

**PART ONE**

**Framing the Issues**



## CHAPTER 1

### ACCOUNTABILITY AS A SCHOOL REFORM STRATEGY: A 30-YEAR PERSPECTIVE ON FLORIDA

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Fathers themselves ought every few days to test their children, and not to rest their hopes on the disposition of a hired teacher; for even those persons will devote more attention to the children if they know they must from time to time render an account.

Plutarch

Accountability, as an organizing principle for establishing state responsibility for public school performance, is alive and well in Florida. For the last three decades, it has been actively pursued as a strategy for defining the state's role, for monitoring student performance, and for fostering school reform. It has a number of appeals for policy makers. It permits the state to carve out for itself a limited but well-defined and potentially powerful role in the overall arena of public schooling. By concentrating on standard-setting and performance reporting the state can leverage its influence without violating historic notions of local control of schools and more recent notions of effective management. It is also relatively easy to administer and inexpensive to pursue.

This chapter provides an analysis of the development of educational policy in the State of Florida between 1970 and 2000. For the

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last three decades, the Florida educational policy arena has been remarkable for the sheer quantity and boldness of its legislative actions. In fact, it has been repeatedly singled out as having the most active state legislature in the area of education and for its willingness to employ highly directive policy instruments (Rosenthal, 1998; Rosenthal and Fuhrman, 1981; Wise, 1979). For most states, the year 1983 marks a watershed in state educational policy development usually explained as a response to the economic competitiveness and educational excellence movements of the '80s. For Florida, 1983 is only one of a number of interim points in a continuous line of policymaking activism since the early 1970s to the year 2000, one whose roots lie as much in the demographic explosion of the 1950s, the social turmoil of the '60s, and the expansion of state government in the '70s as the economic concerns and excellence movements of the 1980s and 1990s.

While the individual actions taken over the last 30 years have solicited much attention and comment, this chapter's purpose is to look broadly over the 30-year period to identify patterns and themes that emerge. Two particular observations can be made. One is that Florida's policymaking has been characterized by a cyclic pattern of peak activity resulting in comprehensive and bold reform packages. This intense activity is then followed by periods of little to no significant activity which, in turn, are followed by another set of comprehensive legislative activity. Second, a singular reform strategy—though one with evolving forms of expression—has remained dominant over the three decades. That reform strategy is accountability.

This chapter posits that accountability has been the controlling concept in Florida driving the state's role in educational reform for the last 30 years. It will describe how the state of Florida has operationalized the concept of public school accountability over this time period. It will conclude with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the state's efforts. It will argue that an accountability system, in its traditional sense, should focus on explanation, that is, how an enterprise performed and why. Though this was the state's original purpose in adopting an accountability system, the centrality and power of this analytic function

was never fully understood, appreciated, or implemented. The thesis of this paper is that over the last 30 years, the state has developed increasingly intricate accountability systems and has put in place arguably the most sophisticated data collection system in the country. However, it has struggled unsuccessfully to translate the information derived from the assessment of performance into analytical activities that can drive powerful efforts in school improvement.

To assemble the information for this set of analyses, the authors reviewed the major pieces of substantive educational legislation enacted by the Florida Legislature between 1970 and 2000. Primary and secondary sources were utilized. The primary source was the *Laws of Florida (LOF)*, the annual compilation of laws enacted during the course of a year. Secondary sources were employed as well, as available: end-of-session summaries prepared annually by the staff of the legislature, the State Department of Education, and the state school board association. The primary source provided the actual content of the legislation; the secondary sources provided the evaluative statements about impact, implications, and relative import.

Over 60 pieces of legislation were reviewed of which approximately one-half could be considered of major importance. Arranged chronologically, the laws cluster by content into four distinct reform thrusts. Each is characterized by a new or more developed conceptualization of the role of the state in school reform and is anchored by one law, or a set of closely related laws, that could be said to dominate that time period. The authors do not assert that all education policies adopted in Florida over the last 30 years can be incorporated into this framework but that the majority can be and that the overall thrust of Florida policy is accurately represented. The following analyses explore these four reform thrusts and their policy features as incorporated in the defining pieces of legislation (see Table 1).

### **CYCLES OF REFORM**

Throughout the 1960s, the general public began to voice concern over the United States' educational system. As the scope and intensity of the concerns grew, lack of public confidence threatened to weaken the social, political, and economic underpinnings of the public school system. Four events in particular were influential in striking alarm in the general public. One, the successful launching of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in the late 1950s triggered concern over the quality of the U.S. public schools, particularly in mathematics and science preparation. Two, huge enrollments throughout the 1960s resulting from the post-war baby boom placed tremendous stress on the system and required large funding increases. Three, the social unrest of the 1960s, particularly protests against the Vietnam War and social unrest in urban areas, raised doubts as to how well the public school system was transmitting traditional values of responsible citizenship. Finally, in southern states such as Florida, the trauma of converting a de jure racially segregated school system into a single, integrated one sorely strained the civic, political and administrative ties that supported it (Rabby, 1999; White, 1975).

**Table 1**  
**Legislative History of Accountability in Florida**

<b>Establishing an Accountability Framework: 1971-1976</b>	
1971	Educational Accountability Act
1973	Omnibus Education Act
1973	Chapter 345, LOF (Florida Education Finance Program)
1976	Educational Accountability Act
(1978)	(Chapter 423: LOF (Teacher Master Examination))
(1979)	(Management Training Act of Florida)
(1981)	(Chapter 206, LOF (Florida Information Resource Network))

**Table 1 (continued)**

<b>Raising Academic Standards: 1983-1984</b>	
1983	RAISE Bill
1983	Chapter 325, LOF (Masterplan for Postsecondary Education)
1983	Educational Reform Act (including merit pay program for teachers)
1984	Chapter 336, LOF (including merit schools and Florida Accountability in Curriculum, Educational Materials and Testing)
<b>Accountability Through State Standards and School Improvement: 1990-96</b>	
(1989)	Chapter 298, LOF (accountability program grants)
1990	Chapter 99, LOF (revision of state assessment)
1990	Chapter 288, LOF (school improvement program and establishment of state goals)
1991	School Improvement and Education Accountability (Blueprint 2000)
<b>Accountability Plus</b>	
1999	Chapter 398, LOF (A+ Plan)

The concept of accountability took shape around the nation as a response to these concerns. Between 1969 and 1976, over 4,000 articles and books were written nationally on the subject of educational accountability. Debate around the issue gathered steam in 1970 with the publication of *Every Kid A Winner* by Leon Lessinger, then U.S. Associate Commissioner of Education. Lessinger and others advocated increasing accountability in public education by drawing upon business practices as a model for education. They called for the collection and analysis of performance and process data as the primary means to describe and evaluate the system, the alignment of budgetary policy with desired objectives and outcomes, and reporting of student and system performance to the public (Kirst, 1990).

Interest in accountability in the Florida Legislature was triggered more directly by two other events. In 1968, a large portion of the teaching

workforce walked off the job, giving voice to at least a decade of growing tension within the school system. The strike, and its aftermath, revealed the growing fissures among the education constituency groups that heretofore had presented a unified front to the public and to policymakers. The breakdown of this coalition, whose overlapping interests had constituted a relatively stable and consistent policy formulation process, revealed substantial disagreements about what public schools were and should be about (White, 1975). Second, a number of lawsuits had been launched in state courts to bring about more equal funding among school districts. The most famous was *Serrano v. Priest* in which the California Supreme Court in 1971 held that the state's entire finance system was unconstitutional. While inter-district inequities in Florida were not as large as in many states, this and other rulings raised the possibility that the state's funding formula might be vulnerable to legal challenge and gave greater legitimacy to the grievances of districts disadvantaged under the funding program then in effect (Governor's Citizens' Committee on Education, 1973). Finally, the state of Florida, since the post World War II period, had financed, on average, a larger share of public school costs than other states. As such, it followed that the state might have a proportionately greater interest in being able to account for the effectiveness and efficiency of its schools.

While the idea of accountability took firm roots in Florida's soil around this time, it is less clear what was meant by accountability. As Kirst (1990) has noted, accountability traditionally referred to the charge given those responsible for managing an enterprise to give an "account," that is to say, to "report" periodically on the success of the enterprise. Historically, the term is rooted in the idea of trusteeship in which the responsibility for an enterprise is given in trust to one or a group of managers, and it is incumbent upon them to report on performance to those who actually own the organization (in the context of public schooling, the owners would be the public or its elected representatives). An accountability system would entail the collection of data by which to measure effectiveness and provide an explanation of good or poor outcomes. If desired, sanctions or rewards could result. To do this, a public school accountability system would presumably have four

components: *standards* (a determination of what should be learned), *assessment* (a measure by an independent third party of what actually has been learned), *public reporting* of the results of the tests and, if desired, *consequences*.

