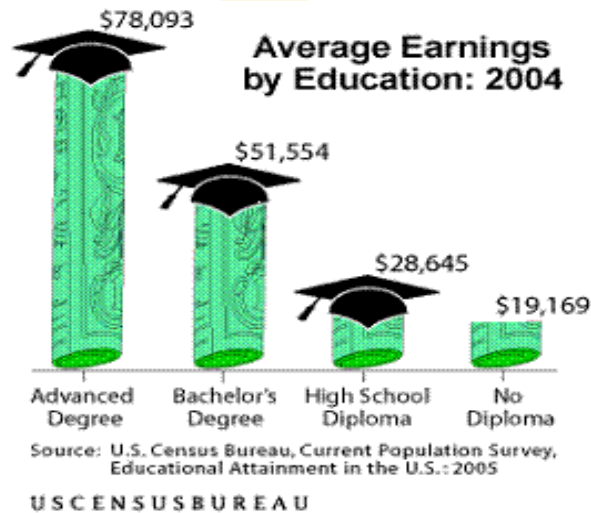
A report released recently by McKinsey & Company confirms what education reformers have long understood – the persisting achievement gap in American schools is a tremendous threat to our nation's long-term economic security. In fact, America's educational decline is the equivalent of a permanent national recession. McKinsey & Company researchers estimated that if the United States had closed the achievement gap with higher-performing nations, the 2008 gross domestic product could have been \$1.3 trillion to \$2.3 trillion higher, representing 9 to 16 percent of our total GDP.

As our country's quality of education continues to flat line, and in many cases decline, the knowledge gap between America and international education leaders, such as South Korea and Finland, continues to widen. As recently as 1995, America was tied for first in the world in college graduation rates. By 2006, the U.S. had fallen to 14<sup>th</sup>.

#### **B. A Growing Government to Meet the Higher Demand for Services**

While raising the quality of education is an obvious requirement to fostering a red hot economy and growing a skilled workforce, it is also the key to reducing the demand and dependence on costly government services, ultimately saving taxpayer dollars through less entitlement spending.

Students who drop out of high school are more likely to earn less, be of poorer health, and serve time in prison. On average, a high school dropout earns around \$260,000 less during a lifetime than a high school graduate. According to the U.S. Census, a student with a bachelor's degree earns, on average, almost \$23,000 more per year than a student with a high school diploma.



### C. A Widening Divide Between Americans

The achievement gap between white and minority students and between affluent and low-income students is persistent and pervasive. Results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test plainly evince a racial achievement gap – 48 percent of African-Americans and 43 percent of Hispanics are “below basic” in math and reading, compared to only 17 percent of white students.

Additionally, students eligible for free or reduced lunches are, on average, two years of learning behind their peers from higher-income families. The gap widens in higher education. Only 9 percent of freshmen at the nation’s top 120 colleges come from the lower half of the socioeconomic scale.

