

FLORIDA EDUCATION MONTHLY: December 2004
A Project of The James Madison Institute
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This is the second issue of The James Madison Institute's newest school reform project, Florida Education Monthly. As a Madison Policy Digest subscriber, you'll continue to receive this exciting new public policy resource on the first Friday of every month.

We're confident that Florida Education Monthly will become your go-to source for the latest education news from the Sunshine State and across the nation. Each issue is packed with best practices, insightful research, and engaging examples on the power of choice in education.

JMI is committed to educating Floridians on practical free-market solutions to public policy problems—and we think Florida Education Monthly is the perfect tool to do just that. As always, you can count on JMI to deliver candid, straightforward information that you can use to impact public policy in Florida.

STATE NEWS

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SCHOOL VOUCHER CASE COULD END UP IN FEDERAL COURT

<http://www.heraldtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20041201/NEWS/412010417/1017/POLITICS>

An unnamed attorney for state lawmakers is predicting that the legal battle over Florida's original school voucher law could move to the federal courts after the state Supreme Court rules on its constitutionality, the Sarasota Herald-Tribune recently reported.

An attorney for opponents, however, said he expects Florida's high court to be the end of the lawsuit, which began more than five years ago.

"I think ... the final chapter will be written by the Florida Supreme Court," Ron Meyer said.

Three courts have ruled that the 1999 law violates the Florida Constitution because it allows tax dollars to be spent on religious schools.

The most recent ruling came two weeks ago from the full 1st District Court of Appeal. That decision was in line with a similar ruling by a three-judge panel of the DCA in August and with a trial judge's ruling in August 2002.

A coalition of opponents, including the state teachers union, the Florida PTA, the League of Women Voters and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, filed suit the day after Gov. Jeb Bush signed the law.

Nearly 700 students this year are attending private schools under the law, which continues to be implemented while the state defends the law in court. Fifty-six percent of the students attend religious schools, according to the state Department of Education.

Voucher students can be taught about religion but cannot be forced to pray, worship or profess a religious belief.

A staff lawyer for the Senate Education Committee told lawmakers that it was possible the law could be defended in the federal courts under the U.S. Constitution.

UPK GETS DOWNSIZED

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/local/10307896.htm?1c>

The Miami Herald reported Wednesday that less than two weeks before Florida lawmakers try to craft a universal pre-kindergarten program, top Republican lawmakers and Gov. Jeb Bush have finally worked out key details that appear to water down the higher standards once espoused by Bush and his administration.

Under the tentative agreement, the state would agree to pay for only three hours of instruction each day, oversight of the program would be split between two separate state agencies, schools would have years to comply with teacher-training requirements and there would be “flexibility” on the student-to-teacher ratio.

The recommendations are a shadow of those promulgated earlier this year by a Bush-appointed pre-K advisory panel, chaired by Lt. Gov. Toni Jennings. The panel wanted a minimum of four hours of instruction a day. Also, Bush this summer vetoed legislation passed by the Legislature, saying it did not meet the “high quality” standards called for by the constitutional amendment that voters passed in 2002 creating the pre-K program.

But is UPK the cure for Florida’s education woes?

In the Cato Policy Analysis “Universal Preschool Is No Golden Ticket: Why Government Should Not Enter the Preschool Business,” analyst Darcy Olsen writes that experience provides little reason to believe universal preschool would significantly benefit children, regardless of family income.

Olsen writes that for nearly 40 years, local, state, and federal governments and diverse private sources have funded early intervention programs for low-income children, and benefits to the children have been few and fleeting. There is also evidence that middle-class children gain little, if anything, from preschool. Benefits to children in public preschools are unlikely to be greater or more enduring.

“Public preschool for younger children is irresponsible, given the failure of the public school system to educate the children currently enrolled,” Olsen warns. “The desire to ‘do something’ for young children should be tempered by the facts, and proposals for universal preschool should be rejected.”

To read full text of “Universal Preschool Is No Golden Ticket: Why Government Should Not Enter the Preschool Business,” visit <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-333es.html>.

CAPITALISM IN FLORIDA SCHOOLS?: COOKIE BUSINESS RAISES A LOT OF BREAD FOR ENTERPRISING TEENS

<http://www.starbanner.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20041129/NEWS/211290310/1027/LIFESTYLE>

Come through the front door at Osceola Middle School and the aroma of fresh-baked cookies might lure you straight to Aura Garcia's classroom, the Ocala Star-Banner recently reported. On Wednesdays and Fridays, Garcia's students run the Cookie Jar, a flourishing business that has sold more than \$1,200 in cookies since the start of the semester.

It's a real business, complete with a CEO, a marketing department, bakers, sellers and financial staff. The students produce 150 cookies a day and offer a choice of four flavors, including peanut butter and macadamia nut.