### **Establishing an Accountability Framework: 1971-1976**

In the wake of the events chronicled above — cold war tensions, burgeoning enrollments, student unrest, court-mandated desegregation, a statewide teacher strike, legal challenges to state aid formulas, and high state contributions to public schooling — then-Governor Askew commissioned a two-year study of Florida's public education system. The committee, chaired by Frederick Schultz of Jacksonville, issued a comprehensive report which included recommendations to establish fiscal equity, school-based management, short- and long-term planning and an ongoing program of research and development at the state and district levels. The Florida Legislature in the early 1970s enacted a series of bills, most notably the Educational Accountability Act of 1973, which drew upon the report for most of its measures and, in doing so, laid out the basic components of a comprehensive statewide accountability system.

The act called upon the state to develop a set of uniform, statewide, basic educational objectives for each grade in each subject. Criterion and norm-referenced tests were to be developed by the state, not the schools or districts, to provide independent assessment of progress toward the agreed-upon objectives. Tests were to be comparable at the local, state, and national levels and the results were to be made public. The legislation identified the school as the locus of accountability. Individual annual reports for each school were required. The publicly disseminated reports included information such as population data and attitudinal data on teachers, parents, and students. School-based community advisory committees were also required.

The backbone of the accountability legislation lay in a new conceptualization of the function of state aid. Since 1947 in Florida, state appropriations to school districts were governed by a minimum foundation program, which had a number of features incompatible with

accountability. It was based, for example, on teacher units. Districts received so many teacher units (of money) determined by the number of students. This formula de facto built the budget on a set of assumed educational practices (i.e., X number of students would require one teacher). The decentralizing logic of accountability required a formula that did not favor one educational practice over another. Also accountability required an equal playing field. If schools were to be held accountable for performance, the playing field had to be leveled. The new formula that was installed, the Florida Educational Finance Program (FEFP), incorporates these objectives. It used state funds to equalize student funding across districts, adjusted for variation in program cost (such as vocational programs) and student cost (such as special needs students), and it left maximum discretion to local educators to determine effective practice.

Finally, the new accountability law included an analytical component. The state department and local districts were required to determine and report on the effectiveness and the costs of varying educational programs. Ideally, the variation present in the state (which under school-based management would be considerable) would allow a natural experiment to be played out. Schools whose students were performing well could be studied to determine which practices “accounted” for exceptional performance. Likewise schools whose students were performing poorly could be studied to determine what practices were ineffective. Because funding would be equalized, performance variations could be assumed to be a function of differences in schooling processes, not resource inequities.

Through reliance on independent and empirical assessments of student achievement, an accountability system offered state policymakers the possibility of: (1) restoring public confidence to the schools and (2) replacing a fragmented education community as the prime source for input on the needs of the schools with an objective and rational alternative, one based on data collection and analysis. Motivation for improvement would spring from the public as it responded to the release of achievement data.

Knowledge on how to improve would come from analysis of effective practice.

During the last half of the seventies, the Florida Legislature enacted a series of bills designed to implement such a system, most significantly the Educational Accountability Act of 1976. It was at this point that key decisions regarding the specifics of accountability had to be made. It was decided to test students only in reading, writing, and mathematics, at least initially, and in only four grades (3rd, 5th, 8th, and 11th). This test was called the State Student Assessment Test, Part One. It was decided as well that all students would be required to sit for a high school graduation exam. This test was originally referred to as the functional literacy test and then the State Student Assessment Test, Part Two.

The level of difficulty of the tests had to be determined to construct the assessment instruments. The original legislation referred to the assessment of “basic skills”; this term was now replaced with “minimum performance standards.” Thus, the focus of the program was on students performing at relatively low levels and on schools having large percentages of such students. The state established a compensatory education program, providing additional resources to districts based on the number of students testing below the performance standard.

Another addition to the accountability framework was the sanctions. The legislation in the earlier years of the 1970s had advanced an accountability framework as a means of improving student performance. Assessments were to be used diagnostically to identify areas of poor performance and to guide the system in the development of corrective actions. However, to the idea of improvement was now added that of sanctions. The legislation stipulated that if students could not pass the functional literacy exam, they were not to receive a regular high school diploma. No sanctions were imposed on schools or districts. In fact, districts received additional funds through the newly created state compensatory aid program that provided additional funds to school

districts based on the percentage of students failing to meet the minimum performance standards.

The high school graduation sanction triggered a lawsuit filed against the state alleging that withholding a high school diploma due to poor performance on the functional literacy test discriminated against minorities (*Debra P. v. Turlington*, 1979). The court held, in part, that all students being subjected to the diploma sanction had not participated in an equal educational system. That is, some students had begun their education under the segregated system in effect prior to 1971. Until these students graduated, the state could not introduce a diploma-sanction examination. Further, the court required the state to demonstrate that the content being tested actually had been part of the curriculum students received. In effect, the court ruled that the legislature had the authority to create a diploma-sanction examination as long as all students had the opportunity to learn the material prior to being subjected to the sanction.

This time period also saw the extension to the teaching force of testing for accountability. Teachers were now required to take a standardized test (the Florida Teacher Certification Examination) as a condition of receiving certification in Florida.

Two other actions of the Florida Legislature in this time period merit mention. Both were designed to provide the resources and capacity necessary to support an accountability system. One, laws were enacted requiring principals to be certified in leadership and management skills. One of the basic tenets of the initial accountability scheme was that the school was to be the unit of accountability with instructional decisions being made at the school level. This approach required an effective school-based leadership capacity. The Florida Council on Educational Management was created to provide the developmental arm of school-based management. Administrative selection and promotion systems, which in the past had been based in large part on informal networks, were replaced with a merit-based system in which prospective administrators received training and certification along lines considered critical for effective school management.

Second, an automated district-based data collection system, eventually known as the Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN), was established. FIRN is a computerized, electronic information delivery system designed to facilitate accurate and uniform transmission of student, school, and district data among the schools, districts, and state. FIRN was a critical piece of an accountability system based on performance reporting. As it developed over the years, it created both a tool to assist schools in assessing their own student and school performance and an instrument for reporting student and school performance data to constituencies outside of the schools such as parents and the community and local and state policymakers.

Of equal, if not greater interest, is what did *not* happen. The analytical component never materialized. In 1971, the Florida Legislature enacted provisions requiring school-level fiscal data reporting and analysis. It required the preparation of an annual public report of student assessment results by grade and subject area for each school. Each district and the state were to conduct analyses and develop recommendations concerning the costs and benefits of instructional programs. However, in 1974 these provisions were amended. The requirement for the analysis of the schools' assessment results and the linking of the results with cost and differential effectiveness analysis was dropped. Furthermore, in 1976, the legislature's prior interest in determining the effectiveness of school expenditures was reduced to a narrower interest in simply accounting for how funds were spent, not their effectiveness. Interviews with senior policy makers in the state substantiate the fact that the analytic function was never properly funded or sustained (Herrington, 1995; Nakib and Herrington, 1998). A research and development office, though established in law, was funded at a very low level and then disbanded within a few years. Its functions were reduced; the responsibility for them was subsumed under the office of student assessment.

### **Raising Academic Standards: 1983-84**

The next decade saw an intensification of the state's role in ensuring the quality of the educational system. The state determined that accountability was not enough and that clear prescription from the state

would be needed to ensure quality. In 1983, the Florida Legislature passed out the RAISE bill (Raising Achievement In Secondary Education), a clear departure from accountability as a reform strategy. The legislation created a large number of programs including more rigorous high school graduation standards (each student was required to obtain 24 academic credits in academically challenging courses and to maintain a grade point average of 1.5 to receive a high school diploma), a lengthened high school day (seven periods), a longer school year, and increases in teacher salaries. The new programs were required of all districts and most were accompanied with specific categorical appropriations to aid the districts in covering the costs of the additional requirements. Other programs followed in subsequent years including a middle school reform package entitled PRIME (a primary school reform package entitled PREP had passed earlier) and reforms targeting mathematics, science, technology, and early childhood education.