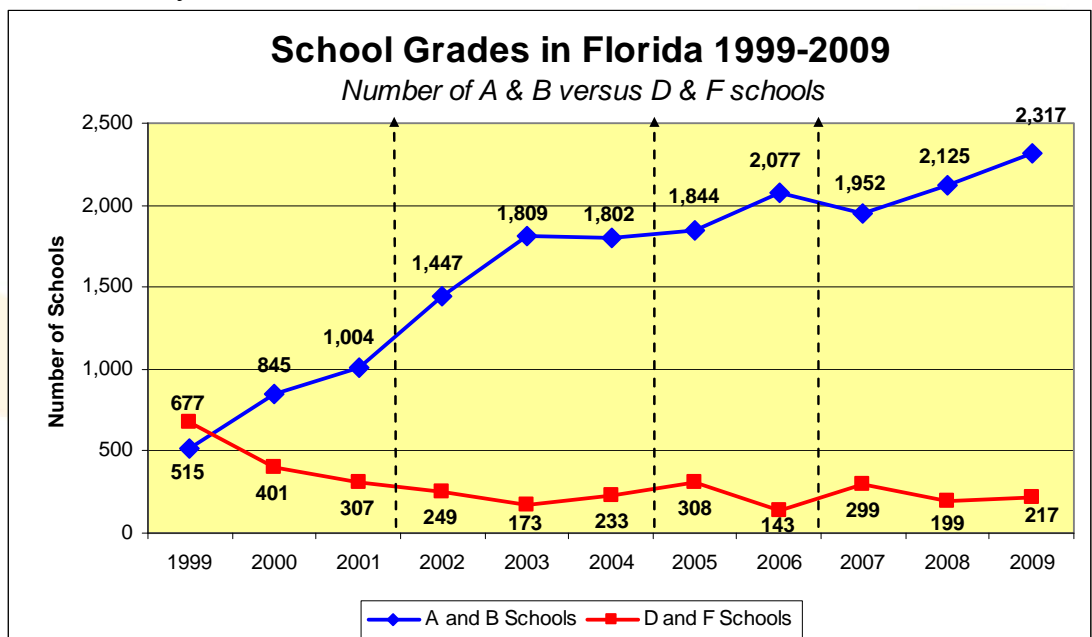
## The Status of Florida’s Education

### A. Rising Student Achievement

Florida’s system of rigorous academic standards, accountability, and competition is raising student performance and closing the achievement gap:

- ✓ In every grade, the percentage of students performing at or above grade level in reading and math has made double-digit leaps since 2001.

- ✓ According NAEP results, Florida is one of only three states in the country that has closed the African American achievement gap in both 4th grade reading and math – while raising *all students'* scores.
- ✓ On the National Assessment of Education Progress, Hispanic fourth grade students in Florida outscore the average student in 15 other states and our *low-income* Hispanic students outscore the *average* student in 7 of those states. Furthermore, Florida's African American fourth graders outscore 73 percent of their peers nationally.
- ✓ Since Florida began grading schools in 1999, there has been a dramatic shift in the quality of schools in Florida. In that year, there were more D and F schools than A and B schools in the state. A decade later, and there are *ten times* as many A and B schools as D and F schools:



## B. Florida's National Profile

Florida is quickly becoming a model for the nation for its sustained student achievement.

- ✓ The state's education system was ranked tenth in the nation by *Education Week's 2009 Quality Counts* report, up from 31st in the nation just two years ago.
- ✓ The U.S. Department of Education recently recognized Florida as one of only three states to close the achievement gap for low-income students and as one of only five states to close the achievement gap for minority students.
- ✓ The national Data Quality Campaign recognized Florida as one of only six states in the country to possess all elements of a quality data system. President Barack Obama praised Florida as *the* national leader in creating a longitudinal data system that can follow each student from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary education and into the workforce.

## The Case for Reform:

While Florida has experienced phenomenal success in elementary school, student achievement in high school remains dismal.

The goal of our K-12 education system is to prepare students for success, whether they pursue a post-secondary degree or enter the workforce immediately after graduation. Yet Florida is failing this fundamental mission:

- Only 42 percent of high school students are reading at or above grade level.
- Only 69 percent of high school students are performing math at or above grade level.

The ripple effects extend to Florida's colleges and universities. 55 percent of all entering students require remediation in math, reading or writing. In the 2005-2006 fiscal year, the total cost of postsecondary remediation was \$129.8 million – and the state paid more than half of these costs, totaling \$70 million. In fact, a student can earn a high school diploma but still not meet the **minimum** requirements for admission to **any** of Florida's state universities. Moreover, in a knowledge-based economy, all students require greater math and science skills, not just those advancing to a postsecondary education.

To earn a high school diploma in Florida, students must complete four years each of language arts and math, three years each of science and social studies, and one year each of fine arts and physical education. In math, only Algebra 1 is specifically required. No specific science courses, such as biology, chemistry or physics, are required. Additionally, students can earn a diploma with a below grade level score on the tenth grade FCAT. Students must earn a cumulative score of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale, which is the equivalent of a C.

## Independent Organizations Weigh In

Many independent, non-partisan organizations have studied how Florida's policies have affected student success after high school.

### **A. ACT**

A recent report by ACT, creators of the college entrance exam of the same name, revealed troubling trends in the college readiness of Florida students.

