

## Florida Master Plan For K-20 Education

### *Status of the Teaching Profession*

#### Introduction

The *Status of the Teaching Profession* is one of the six Strategic Imperatives identified by the Council for its **Master Plan for K-20 Education**. The goal of this focus is to ensure that the critical link between the student and the system at all levels is provided by the highest quality and most motivated teachers available – in numbers sufficient to fully meet the needs of the System.

The most important factor affecting the quality of education is the quality of the individual teacher in the classroom, and there is clear evidence that a teacher's ability and effectiveness are the most influential determinants of student achievement. More critically, the importance of good teaching to the academic success of students is intuitively obvious to any parent.

#### The Challenge

**Florida public schools must attain and maintain high quality instruction for all students.**

To meet the challenges of the projected teacher shortage and the class size reduction mandate, the following priorities must be acted upon:

- Teaching in Florida must be viewed and promoted as a true profession, with the level of respect, recognition and support that are accorded to doctors, lawyers and engineers.
- The environment in Florida classrooms and schools must support professional growth and development for teachers and a high level of learning and achievement for students.
- Greater numbers of high quality teachers must be trained, certified, and employed, particularly in Florida's critical teacher shortage areas and for the state's low performing schools.



Council for Education Policy,  
Research and Improvement

<http://www.cepri.state.fl.us>

The Council for Education Policy, Research and Improvement (CEPRI) was created as an independent office under the Office of Legislative Services by the 2001 Legislature (Section 1008.51, Florida Statutes). The Council serves as a citizen board for independent policy research and analysis and is composed of five members appointed by the Governor and two members appointed by Speaker of the House and two members appointed by the President of the Senate.

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#### *The Council's full report:*

*Florida Teachers and the Teaching Profession* contains "Implementation Strategies" which provide greater specificity and support to the policy recommendations outlined here.

## The Growing Need for Teachers

Florida maintains an excellent teaching workforce, while continuing to strain to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse public school enrollment.

- Florida's public school system is the fourth largest school system in the U.S., serving over 2.3 million students in 67 public school districts.
- Florida has six of the 20 largest school districts in the U.S., with seven districts over 100,000 students.
- The student population continues to increase each year as over 44,000 new students enroll annually in Florida's schools.
- A number of school districts have experienced significant enrollment growth in the last four years (15 districts gained over 10% enrollment), while numerous smaller districts lost significant enrollment (23 districts lost enrollment) during the period.
- The number of high school graduates is projected to increase 37% between 2000 and 2010.
- During the past two decades, public school minority enrollment has grown from 32% to 47%, the largest increase realized by Hispanics, 8% to 19%.
- Official state estimates show that more than 162,000 new instructional personnel will be needed in Florida between now and 2010.
- Efforts to plan for the current and future education needs of the State have been made more critical by the passage of the 2002 Constitutional Amendment for Class Size Reduction. According to Florida's Revenue Estimating Conference, over the implementation period, an estimated 31,800 additional teachers and 30,200 additional classrooms will be needed to accommodate the class size limits expressed in the amendment.

## Policy Recommendations

### Teacher Preparation

#### Postsecondary Teacher Preparation Programs: Role, Status and Support

Florida's 29 state-approved teacher preparation programs have increased liberal arts curricular content, pedagogy and school internship requirements to address the need for greater numbers of teachers and teachers who are able to teach the content required in state and national standards and priorities. In addition, the state community colleges have an essential role as full partners in the preparation of teachers, as it is estimated that 40 percent of Florida teachers have completed at least a portion of their coursework at a community college.

#### Policy Recommendation

1. **University and community college teacher education programs are critical to the mission and success of Florida's education system. Colleges and departments of education, as well as other providers of teacher training, must become a peak priority of the Legislature, the State Board of Education and each institution's board of trustees and administration in order to strengthen the status, quality, resources provided to and effectiveness of their programs.**

### **Postsecondary Teacher Preparation Programs: Effectiveness**

Legislation for state-approved teacher preparation programs in Education ties specific coursework to state certification and delineates credit hours that are required in specific disciplines. In a period when the State is struggling to increase the production of qualified teachers and the state university teacher preparation programs are reporting excess capacity in most of their Education degree programs, the prescriptive requirements for teacher preparation programs are preventing the state programs from having the flexibility to develop and implement innovative strategies for students to efficiently become trained, certified and employed.