These legislative initiatives differed substantially from the accountability approaches taken in the previous decade. The attempt to improve the education system through increasing academic standards and time on task shifted the focus away from student outcomes to the establishment of mandates on educational process. Deregulation, a hallmark of accountability strategies, was replaced with substantive and fiscal mandates.

These reform efforts constituted the high mark in Florida of attempts by the state to impose upon educators at the local level its vision of what constituted high quality education and proper use of funds. It was met with fierce resistance by local school boards, administrators, and teachers who insisted that across-the-board mandates failed to recognize enormous differences in community preferences, student demographics, and schooling capacities across the state. Categorical control of state funds further aggravated the problem, allegedly requiring districts to spend resources in areas they did not consider necessary or crucial in order to comply with state requirements. On the whole, the state mandates were characterized as ineffective at best, as wasteful and dictatorial at worst. By the end of the decade, state policy makers had no evidence that their

reforms had resulted in improved academic achievement, and local educators were protesting that they could not be held accountable for school improvement if they had no control over reform directions or resources. At the same time, the business community and public administration scholars were touting the merits of decentralization as an engine for economic revitalization (see Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; and Peters and Waterman, 1984).

Though the bulk of the 1983-84 reforms would not be considered accountability strategies, two provisions passed at this time clearly are. The state established a merit pay program designed to compensate teachers differentially based on performance rather than seniority. Many educators staunchly opposed the program. It was enacted with haste and implementation proved a disaster. It was abandoned after one year and replaced with a merit schools program that shifted the locus of performance assessment from the individual teacher to the school. This program enjoyed a qualified success. However, it, too, was discontinued in 1990. A second accountability strategy established at this time was a placement rate standard for graduates of vocational education programs. Over a three-year period, each vocational program was to place at least 70% of its graduates in the field for which the program prepares or the program would be terminated. This program continues today.

#### **Accountability Through State Standards and School Improvement: 1991-96**

In 1991, the Florida Legislature enacted the School Improvement and Educational Accountability Act, referred to as Blueprint 2000, focusing on educational accountability. This reform package was explicitly characterized by its proponents as a rejection of the state mandate approach of the '80s. Provisions were included to restore more control over school practice to the local districts and responsibility for school reform to the local schools. Virtually all of the requirements of the educational reforms of the '80s and the special categorical funds that accompanied them were abolished.

Between 1990 and 1993, 77 distinct programs and their funding were reduced to only 13. The seven-period day, the middle school reform

package (PRIME), the primary school reform package (PREP) and many others were abolished. Active steps were taken to encourage innovation and risk-taking in schooling practice. A waiver system was enacted allowing schools to request waivers from statutes and rules. Charter schools and deregulated schools were authorized later in the decade.

Blueprint 2000 legislation recreated another accountability system identical in many respects to the one from the '70s. It called for establishment of standards, assessment of students' knowledge against the standards and public reporting of the assessment results. The school site was again re-affirmed as the locus of student achievement and institutional responsibility. State aid was simplified to allow more local discretion in resource allocation.

Important differences between the 1973 Education Accountability legislation and Blueprint 2000 indicate shifts in how the state was thinking about standard-setting, assessment, public reporting, and consequences on schools. In the new legislation, the primary engine for reform was to be the process of school improvement. Each school was required to engage in a process of needs assessment from which was to be developed a school improvement plan. The plan's implementation was to be closely monitored and the results reported. Requirements that each school appoints a school advisory council and that the council engages in a process of needs assessment and planning were strengthened.

Second, the standard setting process was more elaborate. Educational goals were placed in statute. Districts and individual schools were required to establish local standards and measures of progress. Schools were to measure not just current levels of achievement but progress toward improvement as captured in 16 statewide indicators of progress.

A third significant difference was the imposition of consequences. Sanctions were to be invoked for schools that failed to show adequate progress as measured by their own school improvement plan and district and state standards. While the actual nature of the sanctions was not

specified in 1991, it was stipulated that after three consecutive years of assistance, a poor-performing school would not be permitted to continue serving students in a less than adequate manner. No sanctions were imposed on students.

Much of the rest of the decade was spent attempting to design and implement the reform framework outlined in the 1991 legislation. New educational standards were developed. This was a long and detailed process, which took most of the first half of the decade culminating in the 1996 adoption by the State Board of Education of standards in seven areas. Entitled the Sunshine State Standards, they represented a more rigorous formulation of required academic knowledge than the basic skills approach of the earlier state curricular frameworks. The standards were, in turn, followed by new assessments, entitled the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. The FCAT, first administered in 1997-98, was closely aligned with the Sunshine State Standards in the areas of reading and mathematics and represented a more rigorous concept of what students should be able to know and do. A performance-based writing assessment, entitled Florida Writes! and in place since 1992, was folded in as part of the FCAT.

Public reporting became more extensive and more detailed. The public reporting requirement was broken into two parts. One annual report was designated for the public. A second one, with more detail, was required for the use of the school advisory council in the school improvement process.

The question of consequences proved very difficult. Schools were required by law to demonstrate that they were making adequate progress. Measures of adequate progress were to be determined at each school by the school advisory council. However, after the first few years, only a handful of schools designated themselves as failing to make adequate progress. In 1996, the state imposed an alternative measure of adequate progress, based on student achievement. It designated as critically low any school whose students' achievement was below certain levels for two years in a row on the new assessments (Florida Writes! and the FCAT).

Any school that remained critically low for three years would face possible state intervention, including but not limited to, replacement of principals or allowing students to go to another public school.

The legislation did not establish an analytical role for the state in helping to explain variation in performance. However, activity increased in this area. The newly formed legislative Office of Program Policy Analysis and Governmental Accountability (OPPAGA) was charged with evaluating the processes of school improvement and the State Department of Education's Title I office produced reports identifying elements common to high poverty/high performing public schools. The Title I Office provided a matching service where schools with similar profiles could be matched with similar but higher performing schools. A school recognition program was established with initial funding from the 1999 legislative session. OPPAGA instituted a series of public school performance reviews whereby districts submitted to voluntary management and program audits to attempt to identify areas in need of improvement.

#### **Accountability Plus: 1999**

Once again, for the fourth time in 30 years, in 1999 the Florida Legislature enacted a comprehensive set of reform measures. As had been the case in the seventies and again in the early '90s, the reform package was based on the concept of accountability: provisions were adopted regarding the establishment of student achievement standards, statewide assessments tied to the standards, public reporting of performance, and consequences for performance.

Referred to as the A+ Plan, the reform legislation re-affirmed the importance of the Sunshine State Standards that had been adopted in 1996 and added science as a fourth subject matter to be assessed (along with reading, writing, and mathematics.) It expanded the state assessment system, extending student assessments to include all grades between 3rd and 10th, and called for the assessment system to measure annual learning gains as well as mastery of grade-level criteria.

Public reporting was expanded as well. In addition to the two annual reports already required of all schools, the bill also established a rating system to assign grades to schools (“A” through “F”) based on performance (in the first few years) and in later years based on a mix of performance and improvement. A system of incentives for high achieving or improving schools was also established. (In 1999-2000, the incentives constituted approximately \$100 per student in “A” schools.)

Consequences were extended as well. Student retention standards were adopted. Any student deficient in reading skills in grades 1 or 2 must be given intensive reading instruction. If the student’s reading deficiency, as determined locally in grades 1 or 2 or by the statewide assessment in grade 3, is not remediated by the end of grade 4, the student must be retained. Social promotion, in general, was eliminated, even though school boards can, by exception, override this provision.

In addition to the sanctions directed at students regarding promotion, the legislation also included both sanctions and rewards based on school performance. As mentioned above, schools that rate an “A” are eligible for cash rewards. Students in schools that receive an “F,” that is, they are determined not to be making adequate progress for two out of four years, are eligible for a state voucher to attend another public school in the same or an adjoining district or to attend a private school. The grading system also directs attention and funds to failing schools. For example, districts are required to give first priority to the expenditure of funds for remedial and supplemental instruction to students not performing at grade level.

### **HOW DID ACCOUNTABILITY EVOLVE OVER 30 YEARS?**

The State of Florida has spent the better part of 30 years attempting to deploy the concepts of accountability — standards, assessments, public reporting, and consequences. How has the state’s thinking about accountability as a strategy for improving public schools evolved over this time period and has it been successful?