- In all four subjects – English, math, reading and science – Florida students scored between 9 and 12 percentage points below the national average.
- Florida is ranked 48th in the country in the percent of students prepared in all four core subjects, with only 15 percent meeting the benchmark.

ACT also reports that students who take Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and one other higher-level course are much more likely to succeed in college-level mathematics.

## B. 2009 Quality Counts Report

Every year, *Education Week* issues a report on the quality of education in all 50 states. In their 2009 *Quality Counts* report, the Sunshine State ranked tenth in the country for the overall quality of education but earned an F in the critical area of college readiness. This dismal grade – a score of just 50 out of 100 total points – was based on several factors, including:

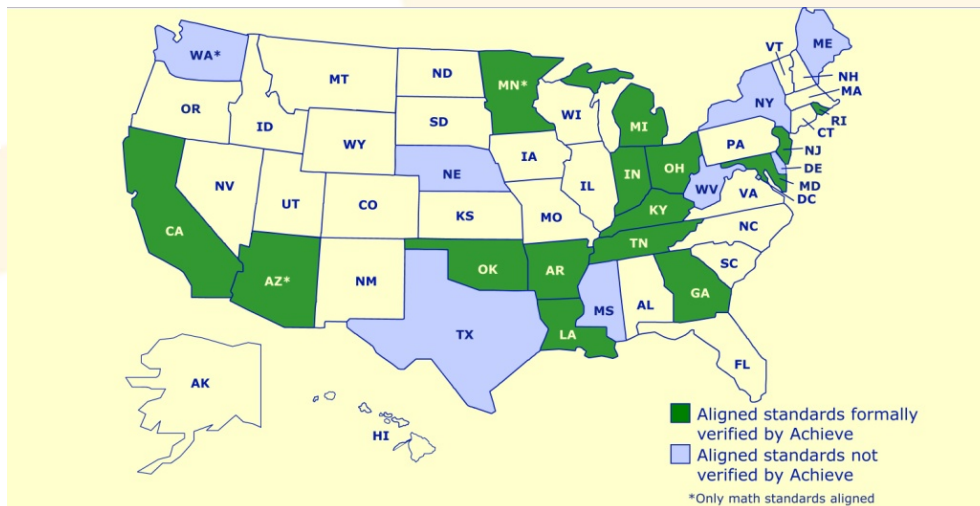
- Florida’s failure to define college readiness.
- Florida’s failure to align high school diploma requirements with entrance requirements of postsecondary institutions.
- Florida’s failure to require college preparation courses to earn a diploma.

## C. The American Diploma Project

The American Diploma Project, launched by Achieve, an independent, bipartisan, non-profit education reform organization based in Washington, D.C., is working with states to raise academic standards and graduation requirements, improve assessments and strengthen accountability. In a report released earlier this year, Florida fared poorly in college readiness based on the leading indicators of a quality college preparatory education:

- 23 states align high school standards with the expectations of college and the workplace – **Florida does not.**
- 21 states aligned high school graduation requirements with college- and career-ready expectations – **Florida does not.**
- 10 states have a college- and career-ready assessment system. – **Florida does not.**
- 20 states require math courses beyond Algebra I for graduation – **Florida does not.**

### STATES THAT HAVE ALIGNED STANDARDS



Last year, Achieve released a report compiling poll results of high school students, recent college graduates, college professors and employers. Among the poll findings:

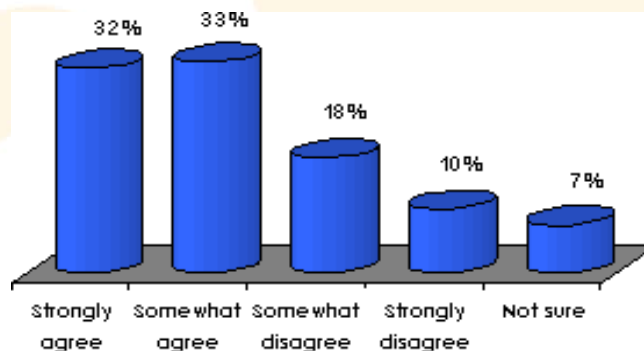
- Four out of five college students (82 percent) and non-students (80 percent) say that they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more, set higher academic standards, and raised expectations of how much coursework and studying would be necessary to earn a diploma.
- 74 percent of high school graduates say that requiring all students to take four years of math and courses in science to graduate would improve chances for success.
- 68 percent of *non-college* students who took Algebra II or higher say they are prepared for the math they face at work.
- Only 4 percent of college professors believe their students are very well prepared in math.
- Employers estimate that 39 percent of recent high school graduates are unprepared for the expectations they face in **entry-level** jobs. This is identical to the proportion of non-college students who say that they have gaps in their preparation.