#### **Policy Recommendation**

- 2. Florida Education statutes, rules, policies and procedures that impede innovation and flexibility in the preparation, certification and employment of high quality teachers must be amended or repealed.**

### **Postsecondary Teacher Preparation Programs: Content and Standards**

Florida's legislatively approved Educator Accomplished Practices and Subject Area Competencies are now well integrated with course syllabi in the state-approved teacher preparation programs, and students are currently required to achieve the content described in the state requirements for program approval. The challenge for Florida's teacher preparation programs is not simply to prepare more teachers, but to prepare the teachers that are needed, i.e., teachers prepared to teach in subject areas and specialties that schools need most and teachers that are trained to meet the educational needs of the school's growing minority populations. More specifically, Florida schools now need teachers who are prepared to teach new State and national standards, make appropriate use of instructional technology and encourage independent and critical thinking.

#### **Policy Recommendation**

- 3. All educational programs in Florida that prepare individuals to teach should require candidates to demonstrate the effective teaching of Florida's subject matter content standards and the professional competencies and skills identified in Florida's educator accomplished practices.**

### **National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification**

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards measures a teacher's practice against rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. Certified teachers must meet high standards of practice and demonstrate their skills and knowledge through examination, portfolios and video demonstration lessons. The process provides a nontraditional, career development opportunity for experienced teachers by providing professional advancement, recognition in their school and community and a benchmark for achievement in the profession.

#### **Policy Recommendation**

- 4. The Dale Hickam Excellent Teaching Program, which supports national board certification for Florida teachers, should be expanded by the Legislature.**

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## **The Recruitment of High Quality Teachers**

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The employment and retention of teachers remain largely responsibilities of local school districts. States, however, increasingly are becoming involved in strategies that complement district recruitment efforts, particularly for hard-to-staff schools and high demand subject fields. Proactive states are finding that competitive salaries, with opportunities for professional growth, are key to efforts to attract and retain the most qualified teachers.

### **Early Outreach Programs**

The value of proactive teacher recruitment programs designed for secondary school students cannot be overstated. Regardless of their level of sophistication, programs that provide information to young students on teaching as a career and that offer hands-on opportunities to shadow and assist teachers can create and solidify an interest in teaching.

### **Policy Recommendation**

- 5. A comprehensive, statewide plan for the recruitment of teachers must be established by the Department of Education and the school districts to attract individuals, particularly secondary school students, to the teaching profession.**

### **Financial Assistance Programs**

For the past two decades, Florida has offered financial assistance programs to support students and teachers in their pursuit of a teaching degree and credential. Targeted financial aid programs, like forgivable loans and incentive grants for students and teachers, can serve as recruitment tools for schools and school districts to increase interest in and pursuit of teaching as a career. Such programs can also assist in the recruitment of teachers who have specific skills needed to work in low-performing and/or ethnically diverse schools.

### **Policy Recommendation**

- 6. A strategic plan that provides financial assistance programs that will most effectively attract and retain high quality teachers must be enacted by the Legislature.**

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## **The Retention of High Quality Teachers**

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High turnover rates and chronic attrition of beginning teachers continue to create an ongoing, annual pressure for hiring and undermine the ability of a school to build and sustain a teaching/learning community. National statistics show that approximately one-third of America's teachers leave the field during their first three years of teaching; almost one-half leave after five years. No teacher supply strategy will keep classrooms staffed with quality teachers if the system fails to implement policies and procedures to reduce teacher attrition, particularly among young teachers.

### **Teacher Compensation: Minimum Teacher Salary**

Beginning salaries for classroom teachers are at the low end of the spectrum for college graduates, and in most traditional school district salary schedules, the prospects for salary growth do not compare with other professions. Florida continues to lag behind the national average in beginning teacher salaries at a time when teacher recruitment is critical to the supply of qualified teachers. To attract academically bright and motivated individuals to teaching, school districts will need to offer annualized salaries, benefits and working conditions to new teachers at least equal to those offered in occupations requiring comparable education.

