

A Report on the Supply of Teachers for Florida's K-12 Public Schools



by
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This report was prepared at the request of John Dasburg, Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee for presentation to the Committee.

Chairman Dasburg has asked me to address teacher education and teacher supply for Florida's K-12 schools. I will focus on the university system's current and potential roles in addressing this urgently important issue.

I've characterized this problem as urgently important because it is. We're facing a genuine threat to our nation's ability to compete in a global marketplace, and that has clear implications for those of us who live in the nation's fourth largest state. If you're familiar with the theme of Thomas Friedman's sobering book, *The World Is Flat*, you'll undoubtedly appreciate the urgency of the need for the United States to improve its system of education.

No plan to improve our schools can succeed without addressing the need for more teachers and better teaching; I'm sure that's what John Dasburg had in mind with his assignment. The issues of quantity and quality must be considered together.

Addressing the Problem

To gather information and ideas for this report on ways the university system could address this problem, I met in February with all of the deans of our Colleges of Education -- except for Florida A&M, where the dean's position was then vacant. The deans met at my invitation for a day-long review of programs and activities at their colleges and to consider an innovation that I shall describe shortly. I found that to be a useful and productive exchange.

In particular, the deans noted the ways our public schools have changed dramatically. In addition to providing academic preparation for employment, for higher education and for life, there is now an expectation that schools will provide community services from sunrise to sunset and sometimes beyond. Many schools, for instance, now offer preschool programs, breakfast as well as lunch, and after-school supervision. Some even have health clinics.

Many of these kinds of non-academic addenda to core school programs represent a response to perceived social conditions -- poverty, homelessness, single-parent households, latchkey kids, fear of violent crime, and so on.

However, many observers contend that the academic programs in American public education have been much slower to adapt to changing conditions. How we teach our students today is, in many ways, remarkably similar to how we taught them decades ago, and there is increasing concern among Americans that the current system is failing to prepare students to compete globally in the 21st century. A recent report by Dan Lips of the Heritage Foundation is instructive:

In his recent best seller, *The World Is Flat*, Thomas Friedman warned Americans about the challenges of an era of increased globalization and international competition.

In an ever “flattening” world, many jobs can be easily outsourced to skilled, lower-cost workers in other countries. Today, American workers have to compete against workers from around the world.

Friedman explained what this should mean to American students by recounting a warning he offered his daughters:

“Girls, when I was growing up, my parents used to say to me, ‘Tom, finish your dinner. People in China and India are starving.’ My advice to you is: Girls, finish your homework. People in China and India are starving for your jobs.”

Too few American students are heeding this advice. The Department of Education released a report last week on American students’ and adults’ performance on international tests. The findings of this report, *The Condition of American Education 2006*, are not inspiring: America students rank in the middle or low end of the pack.

For example, American students scored below average on math and science tests administered to students in OECD countries. In math, U.S. 15-year-olds ranked 21st out of students from 28 countries. In science, U.S. students ranked 16th.

American students fared somewhat better on reading exams; U.S. 15-year-olds scored at the average of OECD countries. That is still too low.

Friedman’s book has served as a wake-up call for Americans, much as the Nation at Risk report did a generation ago. Indeed, increasing numbers of concerned parents are moving their children out of the public schools and are either paying the costs to educate them in private schools or incurring the sacrifices involved in teaching their children at home.

Even so, for the foreseeable future, the great majority of American students will be attending public schools. Therefore, addressing the problems of public education is essential. Moreover, as members of the board overseeing one of the nation’s largest university systems, we have more than a casual interest in this matter. Most of the

students entering our universities are the products of Florida's K-12 system. We even have a vested interest in the quality of education received by those K-12 graduates who don't pursue higher education; many of them will be filling the kinds of blue-collar and technical jobs that have a direct bearing on the economic health of the state.

If I accomplish nothing else with these remarks, it is my fond hope that at least I will have caused Board members to focus hard on the threat to the well-being of our country and of course to this state, of the deteriorating condition of our public schools. My effort in the preparation of this report has certainly had that effect on me.

With the university system's help, Florida's K-12 system could play a helpful role in pioneering school reforms that benefit the entire nation. After all, Florida's system is the nation's the fourth largest, serving nearly 2.7 million students in 67 school districts. Florida has six of the 20 largest school districts in the U.S., with seven districts over 100,000 students. It also has 11 districts with fewer than 3,000 students.

Not only has Florida's K-12 enrollment grown, but it also has become much more diverse. During the past two decades, for instance, the minority enrollment in Florida's public schools has grown to 52 percent from 32 percent. The largest increase was among Hispanics, who increased to 23 percent from 8 percent.

The growth and diversity of Florida's K-12 system add to the challenge of staffing our schools. The Department of Education estimates that some 31,000 teachers will be need to be hired for the 2006-2007 academic year in Florida, which begins less than two months from now. That's an increase of about 9,000 hires above last year's level. Moreover, projections show that more than 160,000 teachers will need to be hired between now and 2010.