#### D. National Governor's Association

A 2005 survey conducted by the National Governors Association found that a large number of students want a more rigorous curriculum in high school:

- More than one-third says high school has been "easy."
- Two in three students agree with the statement: "I would work harder if high school offered more demanding and interesting courses."

*Would work harder if high school offered more demanding and interesting courses?*

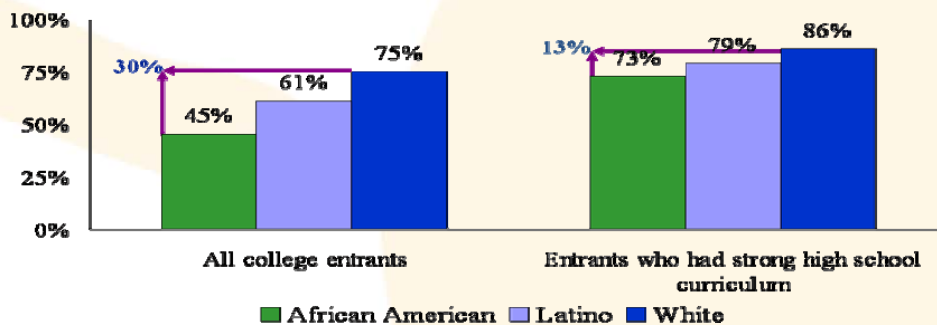


## E. U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Department of Education studies have shown the striking gap between students who take more advanced courses:

- Fewer than half of African American, Hispanic and Native American graduates take math beyond Algebra II, compared with 69 percent of Asian and 54 percent of white graduates.
- Only 33 percent of students from disadvantaged families take math beyond Algebra II, compared with 72 percent of affluent students.

Another study by the U.S. Department of Education, *Answers in the Toolbox*, shows that a more rigorous high school curriculum dramatically shrinks the achievement gap in college graduation between African American and Hispanic students and white students. The report states: "The impact of a high school curriculum of high academic intensity and quality on degree completion is far more pronounced – and positively – for African-American and Latino students than any other pre-college indicator of academic resources." The following chart clearly shows how a high school curriculum narrows the achievement gap (Achieve 2009):



## F. The Sloan Consortium

Research done by the Sloan Consortium, an organization dedicated to integrating online education into the mainstream of higher education, has shown the tremendous growth of online learning in colleges and universities. They found that the percent of higher education students taking at least one online course skyrocketed between the Fall of 2002 and the Fall of 2007, from 11% to over 20%. The total number of students has more than doubled during that time:

### TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS TAKING AT LEAST ONE ONLINE COURSE

Fall 2002	Fall 2003	Fall 2004	Fall 2005	Fall 2006	Fall 2007
1.6 million	1.98 million	2.35 million	3.2 million	3.5 million	3.9 million

The growth rate for online enrollments is greatly outpacing the total growth of higher education students. In just one year (from Fall 2006 to Fall 2007) online enrollment grew by 12.9%, compared to just 1.2% growth in student population.

### **The Solution: Raise Requirements for Graduation to Equip Students for Success**

To increase graduation rates and better align the skills of our graduates with the needs of Florida's private sector employers, the Foundation for Florida's Future advocates increasing rigor and relevance in our high schools through the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Diploma Initiative*, an initiative based on recommendations by the American Diploma Project.