In the early 1970s, the state's thinking about accountability was clearly focused on improving the system and the public perception of the system through the application of the rationalized management tools of establishing objectives and assessing performance through an independent and objective means. Accounting was to occur in two ways. One, schools and districts would give an accounting for their performance by reporting student achievement data publicly. Two, a research program would attempt to account for variation in performance. An aligned developmental program would design more powerful learning systems based on the information derived from the research.

This predominantly rational model, however, was not realized as planned. As implemented in the late seventies, the research function was minimized and the public display of performance information was relied upon to drive school improvement. Then-Commissioner of Education Ralph Turlington frequently compared the release of performance data by schools to the scoreboard at a football game (R. Turlington, personal communication, 1988). It was assumed that the knowledge that one school was out-performing another school would spur the lower performing school to greater effort and better results.

Was this strategy successful? Student scores on the State Student Assessment Test (SSAT-I), inaugurated in 1977, suggest that the strategy achieved limited success. Performance levels of students at the lower end of the population—the target of these assessments—showed gains for the first seven years before leveling off. (The test was discontinued in 1990). The gap in performance between majority and minority students was considerable and increased in the upper grades. Scores on the SSAT-II (now entitled the High School Competency Test), which became a requirement for high school graduation in Florida in 1984, showed a steady decline during the same time period, 1984 and 1989, and the gap between majority and minority students increased. (For a more complete discussion, see Herrington, Cobbe and Leslie, 1990.) While neither of these two tests is comprehensive enough to gauge the effectiveness of Florida's public school system in the aftermath of the accountability-based reforms of the seventies, the student achievement data do support a

conclusion that the reforms were not powerful enough to drive dramatic improvements.

In the 1980s, the state shifted its strategy from public display of performance data to requirements that schools adopt certain programs. The state became very directive in terms of mandating when students should go to school, for how long, what courses they had to take, and what support services schools had to provide. Initiatives such as the RAISE bill, PRIME, and others represented an attempt on the part of the state to dictate effective practice and more rigorous academic standards. Again, by the end of the eighties, many programs had not improved student performance. Most of the RAISE reforms were focused on high school and were explicitly designed to improve preparation for college. Data from the most widely used college admissions exam, the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), from this period suggest some gains in Florida students' performance compared to other states. However, these gains were minor and may have come at a price. While SAT increases would be drawn from the higher-performing student populations (those expecting to attend a state or private university), scores on the state's high school competency test, a test focused on lower-performing students, registered declines through most of the eighties and the gap between majority and minority performance increased. Some evidence indicates that the high school dropout rate also increased. A federal report in the mid-eighties listed Florida as having the highest dropout rate in the country, though those figures were disputed within Florida. (See Herrington and Cistone, 1994; and Herrington, Cobbe and Leslie, 1990, for a complete discussion of these scores and the conclusions that can be drawn from them.)

The districts, in the meanwhile, were assailing the state over what they considered highly intrusive and under-funded mandates on their schools. Insisting that decisions regarding programming and expenditures were best made at the district and school levels, local officials repeatedly accused the state of wresting control of the schools from the local educators and citizens, resulting in programs that were inappropriate and ineffective in various locales around the state. They also argued it was unfair to hold districts responsible for student performance if they did not

have discretion about which programs to offer and how to allocate their resources.

In the early '90s, responding directly to these concerns and to the absence of evidence that student performance was significantly increasing, the state asserted a more limited role for itself. The state decided to confine itself to setting standards, assessing achievement of the standards and reporting the information to the public. It reaffirmed the importance of local control by strengthening requirements for the development of school-level needs assessments, school improvement plans, and school-level councils. However, it went a bit further than in the seventies. It required that the school improvement plans include measurable objectives. If, after three years, the schools' efforts did not result in improved performance as measured by the objectives, the schools would lose the autonomy to direct their own improvements. First the district, and if that did not work, then the state would have to be included in the development and follow-through of the school plans. This, too, proved unsatisfactory as few schools rated themselves as not making adequate progress.

The rest of the decade saw an intensifying of the role of the state in determining what constitutes successful performance. More detailed state curricular standards were adopted, more demanding state assessments were developed, and a more normative means of identifying low performing schools was put in place. In 1996, the state published the first ever list of "critically-low performing schools" based on student performance on standardized assessments. By the end of the decade, with the A+ Plan, the state was increasing the number of assessments, the subject matter covered by the assessments, the distinctions between high and low performing schools through a school grading system, and consequences on students (elimination of social promotion) and on schools for low performance. To the threat of loss of school-level control as a consequence of low performance, the state was adding the right of students from low performing schools to attend other public schools or private schools by means of a state voucher.

The state revamped its assessment system in the nineties. Longitudinal data on performance are available only on the writing skills of Florida students. Here, we do see increases since 1992 when the exam, *Florida Writes!*, was first administered. Most of the gains occurred in the early years (see Burnette, Herrington and Johnson in this volume). On the other hand, evidence to date suggests that the designation of schools as low performing has driven at least short-term efforts to improve performance at these schools. All schools originally designated as critically low performing have removed themselves from that designation. Likewise in 2000, all schools succeeded in raising student performance enough to escape designation as voucher eligible.

In summary, the trajectory from the '70s into the year 2000 is from the state expecting publicly reported information coupled with research and development program to drive improvement (1971), to expecting publicly reported information alone to drive improvements (1976), to driving improvements directly from the state through greater input controls (1983-84), to driving improvements through publicly reported information coupled with greater local control and planning activities at the school-level (1991-96). The current emphasis (1999) extends components of many of the earlier efforts, including a continued reliance on school-level planning and autonomy but coupled with more rigorous curricular standards, more frequent and more rigorous testing of students, more normative school performance information for the public, and more consequences — positive and negative — for schools and for student performance.

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

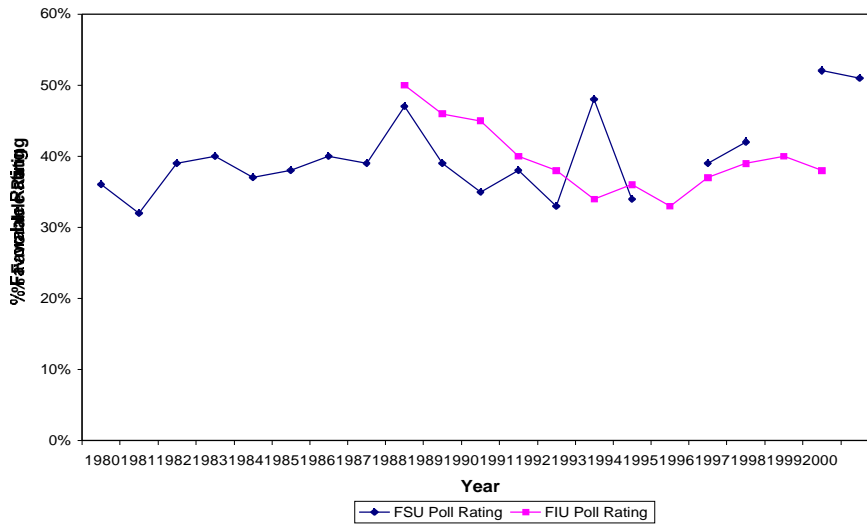
What can one learn from this 30-year history about the effectiveness of accountability as a strategy for a state to drive reform of its public schools? In the early 1970s, two reasons were given to support accountability as a reform strategy. One, it would drive improvements in student achievement through information on performance and, two, it would restore public confidence in public schools by replacing an educational community, increasingly perceived to be fragmented and

unreliable as a source for assessing effectiveness, with objective, third-party data. Has this turned out to be the case?

Has public opinion of the education system improved? Data drawn from annual public opinion polls of Floridians, conducted by Florida State University and by Florida International University (see Figure 1), do not provide a clear answer to the question. Between 1980 and 2000, the percentage of people indicating that they rank their public schools as either “A” or “B” has fluctuated between 32% and 52% with no clear pattern. Spikes into the 50s have occurred twice, in 1988 and again in 1999 and 2000. If the latter high rankings hold, it would suggest that the most recent accountability strategy, the A+ Plan, may be improving the confidence of the public in its public school system. However, overall, the rankings from the last two decades neither support nor undermine accountability as a strategy to restore public confidence.

Has student performance improved? As indicated in the next chapter of this book, Florida students continue to perform consistently in the lowest quartile or, less often, in the lowest third in states’ rankings. Over the last decade, some improvements in performance have been registered. However, on the whole, Florida students continue to perform below the state’s own expectations and in comparison to national averages.