The Cookie Jar is one of 26 different projects in the school's Encore program that also includes such options as Future Teachers, Oratorical Speaking and Financial Fitness. Each project correlates math and language arts.

Because they started with no money, Garcia's students borrowed \$350 from the school office to buy cookie dough, bags and pan liners. They purchased the items from Otis Spunkmeyer, a California-based cookie business that also sent a small oven on loan. The class paid off the school loan within a few weeks.

Besides baking and selling cookies for 75 cents each, the students are learning other aspects of running a business.

For 13-year-old Emily Groves, selling cookies could make a difference in future goals.

"It will prepare me for one day if I want to be part of a business," Groves said. "I'm thinking strongly about it, because I'm having fun."

NATIONAL NEWS

- * Economics in Action: Birmingham Students on Payroll for Learning
- * Tough Love: A D.C. Mother's Commitment to Her Kids' Education Comes at Steep Price
- * Texas Public School Employees Form "Educators Witness Protection Program"

ECONOMICS IN ACTION: BIRMINGHAM STUDENTS ON PAYROLL FOR LEARNING

http://www.freep.com/news/education/pay29e_20041129.htm

Being paid for schoolwork is part of the third-grade curriculum at Beverly Elementary in the Birmingham school district, the Detroit Free Press reported recently.

Students earn "Beverly Bucks" for homework, tests and class work, with a bonus thrown in for good quality.

At the end of the week, they can take a paycheck home for endorsement. Then the student can cash the check for Beverly Bucks and shop in the class store. The store items are partly paid for out of parent donations and class funds. The teachers also kick in a little money.

The paycheck curriculum is part economics, part math and a very big part incentive.

“Their work has really improved,” said teacher Christine Knoper. “When I come to work, I get paid for it. We’ve really just likened it to the real world.”

After the Christmas break, Knoper said the paycheck curriculum will be ramped up a notch when the kids start paying taxes on the hallways (a form of road tax) and playgrounds.

Students can lose money, too.

“If I accidentally hit somebody, I have to lose \$4 or \$5,” said Shane Holmes, 8, suggesting that losing *that* much money was horrifying.

At one point, Knoper’s students were selling items to each other, sending a mini-black market into full swing. Then the third-graders started to see the downside of the black market and voted to outlaw it, Knoper said. They’ve also learned—like many adults—that sharing money and loaning money among friends are bad ideas.

Back in the classroom, the students agree there is one aspect of their paychecks and shopping that they completely understand. Once they buy their treasure: “We just can’t play with it in school,” said Erin Grabowski, 8.

TOUGH LOVE: A D.C. MOTHER’S COMMITMENT TO HER KIDS’ EDUCATION COMES AT A STEEP PRICE

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A20229-2004Nov2.html>

Until two years ago, Michelle Teresa Hutton was riding the Metro to class. Then came the turmoil of 10th grade, when she played as much as studied, and her mother Sheila threatened to have her retake every course. The battles escalated until the teenager suggested, not so seriously, that maybe she should live with her father in New England for several months. Sheila seized on that idea. Getting Michelle out of the District, she decided, was indeed the best thing she could do.

In a faraway dot on a New Hampshire map—a rural curve in the road, nearly to Canada—Michelle is graduating. Sheila had urged her son along a similar path, though the circumstances were vastly different. William, the quiet young man with her at commencement, spent his junior and senior years on scholarship at a private prep school, also, by coincidence, in New Hampshire.

Sheila downplays the heartache of her children’s absences. “It’s not about me,” she says. What it *is* about: their education, and the worlds that could open up for them beyond a modest neighborhood in Northeast Washington.

A parent’s desire for a child’s success is the rule, not the exception. But during the long stretch between kindergarten and graduation, the question is how to foster that success. Those with means can afford to write checks for exclusive academies, private tutoring and résumé-enriching

summer programs. Those like Sheila Hutton can't. They often have only their own commitment to offer, with little margin for error.

TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL EMPLOYEES FORM "EDUCATORS WITNESS PROTECTION PROGRAM"

<http://www.freedomfoundation.us/>

A recent SchoolReport newsletter, a publication of the U.S. Freedom Foundation, reports that a Texas-based "Educators Witness Protection Program" has been initiated to allow individual educators and taxpayers to report instances of alleged wasteful spending in the public school system without being subject to retaliation from powerful administrators or unions.

Early reports vary, from one teacher complaining that her district considered laying off 20 teachers (but no administrators), to several teachers reporting that their district spent \$4 million for a discipline management training program quickly terminated by many schools.

Fraud and waste does exist in the system nationwide. Yet there is little public outrage, and relatively little notice of it.

For more information on the Educators Witness Protection Program, visit

<http://www.educatorswitnessprotectionprogram.com/>.

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