#### **Increase Rigor in High School.**

- ✓ ***Phase in end-of-course exams.*** Administer end-of-course exams to students in each core subject. These exams should count toward a student passing the course and may eventually replace the FCAT as an assessment in each subject.
- ✓ ***Raise math standards.*** To graduate, require students to take at least three higher level math courses, including Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II.
- ✓ ***Raise science standards.*** To graduate, require students to take at least three higher level science courses, including Biology, Chemistry or Physics, and an additional "higher level" science course.
- ✓ ***Require core AP courses to be offered in each high school.*** Require all high schools to offer at least four core courses in AP, IB, AICE or dual enrollment, allowing Florida Virtual School to also fulfill this requirement. Core courses include math, science, English, and social sciences. Currently, 25 percent of Florida schools offer *no* such courses.
- ✓ ***Require on-line coursework for graduation.*** Require every student to take at least one course on-line in order to graduate. This requirement will better prepare our students for the world of higher education and the workforce that is increasingly becoming more dependent upon technology.

#### **Raise the Bar for Graduation.**

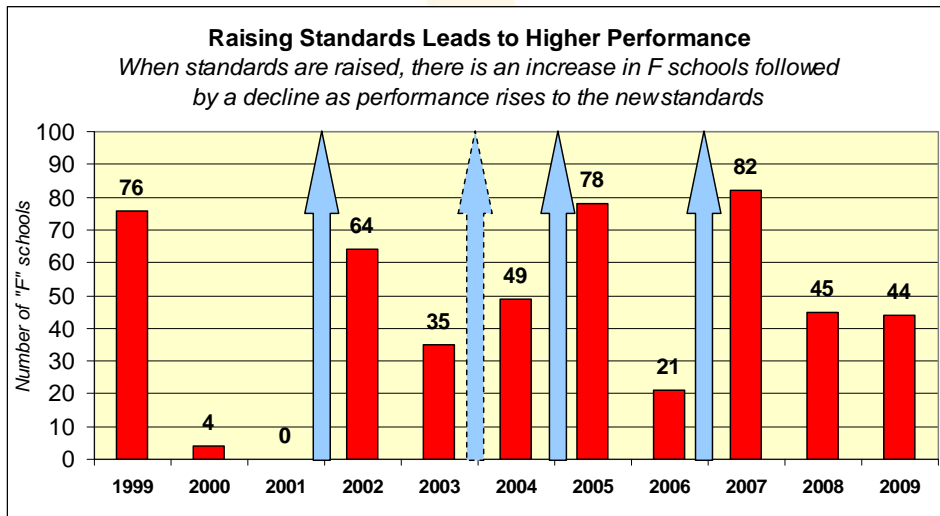
- ✓ ***Raise the Minimum FCAT score required for graduation.*** To graduate, require students to achieve a grade level score or higher on the 10th Grade FCAT. Currently, a student can graduate high school with a below grade-level score on the 10th grade FCAT.

#### **Enhance the Bright Futures Scholarship Program.**

- ✓ ***Align Bright Futures with the 21<sup>st</sup> Diploma Initiative Requirements.*** Ensure scholarship recipients are prepared to succeed at Florida universities and colleges by aligning Bright Futures Scholarships with the increased requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Diploma Initiative.

## The Challenge: A Call to Florida Leaders

Every single time Florida raises standards, a small, initial drop in performance is followed by a dramatic increase in student achievement – evidence that our students excel when expectations are raised:



Perhaps more importantly, studies have shown that the students who need help the most – poor and minority students – benefit most from such policies.

### **The facts are clear:**

- The future of our economy will ultimately be determined by our success in growing a highly skilled workforce.
- Florida's low graduation requirements lag behind states across the nation, setting our students up for failure.
- Our students are ready for a more rigorous high school education.
- Higher academic standards will narrow the achievement gap for poor and minority students.

Higher graduation rates and higher academic standards translate to a more highly skilled workforce, greater tax revenue for the state and a population less dependent on costly government services.

As Florida leaders, from the halls of the Legislature to the Executive Office of the Governor and state Department of Education, address critical education and economic issues in the coming year, the Foundation for Florida's Future encourages the adoption of higher graduation requirements.

As President Barack Obama recently said, "Let's challenge our states to adopt world-class standards that will bring our curriculums to the 21st century." Higher standards are being set by the world around us, whether we decide to meet them may determine the future of Florida's economy.