

FLORIDA EDUCATION MONTHLY: October 2005
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FCAT EXPOSED!

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/12708001.htm>
<http://www.news4jax.com/education/5052008/detail.html>

According to a report in the Miami Herald, parents, teachers, students and even the governor got a peek at the state's high-stakes standardized test when it was recently released online.

Education Commissioner John Winn and Governor Jeb Bush both took the test, although each missed a couple of questions.

Bush said the main goal in releasing the FCAT to the public was to rebuff criticism of the test, which is used to set annual school grades that determine whether schools should be sanctioned or rewarded.

"We want to demystify the FCAT so critics of accountability and assessment can't try to scare people or confuse people," Bush said.

One group of critics is focusing on the test's impact on student retention. According to News4Jax.com, the group says it will launch a campaign against state retention policy arguing that retention often leads to lower levels of long-term academic performance.

But is retention policy really bad for students?

According to research conducted by the Manhattan Institute using data collected from Florida's Department of Education:

"Low-performing students who were actually retained made gains in reading greater than those of similar students who were promoted by 4.10 percentile points on the FCAT..."

"Low-performing students who were retained made gains in math greater than those of similar students who were promoted by 9.98 percentile points on the FCAT..."

The group that has been critical of retention because of FCAT scores will be meeting the first week of October "to develop strategies to try to change the current policy."

According to JMI Director of Public Affairs Matt Warner, "A strategy to explain away this data may be the first thing needed for this campaign to get off the ground."

To take the FCAT online, visit <http://www.firn.edu/doe/sas/fcat.htm>

To read full text of “An Evaluation of Florida’s Program to End Social Promotion,” visit http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_07.htm

PRIVATE SCHOOLS FOR THE POOR?

<http://www.educationnext.org/20054/22.html>

According to new research explained in the fall 2005 issue of Education Next, the rich of the world are not the only ones getting a quality, private school education.

Observing low-income families in underprivileged and developing areas of India, China and sub-Saharan Africa, James Tooley discovered that “the poor have found remarkably innovative ways of helping themselves, educationally, and in some of the most destitute places on Earth have managed to nurture a large and growing industry of private schools for themselves.”

Tooley’s research challenges what he calls “the accepted wisdom” that “private schools serve the privileged” and “everyone else, especially the poor, requires public school.”

When Tooley discovered thousands of “unrecognized schools” – private schools serving the underprivileged –he wondered whether these schools were effective in delivering a quality education.

To answer that question, Tooley gave tests to students from government schools, private recognized schools and private unrecognized schools and compared the results.

His results showed that in most cases students in unrecognized private schools performed better than government schools and nearly as well as recognized private schools.

For example, in Hyderabad, India, students from unrecognized private schools answered 60.8 percent of the math questions correctly compared to only 38.4 percent of questions by students in government schools and 63.4 percent of questions by students in recognized private schools.

For English language questions, students from government schools answered 22.4 percent correctly, students from unrecognized private schools answered 53.6 percent correctly and students from recognized private schools answered 59.5 percent correctly.

Other examples follow similar trends.

Tooley, a professor of education policy, concluded:

“...the accepted wisdom does seem to be right on one point: private is better than public. Of course, no one suspected that private slum schools would be better. Yet our research suggests that children in these schools outperform similar students in government schools in key school subjects. And this is true even of the unrecognized private schools...”

Does Tooley’s evidence have any implications for the school choice debate in America?

According to Tooley, “The evidence from developing countries might challenge the claim, made by school choice opponents, that the poor in America cannot make sensible and informed choices

if school choice is offered to them. It may also stimulate debate about whether public intervention crowds out private initiative.”

Tooley’s research continues in China.

To read full text of “Private Schools for the Poor: Education Where No One Expects It,” visit <http://www.educationnext.org/20054/22.html>

18 MYTHS OF EDUCATION PUT TO REST

<http://www.manhattan-institute.org/educationmyths/>

A new book released mid-September entitled “Education Myths” challenges eighteen of the most pervasive and misguided beliefs about education and education reform.

Have you ever heard someone say, “School choice harms public schools by draining resources and brain power”?

Well, according to research by author Jay Greene, such notions are not supported by data. In fact, Greene points to evidence that in places where public schools are subjected to school choice policies, academic performance of students is on the rise.

How about this one, “Teachers aren’t paid enough, no wonder our students are failing.”

In an article published in the New York Post, Greene explains why his book counters that claim.

“The idea that teachers are underpaid is a myth. When we discard our presuppositions and look at the evidence, it turns out that teachers actually are better paid than many people realize.”

Greene says we need to account for the relatively few hours teachers actually spend working compared to other professionals.

“Teachers have long vacation periods, several personal and sick days and work a shorter day than most other professionals. We can only properly understand these hours away from work as a benefit of the teaching profession. That is, a teacher who earns \$45,000 to work for nine months is clearly better paid than a nurse who gets the same salary for working 12 months.”

Because of this, Greene argues the only reasonable way to compare teacher pay to other professions is with an hourly wage calculation.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the average public elementary school teacher in the United States earns about \$30.75 an hour. Greene compares this hourly wage to the average mechanical engineer’s \$29.76, the average dentist’s \$35.51 and the average police officer’s \$22.64.

To read full text of “The Teacher-Pay Myth,” visit http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/_nypost_teacher_pay_myth.htm

To purchase "Education Myths" by Jay P. Greene, visit
<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0742549771/103-6233952-0459007?v=glance&n=283155&n=507846&s=books&v=glance>

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