



Real Energy for Change? Provide Something Better!

Dr. Ed Moore

Education reform. Now that is a phrase we have all heard over the decades, maybe to the point of redundancy. When the phrase was used more than three decades ago, it likely referred to curriculum revisions or changes in the instructional requirements in the preparation of teaching personnel. We all recall such

timeless favorites such as Writing to Read, New Math, Hooked on Phonics, and the list is long. My favorite was Writing to Read because it assured me that when my kids got older, they would be as bad a speller as their dad is. Thank goodness for spell-check.

Historically speaking, it has usually been the larger, more structurally focused

changes that have had the greatest effect on advancing education. Changes in curriculum formats and styles have blended in and out through the ages, as have the tools used to convey materials in the classrooms, but the larger, more broadly applied, sociological changes have had the greatest effects on learning in America.

We take for granted the easy access public school systems that are available to every child in the U.S. In some respects, they have become like the fast-food options, the drug stores, and the mattress stores that are ubiquitous and visible to us as we go about our daily business. Once you no longer have children in the schools, they usually just become a part of the neighborhood landscape except when you receive your annual property tax bill and catch a glimpse of that line item. For a brief moment in time, the schools matter, and then your busy life gets in the way. We forget just how important our schools have been in the advancement and development of our modern society and how, over time, they became the necessary ladders to success for everyone, no matter your economic status.

We are now into the fall season and our students are once again back to face-to-face learning. As Florida's schools find students returning to class, more than the bells for the start of the day are ringing. Alarm bells are ringing about a very serious public policy problem; the continuing and increasing shortage of qualified teachers in every classroom. Recent estimates indicate as many as 9,000 classrooms are lacking a certified full time qualified subject matter teacher. We have long struggled to place teachers in complex subjects such as physics, chemistry,

and advanced math, but the problem has grown. This is not just a rural problem. It is a statewide problem. Certainly some of the obstacles and issues might vary, but the net results are the same; not enough teachers and even fewer taking course loads in colleges across our state in preparation for a teaching career. Housing costs in our more urban communities are vastly different than one might find in the more rural counties, but availability might still be an issue. Teachers are leaving the profession in greater numbers for many reasons. This has been a long time coming and, in part, can be attributed to the common discourse about education. We place the blame on the classrooms without thinking through the much larger picture of causations.

I have been engaged in education policy and related issues for more than thirty years. I chaired a state study commission two decades ago on the issues of teachers and the teaching profession. Two decades have not changed the discourse, in fact, it has gotten worse and the recruitment and retention of teachers has now reached a point where the state needs to take a hard look at what changes must be made and how soon. Florida is not alone in this dilemma but, in my view, we have a chance right now to take a national lead in making changes to alter the state of the classrooms across our state.

Changes Over Time

Take the time to go back over the history of public education in America. It has not always been there and for so many it was a very long time coming. Massachusetts, under the persistent efforts of one Horace Mann, began the very first public school

system. He became the very first State Superintendent of Schools and made it his life work to create access for the children of Massachusetts. It took centuries for access to be available for young males from across the economic spectrum alone in the various states. We have seen tremendous changes in access for all children, starting with access for females to all aspects of education in the early 20th Century, and then later—with the passage of Title IX—all races, all national origins, etc. Many Eastern Seaboard cities saw the creation and expansion of parochial systems, at first in reaction to the waves of Irish immigrating in the mid-to late 1800s, and then huge numbers of other European immigrants in the 30 years from 1890-1920. It was not that long ago that poorly directed nationalistic attitudes combined with outright bigotry limited many “white” children from receiving proper instruction. The 1950s and *Brown vs. Board of Education* opened the doors even wider and even with that it took another 15 or more years for schools to be schools, not black or white schools.

All of these sociological changes fell heavily upon the public and parochial school systems to manage. When bricks fall upon a school, the teachers have to lift and carry those bricks. We have asked much of our teaching professionals, all the while being a highly critical society. It is one aspect of our lives where we all form opinions; after all, most all of us spent at least 12 years of our lives experiencing it. However, that does not make us experts. Far from it. My view is that even the so-called experts do not have a true handle on where we go now. We are in a period of the most rapid

changes society has ever seen. I hesitate to write this, but the reality is that students starting college this fall will more than likely be preparing themselves for a workforce filled with jobs that have yet to be created. This is why I cringe when I hear politicians calling for a focus more on specific jobs rather than on the value of learning for learning’s sake. If you are 20 today, you had better be preparing yourself for a lifetime of learning, and the re-creation of who you are and what role you will play in a constantly changing economy.

The sheer volume of knowledge is stunning. In 1945 the whole of knowledge would double every 25 years. It is now estimated that today the volume of knowledge doubles every 12 hours. Read that again. In large part, this has helped to form my opinion that while content knowledge by teachers is critical, it is the modalities of teaching, and the conveyance of the importance of learning new things that will become even more critical over time. We should never lose sight that teaching is not within the toolbox of all of us. I have taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It is a challenge that took a great deal of effort to be even a little bit good at it. Imagine teaching eighth grade, with all those various energies and competencies, and facing six periods a day with 22 kids in each class. Imagine not only teaching these 132 highly diversified (in every way imaginable) children but also dealing with parents, administrators, policymakers, and at the end of it all providing grading and feedback to those cherished 132 souls. It is a challenge and yet we wonder why so few choose it as a profession.