### **Policy Recommendation**

- 7. A minimum salary level for all Florida teachers should be established by the Legislature.**

### **Teacher Compensation: Performance Pay / A Career Ladder for Teachers**

The profession of teaching has traditionally offered little recognition to the experienced and highly skilled teachers in comparison to the novice teacher, other than annual, incremental salary increases given to all teachers equally based on how many years they have taught. Differentiated pay for teachers, within a school-wide system of teaching and learning accountability, will address the concern of paying all teachers at the same level regardless of abilities, performance and motivation. In recognition of the private sector

model, it is clear that high achieving teachers, teachers in scarce fields and teachers who accept the most challenging classes deserve a higher level of compensation than mediocre, ineffective teachers.

An effective performance-reward compensation system will enable the best teachers in Florida to earn higher salaries and advance professionally, just as in other professions, without having to leave the classroom.

#### **Policy Recommendation**

- 8. Florida's system of teacher compensation must be redesigned so meritorious teachers are rewarded for demonstrated competence, outstanding performance and student achievement and so a career advancement structure is in place for all teachers.**

#### **Teacher Compensation: Hard-to-Staff, Low Performing Schools**

Florida has many schools that are located in high poverty, urban neighborhoods and in isolated rural areas that serve students who have fared least well according to all available measures of student achievement. In numerous cases, students who have the greatest need for the most highly skilled teachers are educated in schools that are most likely to employ under-prepared and inexperienced teachers, as these schools typically hire a disproportionate share of new teachers. Special efforts are needed to attract strong teachers who have the commitment and passion to persist in challenging environments to these hard-to-staff schools - and these teachers must receive the support necessary to enable them to be successful.

#### **Policy Recommendation**

- 9. A comprehensive plan must be established by the Department of Education and funded by the Legislature to ensure that school districts and schools have the resources needed to employ and retain high quality, experienced teachers in low performing or hard-to-staff schools.**

#### **Teacher Induction Programs**

Beginning teachers are often termed "works in progress" and face unique working conditions as they adjust to having total responsibility for student learning. They must not only be competent in their subject and know how to teach it, they must maintain a climate in which teaching and learning can take place. A strong, structured mentoring program can create a safety net for the most vulnerable teachers by strengthening their skills and knowledge and pairing them with experienced, successful teachers.

Well-crafted teacher induction programs represent a significant teacher retention strategy and have proven their value in reducing attrition rates among new teachers. Specifically, these programs can improve teaching quality, help deter the flow of novice teachers from the profession and in doing so, decrease the overall cost of recruiting, preparing and developing teachers.

#### **Policy Recommendation**

- 10. A formal teacher induction program should be implemented in every school and should be supported by the Legislature through a targeted incentive funding program.**

#### **Teacher Retirement Issues and the Deferred Retirement Option Program**

The Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP) is a retirement program that is available to all public employees, including classroom teachers, who are eligible for normal retirement and whose employers participate in the Florida Retirement System (FRS). DROP allows participants to retire and begin accumulating retirement benefits, without terminating employment, for up to 60 months from the date the participant first reached normal retirement. Florida classroom teachers are permitted a special exception allowing them unlimited deferral of the date they may begin participation in the DROP program.

In recent years, alternative methods to provide employment incentives to the Florida teaching profession have been considered by the Legislature and the Department of Management Services. DMS reports that any proposal that will change the benefit formula under the FRS pension plan requires an actuarial special study examining the fiscal impact on retirement benefits. This fiscal impact would have to be fully funded by the State at the time the benefit change becomes effective under Florida law.

### **Policy Recommendation**

**11. Florida Retirement System policies, particularly the Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP), should be reviewed by the Department of Management Services and the Department of Education in order to establish and/or modify policies to increase the retention of high quality teachers.**

## **Committee and Activities**

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The Council's Committee on the Status of the Teaching Profession developed a Data Update to provide information that highlights the current status of teaching in Florida and that represents key issues related to state and district policies affecting teachers.

Public hearings were conducted with a variety of education constituencies, including state education, school district and institution administrators, school district superintendents, teacher preparation program deans, school principals and classroom teachers, to receive "front-line" testimony from individuals directly involved with teachers and the teaching profession. Based on this testimony, the Council identified policy recommendations and developed the full report: "Florida Teachers and the Teaching Profession."

**Please visit our website at <http://www.cepri.state.fl.us> for the full report**

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Council for Education Policy, Research and Improvement  
111 W Madison St Ste 574  
Tallahassee FL 32399-1400  
(850) 488-7894