**Figure 1**  
**Public Opinion: Favorable Rating of Local Public Schools**  
**in Florida**



Other conclusions may be drawn from this 30-year perspective. On the issue of equity, Florida’s remarkably high degree of fiscal equity across districts, a standard that few other states attain, was part and parcel of the original conceptualization of accountability in the early 1970s. Attempts to weaken interdistrict fiscal equity over the years have repeatedly failed, perhaps due in some part to the continued prevalence of thought that if schools are to be held accountable for performance, equality of resources is fundamental to maintaining a level playing field (see Nakib and Herrington, 1988).

In terms of student equity, accountability strategies have maintained a focus on lower performing students. In the late seventies and the late nineties, the public release of performance data clearly highlighted the fact that schools serving low-income students were failing to successfully educate their students and that certain sub-populations were consistently being poorly served. Fiscal and other material resources have followed. In 1976, the state instituted a state compensatory education

program that provided extra funds to schools based on the number of students not meeting performance criteria on the new state assessments. In 1996, after the release of the list of critically low performing schools, the state targeted a number of state-controlled resources to the approximately 150 schools. In 1999, the two schools graded as “F” and whose performance qualified their students for vouchers also benefited from additional support from the state and the district in terms of additional staff, equipment, and expertise (see Inman in this volume).

Conclusions about two other areas stressed in the state’s accountability programs — school-based management and sanctions — are less sanguine. The capacity of schools to manage or lead their own reform, to engage in effective planning and to stimulate productive community involvement has been problematic. Experience from the early ’90s suggests that local school communities are slow to acknowledge sub-par performance. Furthermore, it may be that the capacity for school improvement is most limited in neighborhoods where the need is greatest.

Sanctions, whether applied to students or to schools, have been a particularly difficult area. As argued earlier, evidence suggests that the threat to students of denial of a diploma (1976 Educational Accountability Act) and retention in grade (1999 A+ Plan) may have spurred additional efforts to better prepare students. At the same time, it may have exacted a toll on students whose performance is difficult to raise. Florida has had one of the highest dropout rates in the country consistently over the last two decades, suggesting perhaps that some students have simply abandoned schooling in the face of higher standards or sanctions. The use of retention as a sanction or for remediation is problematic as well. Research on retention of students suggests that retention can increase the rate of dropping out and that for many students achievement is not improved by repeating another year.

Sanctions on the system are newer but equally problematic. Sanctions on schools were first introduced in the ’90s. Currently, sanctions on schools include loss of school-level autonomy, stigmatization of schools through public designation of low performance and loss of

students to other schools through vouchers or other policies. Some evidence suggests that these sanctions result in short-term improvements. Most schools initially reported as critically low in 1996 or receiving an “F” grade in 1999 improved performance sufficiently within a year to remove the designation. The remaining question is whether the efforts to improve can be sustained over time and across systems or whether they are the result of unsustainable, short-term bursts of energy.

This overview of accountability as a strategy for school improvement suggests it may be effective in focusing attention on problems and may, at times, be effective in producing short-term improvements in the most troubled portions of the system. But evidence to date is not optimistic that accountability can be used to drive quality improvements at all performance levels — for high performing as well as low performing schools — or that it can translate information about student achievement into knowledge about how to build high performing systems. Its primary weakness is that, conceptually, the identification of performance problems is not linked with diagnosis of possible causes and the development and testing of more powerful systems. Public accounting of performance information may drive *interest* in better performance, but it does not create the *capacity* for improved performance.

The most recent addition to the state’s accountability structure — the concept of value-added — may prove more promising. Value-added measurements, as currently being developed, replace performance measurement based on fixed criteria with a measure of the amount of learning that has occurred over a given period of time. Theoretically, the state will be able to calculate how much a student improves over a period of one school year. This element of the reform package is an improvement over the reforms of the 1970s that focused primarily on bringing poor performing schools up to minimal standards. Furthermore, determination of value-added will provide more detailed and more accurate information on how the schooling process is resulting in additional learning. It will presumably provide detailed information on student achievement at all levels over time. This information can then be used to investigate the relationship between student achievement and different instructional

practices and between different student populations and different schooling environments.

In conclusion, the state is still struggling to find a role for itself that meets its constitutional obligation as the responsible agent of education for all children in the state; that is legitimate in the eyes of citizens and local educators; that is feasible in a system that includes over two and a half million children and is diverse geographically and culturally; and that can drive improvements systemwide for all children. Accountability as the state has defined it over the last 30 years has fared well in terms of being perceived as a legitimate role for the state. However to date, it has not resulted in the desired effect of raising student achievement and it has become increasingly more controversial. Disagreement is becoming more intense over the level of standards, the types of assessments, and the efficacy of sanctions (see Inman and Wolcott in this book).

Due in large part to the need to support its accountability strategies, Florida has developed arguably the most comprehensive and sophisticated student information system in the country (W. Fowler, personal communication, March 2000; see Nakib and Herrington, 1998; and Whitney, 1999). However, the data have not been harnessed to aid the state in understanding how learning occurs. We would argue that unless the information derived from the “accounting” is used to better understand how learning occurs and to design stronger, more robust learning systems, accountability will fall short of its promise.

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## CHAPTER 2

### TRACKING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN FLORIDA

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How well are Florida's students performing? This question is more difficult to answer than one would think. Ideally, one would like to compare Florida students against three standards:

How well they are doing compared to what is required,

How well they are doing compared to other states, and

How well they are doing compared to previous generations.

We do have data to provide partial answers to each of these questions. No one data set can answer all three of the questions and each data set has limitations. The following describes the assessment data currently available to the state and from which conclusions can be drawn about the performance of Florida students.

#### **National Assessment of Educational Progress**

Unquestionably, the single most useful indicator of how Florida students perform is the data drawn from the congressionally mandated

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National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This assessment has been administered nationally since 1968. However, data at the state level have been available only since 1990. Student performance is scored on four levels:

**Advanced (adv)** - superior performance for the grade level tested.

**Proficient (prof)** - solid academic performance for the student's grade level.

**Basic** - partial mastery of fundamental knowledge and skills for proficient work at each grade level.

**Below basic** - less than partial mastery.

Table 1 compares the performance of Florida students in reading, mathematics, science, and writing on the NAEP at different points in time. Percentages reported for advanced, proficient, and basic are cumulative, e.g., "proficient" includes students scoring proficient and advanced. Basic and below basic are mutually exclusive and add to 100%.

In 1998, NAEP performance for Florida students improved over prior years. However, a fairly large percentage of students still scored below the basic level. In 1998, this percentage ranged from 46 to 49% for fourth grade reading, fourth and eighth grade mathematics and eighth grade science. Results were better for eighth grade writing and reading which posted percentages of 22% and 35%, respectively, below the basic level.

Florida students have consistently scored more poorly than the nation as a whole—for each NAEP assessment (math, reading, writing, and science) and testing period. This pattern holds true at all four levels: advanced, proficient, basic and below basic.

How significant are these differences? Among all of the states administering each test, Florida typically falls in the lowest quartile or bottom third, depending on the subject and grade tested (see Table 2). For example, in 1998, Florida's percentage of students scoring proficient or

above surpassed percentages in only eight other states on fourth grade reading, six other states on eighth grade reading and 10 other states on eighth grade writing out of the 35-39 states administering the tests that year. Most of the states doing more poorly than Florida were high poverty states, mainly in the South. Florida fared about the same on the most recent mathematics and science tests administered in 1996, outperforming only 9 out of 43 states on fourth grade math; 11 out of 40 states on eighth grade math and 7 out of 40 states on eighth grade science. Results for states performing more poorly than Florida are shaded in Table 2. The following are among the states typically surpassing Florida by a wide margin: Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

Florida's unfavorable comparison with other states is even more of a concern in subjects where the United States does not compare favorably with other nations. On the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), a standardized achievement test administered in about 40 countries in 1995, eighth grade students in the United States performed above the international average in science but below the international average in mathematics. In both subjects, fourth graders scored above the international average. Results of the TIMSS-Repeat, administered in 1999, will show how these fourth graders compare to students in other nations after they have reached the eighth grade.