I wrote a study-piece about five years

ago that was designed to try to awaken policy makers to a coming crisis in education. At that time, I headed an organization of 30 colleges and universities, with 21 of those offering degrees in education. We saw a precipitous drop in the number of students earning degrees in education during the years from 2010 to 2018. If we are not producing new teachers, we cannot replace the sheer numbers who leave the profession each year, a pace which has only accelerated. Why be surprised when recruitment efforts fail, especially when you know a huge number of certified teachers in Florida classrooms already are coming here from other states, having earned their degrees from non-Florida colleges and universities.

Florida has tried different ways to create new teachers. Every community or state college created mechanisms for offering programs at each site they manage with the intention of creating greater outputs and offering shorter pathways to teacher certifications. Go ahead and check out how many still are in place and how successful each has been in meeting the local county demand for teachers. We have used all kinds of alternative track methods for converting people with subject matter expertise into teachers, and yet we are around 9,000 short this fall semester. That number is going to get worse unless it becomes a public policy priority for Florida. The study I chaired 20 years ago found a multitude of reasons for why teachers left the profession. Those issues have grown in number and as our society becomes more complex, more divisive, and more resistant to change we must find ways to be more creative, more open to new ideas and more focused on doing what

is best for our students.

We have been creative in developing new modalities, new venues, and new kinds of structures. When once we only saw public schools, private schools and parochial schools, we now have all kinds of mixes and options. As high-speed internet connectivity expands and the ability to reach every household with adequate online capacity grows, our options will also grow.

This is a national challenge, but it is a great opportunity for Florida to step up and seek workable solutions. We need the best instruction now if we want to be the best tomorrow. We need it in every school and every classroom in our state. We also need to find out why we are losing our teacher talent and our teacher pipeline. We know we have a shortfall, in large part due to losing three out of five teachers within five years of them entering a classroom.

Five Immediate Challenges For Florida's Education Systems

There are five critical challenges beyond the immediate need of finding better ways to both recruit and retain teachers. This will take a singular concerted effort before we even jump to the other five huge challenges. One thing we know is that creating learning organizations out of public policy making entities, such as legislatures, will also take a huge change in retention of prior actions and efforts. Term limits have exacerbated this problem. Pulling together old actors in the processes who have been there and done that, and combining them with new creative thinkers, might help in these change efforts as we move forward. Here are a few places to start:

Expanding choice and competition are two keys to updating Florida's education system of schools, colleges and universities. Choice gives students and families needed options to boost their education and capacities to meet the demands of the future. Competition gives students, families and the State help in lowering education costs. Choice and competition, if nothing else, break old habits and boost new, more creative designs.

Many state, independent, and private colleges and universities have already begun this work. Many have researched, tested, adjusted and demonstrated choice and competition models. These existing models should be inventoried, assessed and where possible replicated in lower performing areas of the state. Some talk as if choice is something new for Florida. It is interesting to note that the state provided a grant program for students attending Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF) schools, now called EASE but previously called FRAG, which is now in its 44th year of existence. It has helped give students enhanced choice options upon graduating from Florida high schools. Oddly, this past legislature chose to reduce this choice option. There are many on the national level pushing for public dollars spent in education at all levels to simply follow the students. Families make choices. Those choosing non-public options continue to support public options through taxes. The concept here is, to truly allow and advance choice, one must treat all students, families and institutions meeting public needs the same.

Career counseling is in need of expansion. Technology is transforming education

and the workplace. Technology will likely eliminate a significant number of today's jobs in upcoming years. Census estimates predict that Florida will welcome more than four million new residents by 2030. These two anticipated changes will trigger massive retraining and educational assignments for our schools. There are on-site and online courses and degree or certificate programs, offering career pathways that current and future students can choose. Our higher education institutions are increasingly competing to enroll both traditional and working adult students. We will gain more efficiencies in using these new tools if we begin to think of alternatives to the traditional school agrarian calendars with students tied to classroom seats, and funding models needing changes, since our current models fund schools based on how it has been done, but not necessarily on how it could be done.

What is not abundant is counseling to help Floridians decode their options and make their best choices. Florida's students are making career and college decisions right now. We know they will likely have several different careers as they age, but starting them out on a clear path should be more effective. This includes revising what it means to be a teacher, how we recruit and retain teachers, and how to make the teaching profession an attractive career path for middle and high school students of today. Adults in the workforce are returning to colleges and universities to retrain and complete their degree work. Wrong decisions waste student, school, college and university, and taxpayer resources. A statewide campaign to equip counselors and coaches

to help every motivated Floridian choose their educational or retraining pathway is essential. A statewide education and career counseling work group of education, employer, community, and foundation leaders can focus on expanding what can be done.