What's going on, you may ask. Many teachers of America's baby boom generation are now nearing retirement. However, even if no retirees needed to be replaced, there would still be a need for Florida to hire additional teachers to cover growing enrollment. Moreover, even if no retirees needed to be replaced and enrollment growth suddenly stalled, there would still be a need for Florida to hire additional teachers as the more stringent provisions of the class-size amendment take effect.

There's more: Even if no retirees needed to be replaced enrollment growth were stalled and the class-size amendment were repealed, Florida still would need to be hiring teachers for reasons that ought to concern those of us who oversee Florida's university system. The fact is, Florida would still need to keep hiring to replace those younger teachers who leave the profession long before retirement – and to replace ineffective teachers who ought to find a new line of work.

Unfortunately, all of these factors – retirements, resignations, enrollment growth and the class-size amendment – are converging at once, causing demand for additional teachers to remain strong. Apart from the sheer numbers, however, we have some bigger problems that need to be addressed. The job of teaching in our public schools is more complex and more demanding than ever, as we are reminded by education professionals and lay people alike.

First, though, some good news: For much of the past decade, Florida has been a laboratory for school reform, and many observers believe that the state's FCAT testing program and the A+ accountability system have served as de facto models that other states and the federal *No Child Left Behind* program have emulated, albeit imperfectly.

Florida's reforms, which include statewide testing and school choice, have stressed standards and accountability, and they have enabled low-performing students and schools to make significant gains, as demonstrated by the newly released FCAT results. Florida's public schools, and our teachers and students, will continue to be significantly influenced by a state accountability system that is evolving and is subject to modification annually by the Legislature.

Unfortunately, this good news has been partially offset by some other developments. Florida voters have placed guarantees of smaller class size and universal voluntary pre-kindergarten into the state's constitution. In particular, the 2002 Constitutional Amendment for Class Size Reduction has imposed costly changes in the operation of our schools. The amendment calls for the Legislature, not the local school districts, to provide sufficient funds to reduce the average number of students in each classroom by at least two students per year until the constitutional limits are reached.

Though conventional wisdom may suggest that smaller classes lead to higher levels of achievement, there is no credible research establishing a definitive correlation between class size and student achievement. Moreover, funding the full implementation of the class-size amendment may well result in diminishing the funds available to attract and retain good teachers.

Another inconvenient truth: Because of collective-bargaining agreements that extend many privileges to those teachers who have the most seniority, young beginning teachers are often assigned to hard-to-staff, underperforming schools and are required to teach the most difficult students or subjects for which they lack adequate preparation. This can be a shock to teachers who, weeks earlier, were sitting in a College of Education classroom on a bucolic university campus and listening to a veteran college professor expound on various pedagogical theories. Getting thrown unprepared into these kinds of trial-by-fire classroom situations often frustrates new teachers and causes some to leave teaching before they have learned what it feels like to teach under more typical conditions.

Word from the Deans

Teacher preparation was one of the key topics discussed during my February meeting with the deans of our colleges of education. We had a very productive day-long exchange that included some interesting views on the education of teachers and ways to address Florida's teacher shortage.

I've included in the appendix of my written report a summary of my meeting with the deans. In the interest of time, I will make only a few comments now on what our colleges of education are doing. It's a lot, but even the deans would concede that it's not enough. Here are some of those things:

- The deans described cutting-edge programs to enable undergraduates who are majoring in fields other than education to take the education courses that are required for state certification.

- They also described efforts to recruit those who are working at other jobs and who might be recruited to teaching; in other words, to accept a change of vocation at some point after they finished college.
- Our colleges of education are moving vigorously into distance learning, and it strikes me that taking courses in teaching using the liberated electron might be more promising than would be academic work in other fields that may be less concerned with hands-on experiences.
- We have programs designed to reduce attrition of young teachers by providing mentoring and in-service help provided by their colleagues who are more experienced teachers.
- The deans also believed that they and their faculties could play a stronger role in providing policy makers with information on experimental programs and successful models from other states.

Mind you, we must be careful not to hold our colleges of education unduly responsible for a large portion of Florida's problems with teacher supply and teacher quality; local school districts also play a large role in the training of teachers and especially in their retention. The Florida Department of Education also has a different but important role, in certification, for example. And let me state emphatically that in terms of numbers, the retention of well-trained, capable young teachers is as important as turning out fresh graduates from our colleges of education.

Well-trained teachers make good schools possible, and good schools make great contributions to the economic health of communities and indeed to the health of the state. I thought as I listened to the deans that they represent a valuable locus of research and experimentation that might now be underutilized.

This would be the right place in my report to thank and commend the state universities for their foresight and courage in addressing the problems I've just described. You are doing some very good things, and they're making a difference. In another time – say, even a decade ago – these efforts might have been enough. Today, they are seriously inadequate, and I ask you presidents to ask yourselves where teacher

preparation is on your agenda. Where does it rank with brain-stem research or advances in high magnetic fields or starting new medical schools?

Teachers' Pay

You'll notice that I did not begin my discussion of the teacher shortage by bringing up the subject of teachers' pay. That's because the problem is much too complex to be solved by money alone. Moreover, we in the state university system do not have a direct role in determining the compensation of teachers in the K-12 system, although university research can sometimes inform the decisions of those who do have a direct role.