**Table 1**  
**National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP):**  
**Percentage of Students Scoring at or Above Each Achievement Level**

	<b>FLORIDA</b>				<i>UNITED STATES</i>			
Year	Adv	Prof	Basic	Below basic	Adv	Prof	Basic	Below basic
<i>READING, GRADE 4</i>								
<b>1992</b>	3%	21%	53%	47%	6%	27%	60%	40%
<b>1994</b>	5%	23%	50%	50%	7%	28%	59%	41%
<b>1998</b>	5%	23%	54%	46%	6%	29%	61%	39%
<i>READING, GRADE 8</i>								
<b>1998</b>	1%	23%	65%	35%	2%	31%	72%	28%
<i>MATHEMATICS, GRADE 4</i>								
<b>1992</b>	1%	13%	52%	48%	2%	18%	59%	41%
<b>1996</b>	1%	15%	55%	45%	2%	21%	64%	36%
<i>MATHEMATICS, GRADE 8</i>								
<b>1990</b>	1%	12%	43%	57%	2%	15%	52%	48%
<b>1992</b>	2%	15%	49%	51%	3%	21%	58%	43%
<b>1996</b>	2%	17%	54%	46%	4%	24%	62%	38%
<i>SCIENCE, GRADE 8</i>								
<b>1996</b>	2%	21%	51%	49%	3%	29%	61%	39%
<i>WRITING, GRADE 8</i>								
<b>1998</b>	1%	19%	78%	22%	1%	24%	83%	17%

Source: NAEP Summary Tables, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/site/home.asp>

**Table 2**  
**National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP):**  
**Percentage of Students Scoring at or**  
**Above “Proficient,” by State**

State	1998			1996		
	4 <sup>th</sup> grade Reading	8 <sup>th</sup> grade Reading	8 <sup>th</sup> grade Writing	4 <sup>th</sup> grade Math	8 <sup>th</sup> grade Math	8 <sup>th</sup> grade Science
Alabama	24	21	17	11	12	18
Alaska				21	30	31
Arizona	22	28	21	15	18	23
Arkansas	23	23	13	13	13	22
California	20	22	20	11	17	20
Colorado	34	30	27	22	25	32
Connecticut	46	42	44	31	31	36
Delaware	25	25	22	16	19	21
<b>Florida</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>
Georgia	24	25	23	13	16	21
Hawaii	17	19	15	16	16	15
Idaho						
Illinois						
Indiana				24	24	30
Iowa	35			22	31	36
Kansas	34	35				
Kentucky	29	29	21	16	16	23
Louisiana	19	18	12	8	7	13
Maine	36	42	32	27	31	

**Table 2 (continued)**

Maryland	36	42	32	27	31	41
Massachusetts	29	31	23	22	24	25
Michigan	37	36	31	24	28	37
Minnesota	28			23	28	32
Mississippi	36	37	25	29	34	37
Missouri	18	19	11	8	7	12
Montana	29	29	17	20	22	28
Nebraska	37	38	25	22	32	41
Nevada				24	31	35
New Hampshire	21	24	17	14		
New Jersey	38					
New Mexico				25		
New York	22	24	18	13	14	19
North Carolina	29	34	21	20	22	27
North Dakota	28	31	27	21	20	24
Ohio				24	33	41
Oklahoma						
Oregon	30	29	25			
Pennsylvania	28	33	27	21	26	32
Rhode Island				20		
South Carolina	32	30	25	17	20	26
South Dakota	22	22	15	12	14	17
Tennessee						
Texas	25	26	24	17	15	22
Utah	29	28	31	25	21	23
Vermont	28	31	21	23	24	32
Virginia				23	27	34
Washington	30	33	27	19	21	27
West Virginia	29	32	25	21	26	27
Wisconsin	29	27	18	19	14	21
Wyoming	34	33	28	27	32	39
<b>U.S</b>	30	29	23	19	22	34

Source: Education Week, <http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc00/tables/gradesum-t1.htm>. Percentages available only for states participating in NAEP test administration

Three other statewide assessments provide information assessing Florida students, one to a pre-determined standard and two to national norms.

### **Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test**

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) measures student performance relative to State Sunshine Standards in reading (grades 4, 8, and 10) and mathematics (5, 8, and 10). FCAT reading assesses a student's ability to construct meaning from information text and from literature. FCAT mathematics assesses skills in five areas: (a) number sense, concepts and operations, (b) measurement, (c) geometry and spatial sense, (d) algebraic thinking, and (e) data analysis and probability. The test consists of multiple-choice questions as well as short and extended response questions requiring students to write their own answers. National comparisons are not possible on this test because questions are specific to standards developed by the State of Florida.

The FCAT measures student proficiency relative to the State Sunshine Standards (<http://www.firn.edu/doe/sas/fcatlev1.pdf>) at five levels:

**Level 1:** little success.

**Level 2:** limited success.

**Level 3:** partial success, inconsistent performance (answers most questions correctly but is less successful with the most challenging questions).

**Level 4:** success with most questions but only partial success with the most challenging questions.

**Level 5:** success, even with the most challenging questions.

FCAT results on student proficiency are currently available only for 1999 and 2000 (Table 3). The results for these two years are mixed. In reading, elementary students showed the best overall performance and the largest gain from 1999 to 2000. In 2000, 52% of fourth graders scored 3 and above—up four percentage points from 1999. Middle and high school students, on the other hand, had lower percentages reaching 3 and above—

only 39% of eighth graders and an even lower percentage (29%) of 10<sup>th</sup> graders. Also, from 1999 to 2000, both these grades showed a decline in performance, especially grade 8.

**Table 3**  
**Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT):**  
**Percentage of Florida Students Scoring at Each Achievement Level**

Grade	Year	Reading						Mathematics					
		Achievement Level						Achievement Level					
		1	2	3	4	5	3 & above	1	2	3	4	5	3 & above
4	1999	36	17	29	17	2	<b>48</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2000	33	16	29	19	4	<b>52</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	1999	-	-	-	-	-	-	33	32	21	12	2	<b>35</b>
	2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	26	29	24	17	5	<b>46</b>
8	1999	28	28	31	12	1	<b>44</b>	33	23	27	11	6	<b>44</b>
	2000	32	29	27	11	1	<b>39</b>	29	20	28	13	10	<b>51</b>
10	1999	33	37	19	6	5	<b>30</b>	27	26	24	19	4	<b>47</b>
	2000	35	36	19	6	4	<b>29</b>	26	23	23	22	6	<b>51</b>

Source: Florida Department of Education, <http://www.firn.edu/doe/sas/fcat0000.htm>.  
Includes students in all curriculum groups.

In mathematics, a different pattern emerges. The upper grades have the highest percentage meeting or exceeding partial success and, in contrast to reading, improved mathematics proficiency from 1999 to 2000. For example, in 2000, 51% of 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders scored 3 and above, compared to 46% of fifth graders. From 1999 to 2000, 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders increased these percentages by seven and four percentage points. While fifth graders had lower overall performance (46% reaching level 3 as of 2000), this group showed the largest gain from 1999 to 2000 – a jump from 35 to 46% (11 percentage points).

### Florida Writes!

Florida Writes! is a performance-based assessment which means that students must demonstrate their ability to write. Standards for the test

are stringent and, like the NAEP, attempt to distinguish between adequate and inadequate performance. The scoring system ranges from 1.0 to 6.0 with scores below 3.0 considered inadequate.

Florida Writes! assesses students' writing ability in grades 4, 8, and 10 and has been administered yearly since 1992-93. Scores for 1998-99 of 3.1, 3.4 and 3.6 suggest that students, on average, are writing at adequate levels (Table 4). The general upward trend for all grades suggests that improvement has occurred during the seven years from 1993 to 1999. Improvement has been greatest for fourth grade which had the lowest initial scores in 1992-93.

**Table 4**  
**Average Score on the Florida Writes!**

<b>Grade/Year</b>	<b>92-93</b>	<b>93-94</b>	<b>94-95</b>	<b>95-96</b>	<b>96-97</b>	<b>97-98</b>	<b>98-99</b>
<b>4</b>	2.0	2.2	2.4	2.5	2.6	3.0	3.1
<b>8</b>	3.0	2.7	3.1	3.5	3.4	3.3	3.4
<b>10</b>	NA	2.9	3.3	3.3	3.6	3.6	3.6

*Source: John Loughran, Assessment and Evaluation Section, Florida Department of Education, Tallahassee. Includes standard curriculum students only.*

### **High School Competency Test**

The High School Competency Test (HSCT), formerly titled the SSAT-II, dates back to the 1970s and since 1984 has been a condition for receipt of a high school diploma. In 1998, only 72% of Florida students were able to pass both parts of the exam on the first try, certifying attainment of 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade-level skills (see Table 5). A higher percentage (81%) showed attainment in communications; a lower percentage in mathematics (77%).