High School Credits, Skills; Workplace Lessons

American schools have always been about a foundation education, going back to the One-Room School House. That foundation has expanded over the years from “Reading, Writing, Arithmetic” to completing 8th grade as a goal, to earning a high school diploma. It has changed again. A high school diploma will be an insufficient foundation for careers in the future. It will mean a lifetime of dependency, costly government programs and even possibly incarceration. Florida should not allow students to drop out until they have completed a workplace skills certificate or program that can lead to their employment. CareerSource Florida and the Department of Economic Opportunity could assist with a design. School performance reports should count these completers as positive workforce completers who will someday choose to advance their education further.

Every high school student should complete a workplace foundation program. Currently in high schools, there are numbers of college academic preparation programs such as dual enrollment and advanced placement. These college-bound students are on pathways to postsecondary education. However, those on career tracks also need firm academic foundation skills. Every high school student must already

take an online education course. Every high school student should also take a high-skill certificate or other workplace experience course before they earn their diploma or can leave high school before age 18. These are new, essential foundation skills for the future. An expanded menu of choices for all high school students should include industry certification, apprenticeships, internships, and other employment/workplace training and experiences that could lead to a job upon graduation or at the age of 18. Keeping young Floridians in high schools to choose and develop workplace skills will chart a pathway to employment. For students heading to postsecondary degrees, it will provide employability insurance and resume enhancement.

Swift Pathways To Certificates And Degrees

Former President William D. Law, Jr., of St. Petersburg College, testified to the Senate Education Committee many years ago that a college’s performance measurement standards are Direction and Velocity. What is a student’s destination? How fast are they going to get there? His equation is correct but there is a third critical performance measurement: “Fuel.” Students must assemble and contribute the resources, energy and resolve to complete their postsecondary education. This equation is a framework for moving students as swiftly as possible from schools to colleges to careers. As Florida’s population of traditional and working adult students grows, the usual and customary alternative would be to build and expand more campuses, buildings and classrooms at Florida’s public and independent colleges

and universities. Those campuses are already among the largest in the nation and are not reachable by many students. There are low-cost actions to boost completions. They focus on choice and competition among colleges and universities, focused on direction, velocity and fuel.

(Direction + Velocity) + Fuel = Completions

Florida is far ahead of nearly every other state, focusing on direction, velocity and fuel. For decades, Florida has had 2+2 articulation agreements to speed associate's degree completers to bachelor's degree programs at state and independent colleges and universities. Florida's Articulation Coordinating Committee is a longstanding collaboration of public, independent and private colleges and universities that promote tools such as the state's common course or course equivalency numbering system.

Many thousands of high school students are currently sampling college courses in high school through dual enrollment, advanced placement and other such programs. Florida can affordably do more.

Targeted Degrees—Targeted degree production has been a priority for decades. Educators have tested many different approaches, focusing on costly inducements to students, colleges, universities and employers or slackening regulator impairments. Employers that know their talent needs work with educators. Educators design customized curriculums to meet those local needs. Employers and educators work with students, preparing and placing them in the targeted local jobs.

Other Inducements

There could also be student, college and university performance inducements that reward students who complete their degrees swiftly. There are currently disincentives for slow-moving students. The Effective Access to Student Education Grant (EASE; formerly known as FRAG) ceases to exist for each student after nine semesters. A student earning excess credit hours at the State University System has higher tuition costs. An inducement idea to accelerate student time-to-degree and cut excess credits-to-degree adopted for Bright Futures may be on the right track. Florida should consider student financial inducements to attend summer sessions or take online courses during the summer, discount tuition costs for early morning or Friday classes, establish Carry-Forward-Your-Scholarship Bonuses to pay graduate school tuitions or pay off student loans, and give registration advantages to "Fast-Track" students and bonuses to "Fast-Track" completers. Additional "Carrot & Stick" inducements could move both students and institutions to speed up.

What We Need

If Florida identifies critical need occupations there should be alternative ways of paying tuition costs for students choosing these professions. If we need teachers, then take steps to ease the financial burdens of becoming one. The same holds true for Bachelors in Nursing or other allied health fields. At the graduate levels, we have made it impossible for students to become doctors without incurring huge debt loads, then we expect them to retire this huge debt over ten or 20 years. Then we bemoan the reality that students finishing medical school are

now opting out of pursuing advanced specialties because the costs of both tuition and deferred income possibilities are too large. We need to better target societal needs and figure out how to entice students into choosing careers that meet those needs. We need to start with a focused effort at the teaching profession!

We will need at least a chunk of tomorrow's best and brightest to choose to share their talents, energies, and knowledge with my grandkids and all of Florida's kids. Our

future depends upon it. I wish all those who have already chosen this path and are making teaching both their profession and career all the best in this coming year. When the morning bells ring this year, we also need to recognize the alarm bells are ringing, too. How we respond will determine who we are as a society tomorrow.

Dr. Ed Moore is a long-time public servant, partner in All Things Florida Consulting, and ICUF President Emeritus.