Because the state has re-scaled the test a number of times, one cannot compare results over the 21 years of its administration. However, one can draw reasonable conclusions from the test data within similar scaling periods. The purpose of the test is to ascertain the minimal competency in the core areas of communication and mathematics. Most

11<sup>th</sup> grade students should be expected to pass because the test is pitched at a 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade level.

From 1994 to 1998, the percentage of 11<sup>th</sup> graders passing the HSCT on the first try has shown no improvement. In fact, it declined in 1996 and 1997. Results from 1998 suggest that performance may have started to rebound, although the percentage passing was still lower than in 1994 and 1995.

**Table 5**  
**High School Competency Test: 11<sup>th</sup> Graders Passing on the First Try**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Both Tests</b>	<b>Communications</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>
<b>1994</b>	<b>76%</b>	89%	78%
<b>1995</b>	<b>75%</b>	89%	77%
<b>1996</b>	<b>69%</b>	77%	75%
<b>1997</b>	<b>69%</b>	78%	75%
<b>1998</b>	<b>72%</b>	81%	77%

*Source: John Loughran, Assessment and Evaluation Section, Florida Department of Education, Tallahassee*

### **Non-promotions**

“Social promotion”—keeping students with their chronological age group regardless of poor academic performance – has been a contentious issue in Florida and the nation. All else being equal, a decline in social promotions would result in an increase in non-promotions.

Non-promotion rates (see Table 6) showed small, but steady increases through the early '90s, then began to increase more rapidly in 1996-97. For all grades, pre-kindergarten through 12, the non-promotion rate in 1998-99 was the highest it has ever been this decade. A consistent pattern emerges across grade levels. Non-promotion rates are lowest in pre-kindergarten through grade 5, rise in grades 6-8 and jump again in high school, particularly in grades 9 and 10. By 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, non-promotion rates decline, most likely because of dropouts.

**Table 6**  
**Percentage of Enrolled Students Who Were Not Promoted to the Next Higher Grade in Florida Public Schools, by Grade**

School Year	1990-1991	1991-1992	1992-1993	1993-1994	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999
<b>Pre-K</b>	3.4%	2.0%	2.8%	3.7%	3.1%	1.8%	3.6%	3.9%	3.9%
<b>K</b>	4.9%	3.9%	3.5%	3.2%	3.0%	3.1%	3.6%	4.0%	5.0%
<b>1</b>	4.2%	3.7%	3.6%	3.4%	3.3%	3.6%	4.2%	5.2%	6.1%
<b>2</b>	1.5%	1.5%	1.7%	1.6%	1.5%	1.9%	2.2%	3.3%	4.0%
<b>3</b>	1.1%	0.9%	1.0%	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	1.5%	2.4%	3.3%
<b>4</b>	1.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%	1.0%	1.7%	2.4%
<b>5</b>	0.8%	0.6%	0.6%	0.7%	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%	1.3%	1.5%
<b>6</b>	2.5%	2.3%	2.8%	3.0%	3.3%	3.7%	4.4%	5.2%	6.5%
<b>7</b>	4.5%	3.7%	4.2%	4.5%	4.7%	4.7%	4.9%	5.9%	7.5%
<b>8</b>	4.3%	3.1%	3.3%	3.4%	3.6%	3.6%	4.0%	4.6%	5.6%
<b>9</b>	8.4%	8.7%	10.8%	10.8%	11.1%	12.8%	14.3%	17.2%	17.5%
<b>10</b>	8.5%	7.9%	9.1%	9.5%	9.3%	10.8%	12.1%	13.8%	14.6%
<b>11</b>	6.3%	6.1%	7.2%	7.9%	7.8%	7.8%	8.6%	9.0%	9.8%
<b>12</b>	5.3%	4.4%	5.3%	5.5%	5.3%	5.2%	5.7%	6.3%	6.6%
<b>Total</b>	4.0%	3.5%	3.9%	4.0%	4.1%	4.4%	5.0%	6.1%	6.9%

*Source: Calculated from non-promotion and enrollment data provided by Teresa Sancho, Education Information Services, Florida Department of Education.*

### Scholastic Assessment Test

Another test which shows change over time in the performance of Florida students is the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), a good predictor of success in college. While this test is the best known and most carefully watched, it provides little useful longitudinal or comparative information because the population of test takers is self-selected.

Florida students score lower than U.S. students on the SAT, but they also take the test in larger numbers and come from populations more disadvantaged. Test takers as a percentage of graduates increased from 1977 to 1999 in both Florida and the United States, but the increase has been greater in Florida where this percentage was 57% in 1999 compared to 43% in the U.S. As a result, comparisons between Florida and the nation are difficult to make. As shown in Table 7, Florida student performance has fluctuated over the last 20 years between scores of 982 and 1001 with no clear pattern. Scores have improved for the last three years. U.S. scores also have fluctuated but at a higher level, between 994 and 1017 over the same period.

**Table 7**  
**Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT): Average Combined Scores**

1977	1980	1983	1986	1989	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
<b>Florida</b>												
984	991	991	998	991	987	985	982	993	994	998	1001	997
<b>United States</b>												
1003	994	997	1009	1006	1001	1003	1003	1010	1013	1016	1017	1016

Source: SAT Trends (Scholastic Assessment Test): Florida and the Nation, August 1999, p. 2

It is worth noting that Florida students at nearly all income levels score below the national averages (see Table 8). For example, Florida students from the most affluent homes (incomes over \$100,000) score 41 points lower than the national average.

**Table 8**  
**Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT):**  
**Average Combined Scores by Income Level, 1999**

<i>Income level</i>	<b>Florida</b>	<i>United States</i>
Less than \$10,000	860	871
\$10,000 - \$20,000	909	907
\$20,000 - \$30,000	957	954
\$30,000 - \$40,000	973	986
\$40,000 - \$50,000	999	1011
\$50,000 - \$60,000	1014	1030
\$60,000 - \$70,000	1032	1043
\$70,000 - \$80,000	1035	1058
\$80,000 - \$100,000	1049	1082
More than \$100,000	1089	1130

Source: SAT Trends (Scholastic Assessment Test): Florida and the Nation, August 1999, p. 6

### **College-Level Entry Placement Tests**

All students entering state universities or community colleges must take an entry-level test to assess their skill levels in reading, writing, and mathematics. If they perform below the established cut-off scores, they are required to enroll in college preparatory courses and demonstrate a certain skill level before they may enroll in college-level courses. Performance on these tests is tracked specifically for Florida public high school graduates entering community colleges the following year (see Table 9).

In 1998-99, only 40% of Florida high school graduates entering community colleges passed all three entry-level tests. Half failed to make the cut-off in mathematics, 41% in reading, and 32% in writing. The vast majority of Florida high school graduates entering universities pass these entry-level tests.

The cut-off scores are not high. For so many students who aspire to college-level work to perform so poorly on these tests indicates clearly that many students are graduating from high school and entering college without the foundation for successful college-level work.

### **DOES PERFORMANCE DIFFER BY STUDENT RACE OR ETHNICITY?**

When test performance is analyzed by race and ethnicity, clear and consistent differences emerge (see Table 10). Whites and Asians have the lowest rates of non-promotion while students of other racial/ethnic groups are more likely to be held back a grade. Blacks are the most likely to be retained. In 1998-99, almost 10% of Black students were not promoted to the next higher grade, compared to 7.4% of Hispanics, 7.1% of Native Americans, 5.6% of Whites, and 4.1% of Asians.

**Table 9**  
**Florida Public High School Graduates Entering Community Colleges**  
**Who Passed Entry-Level Tests: 1998-99**

	College Prep Subject	Percentage Passing (scoring above cut-off)*
<b>Community Colleges</b>	<b>Reading</b> (comprehension)	59%
	<b>Writing</b> (sentence skills)	68%
	<b>Mathematics</b> (elementary algebra)	50%
	<b>All areas</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>State University System</b>	<b>Reading</b> (comprehension)	96%
	<b>Writing</b> (sentence skills)	99%
	<b>Mathematics</b> (elementary algebra)	98%
	<b>All areas</b>	<b>93%</b>

*Source: Nathaniel Johnson, Office of Postsecondary Education Coordination, Florida Department of Education, Tallahassee. Includes 1997-98 public high school graduates who enrolled as degree-seeking students in community colleges or state universities in 1998-99.*

**Table 10**  
**Percentage of K-12 Students in Florida Public Schools**  
**Not Promoted to the Next Higher Grade, by Race**

School Year	White (non-Hispanic)	Black (non-Hispanic)	Hispanic	Asian	Native Americans	Total
1990-91	3.4%	5.6%	4.2%	2.4%	4.8%	4.0%
1991-92	3.1%	4.5%	3.8%	2.1%	4.4%	3.5%
1992-93	3.3%	5.1%	4.6%	2.3%	5.4%	3.9%

**Table 10 (continued)**

1993-94	3.4%	5.6%	4.4%	2.3%	4.9%	4.0%
1994-95	3.4%	5.4%	4.8%	2.4%	5.0%	4.1%
1995-96	3.6%	5.9%	5.3%	2.6%	5.0%	4.4%
1996-97	4.0%	6.8%	6.2%	3.1%	6.0%	5.0%
1997-98	4.9%	8.4%	7.1%	3.5%	6.6%	6.1%
1998-99	5.6%	9.8%	7.4%	4.1%	7.1%	6.9%

*Source: Calculated from non-promotion and enrollment data provided by Teresa Sancho, Information and Accountability Services, Florida Department of Education.*

The same performance disparities among racial and ethnic groups are reflected in test scores. On the FCAT, Asians and Whites score higher than other groups. Among minorities, Blacks score the lowest—in all grades and subjects tested (see Table 11).

**Table 11**  
**Average Score on the 1999 Florida Comprehensive**  
**Assessment Test (FCAT), by Race**

<b>Racial/ethnic Group</b>	<b>Reading (mean test score)</b>	<b>Mathematics (mean test score)</b>
<b>Grade 4</b>		
White (non-Hispanic)	313	-
Black (non-Hispanic)	263	-
Hispanic	282	-
Asian	315	-
Native American	304	-
Multiracial/ethnic	305	-
<b>Grade 5</b>		
White (non-Hispanic)	-	325
Black (non-Hispanic)	-	281
Hispanic	-	301
Asian	-	333
Native American	-	316
Multiracial/ethnic	-	318

**Table 11 (continued)**

<b>Grade 8</b>		
White (non-Hispanic)	317	320
Black (non-Hispanic)	275	269
Hispanic	290	292
Asian	321	331
Native American	306	307
Multiracial/ethnic	309	304
<b>Grade 10</b>		
White (non-Hispanic)	318	324
Black (non-Hispanic)	281	284
Hispanic	295	301
Asian	318	333
Native American	307	313
Multiracial/ethnic	308	311

*Source: FCAT 1999: State Demographic Report of Scores, CTB McGraw-Hill. Includes standard curriculum students only.*

On the HSCT in 1998 (see Table 12), the percentages of Black and Hispanic students who passed the exam were 48% and 64% respectively, compared to 82% for whites. Historically, the gap between majority and minority performance has been greater in mathematics than communications.

College-level entry tests show a similar profile by race and ethnicity (see Table 13). White and Asian students score significantly higher than Hispanic and Black students. Blacks have the lowest pass rate.

**Table 12**  
**High School Competency Test:**  
**11<sup>th</sup> Graders Passing Both Tests on the First Try, by Race/Ethnicity**

Year	ALL STUDENTS	Native American	Asian	Black (non-Hispanic)	Hispanic	White (non-Hispanic)
1992	<b>75%</b>	77%	79%	51%	63%	85%
1993	<b>75%</b>	74%	80%	53%	67%	85%
1994	<b>76%</b>	78%	81%	53%	67%	86%
1995	<b>75%</b>	78%	82%	52%	66%	85%
1996	<b>69%</b>	67%	76%	43%	59%	79%
1997	<b>69%</b>	72%	77%	44%	60%	79%
1998	<b>72%</b>	73%	81%	48%	64%	82%

*Source: John Loughran, Assessment and Evaluation Section, Florida Department of Education, Tallahassee*

**Table 13**  
**College Students who Scored above Cut-off Scores**  
**on State Required Entry-Level Tests, by Race/Ethnicity: 1998-99**

Race/ethnicity	Percentage scoring above the cut-off
<b>Native American</b>	55%
<b>Asian</b>	69%
<b>Black (non-Hispanic)</b>	40%
<b>Hispanic</b>	45%
<b>White (non-Hispanic)</b>	70%
<b>ALL STUDENTS</b>	<b>62%</b>

*Source: Nathaniel Johnson, Office of Postsecondary Education Coordination, Florida Department of Education, Tallahassee. Includes 1997-98 public high school graduates who enrolled as degree-seeking students in community colleges or state universities in 1998-99.*

Blacks and Native Americans score substantially lower than Whites or Asians on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), which is taken primarily by students who plan to go to college. However, both of these groups increased their average scores significantly between 1978 and 1999, a total of 87 points for Blacks and 78 points for Native Americans. There also were large gains for Asian students over this time period. Most of these gains occurred in the late '70s and early '80s. Hispanic and White performance remained relatively flat for this period.

**Table 14**  
**Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT): Average Combined Scores**  
**in Florida by Race/Ethnicity**

Year	All Test takers	Native American	Asian	Black (non-Hispanic)	Hispanic	White (non-Hispanic)
1978	<b>993</b>	908	977	767	945	1025
1980	<b>991</b>	939	1001	786	959	1020
1982	<b>992</b>	950	1007	818	938	1021
1984	<b>994</b>	946	1027	827	946	1023
1986	<b>998</b>	928	1020	831	944	1025
1988	<b>994</b>	945	1017	836	943	1026
1990	<b>988</b>	932	1017	837	947	1023
1992	<b>987</b>	944	1026	843	949	1025
1994	<b>982</b>	945	1014	838	943	1027
1996	<b>994</b>	957	1043	854	954	1037
1997	<b>998</b>	954	1041	856	954	1043
1998	<b>1001</b>	961	1050	856	957	1045
1999	<b>997</b>	986	1044	854	957	1041

*Source: SAT Trends (Scholastic Assessment Test): Florida and the Nation, August 1999, p. 21*

## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, Florida students in kindergarten through grade 12 do not perform well compared to the national average or to Florida's own educational standards.

### Reading

Historically about 50% to 65% of fourth and eighth graders have scored at or above the basic level in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. On the FCAT, about 29% to 52% of 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> graders score 3 or above relative to State Sunshine Standards – that is, at least answer most questions correctly, except for the most challenging questions. Elementary students perform better in reading than middle and high school students and, unlike their counterparts, improved from 1999 to 2000.

### Mathematics

Historically 43% to 55 percent of fourth and eighth grade students have scored at or above the basic level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. On the FCAT, 35% to 51% of 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> graders have scored 3 or above. In this subject area, elementary students perform more poorly than middle or high school students. All grades tested showed improvement from 1999 to 2000, with elementary students showing the greatest gain (11 percentage points).

### Writing

Florida students show their best performance in writing. As of 1998, 78% scored at or above the basic level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a result far better than in reading or mathematics but still worse than U.S. students generally. In 1999 and 2000, the average score for 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students was 3.0 or higher on the FCAT writing test (Florida Writes!), indicating that students on average are writing at adequate levels relative to Sunshine State Standards. Also, encouraging is the steady improvement shown by all grades tested over time.

### **High School Graduates**

The picture looks more dismal for students nearing or reaching graduation. Historically, about 25 to 30% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders have not passed the High School Competency Test (HSCT) on the first try. High percentages of Florida public high school graduates entering community colleges do not pass entry-level tests in reading, mathematics and writing; only 40% passed all three tests in 1998-99. Florida's average SAT scores are below the national average at all income levels. In general, none of these tests shows much sign of improvement.

### **Racial and Ethnic Disparities**

Clear and consistent racial and ethnic disparities exist in the performance of students in all subject areas and grade levels tested. Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans score lower than Whites and Asians. Blacks consistently show the poorest performance. They also are the most likely to be retained. In 1998-99, almost 10% of Black students were not promoted to the next higher grade.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

While Florida's students have made some progress, the state still faces major challenges in K-12 education. The preparation of high school students, particularly as they reach graduation, remains inadequate. Improvements in the earlier grades are promising and, if they continue, can make a difference for these students as they advance to higher grade levels. However, Florida students have a long way to go toward reaching state and national standards. Also, substantial racial and ethnic disparities in school achievement will need to be addressed before Florida can reach its goal of providing a high quality education for all children and preparing its workforce for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.