Nonetheless, no discussion of the teacher shortage would be complete without considering compensation issues. Moreover, the pay that teachers receive is acknowledged to be important in the career decisions of many our college students and in the decisions of many practicing teachers as to whether they will remain in teaching or leave the profession.

Various individuals and organizations, including state and federal agencies, have issued reports recently on teacher compensation. While there is a distinct lack of agreement on how teacher compensation should be measured, I've examined several of the reports, and I believe it would be useful in this discussion by board members to determine as best we can how Florida teachers are paid. Indeed, there may be insights that would be useful when we address the topic of faculty pay in the university system.

One interesting report is from our own Florida Department of Education, conducted under the auspices of Deputy Commissioner Hanna Skandera. You'll find a good bit of information in the appendix to this report, but the essential information from this report is found in the table below.

Average Florida Teacher Salary	\$41, 587
Average w/ Supplemental Pay & Bonuses	\$45,432
Average Retirement Benefits	\$3,073
Health Benefits	\$4,006
Average State Income Tax Avoidance	\$2,691
Real Market Value of Average Salary	\$52,416

But before we go further, let me tell you that we sometimes see published comparisons among the various states or among different school districts within the state that are based on data that are neither sufficient nor reliable to make such comparisons. For instance, there are no standard definitions from state-to-state that define a full-time teacher. The Florida DOE report performed a recent analysis of average teacher salaries adjusted for state income tax and retirement contributions, and Florida ranked sixth among 15 states. The 14 other states were Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

If you're interested only in salary, Florida ranks 31st among the 50 states according to the National Education Association, and 29th according to the American Federation of Teachers. However, neither organization defines the terms used in its ranking, and teachers' unions have reason to shade their reports on the dark side.

Whether these data reveal that we pay our teachers well or poorly or somewhere in between is a matter that board members will likely contemplate and decide based largely on our own experiences and ideas about the worth of teachers and the merits and demerits of the job. However, I should add an important caveat about teachers'

pay. I have seen many studies over the past several years that report on teachers' views in the matter of job satisfaction. Pay is never at the top of the list of concerns; it's usually third or fourth. Professional respect is usually number one.

Why don't we pay more attention to such studies? The reason, I believe, is political. Office seekers can get lots of media coverage by calling for better pay for teachers. Candidates for governor can beat their chests about the poorly paid teachers knowing that they won't really be held accountable, as it's the Legislature not the Governor that ultimately determines the state budget's allocation for education. I've also noticed that in school board elections, candidates rarely say much about better pay for teachers because they know that if they're elected, they'll be expected to stand behind their campaign promises.

What Teachers Say is Important

If salaries aren't the only factor or even the most important factor to address in solving the teacher shortage, what else can Florida in general and its university system in particular do to attract and retain qualified teachers? To comply with the Florida Constitution's mandate to provide a free, high-quality education for the young people who attend our schools, we must identify and describe the many influences on teachers and those who might become teachers.

What is there about teaching that attracts talented people? And what is there that discourages good people from entering the profession or remaining in it?

Although salaries and benefits are important, so are other things. We must be concerned about anything that affects the way teachers feel about their jobs and the way they are regarded by the parents of their students and the public generally. Therefore, I suggest we need to take a careful look at teaching as seen by most Floridians and consider how the public image of teachers is formed.

I believe the picture that many – perhaps most – Floridians have of teachers is that they are underpaid, overworked and unappreciated. That is the message conveyed by the organization that speaks for teachers, and that organization, of course, is the teacher's union. While there are unions in 66 of our 67 county school districts, it is the

state organization, the Florida Education Association (FEA), that presumes to speak for the whole of Florida's teachers. Unfortunately, many Floridians seem to believe that the FEA represents teachers not only in collective bargaining but also in most professional and educational matters.

There is one simple truth that should be remembered when anyone considers the place of teacher's unions in the education enterprise. It is that in many school districts, and certainly at the state level, the unions must and do establish and maintain an adversarial relationship with school administrators and school boards. That's what unions do: They must persuade their members that they and only they have the welfare of the teachers at heart, and that the benefits teachers receive in the union contracts have come about through the efforts of union leaders to force the school boards to provide benefits they would have given up in no other way.

The union leaders' negative portrayal of teachers as victims tends to permeate media coverage of our schools and, thus, the public opinion of teaching as a profession. Much of the coverage concerning our teachers and the conditions under which they teach does not accentuate the positive. Moreover, Florida's news media too often accept the FEA's statements as gospel. That, in turn, exacerbates the teacher-supply problem. It is difficult to recruit new teachers or maintain an acceptable level of teacher morale when the union representing those already in the profession is constantly complaining that teachers are getting a raw deal.

Of course, school administrators often make news of a more positive kind, as when they announce the nominees for Teacher of the Year. While this calls attention in a positive way to the actions of individual teachers, it does not really celebrate the profession of teaching per se, nor can it entirely counteract the stream of negativity orchestrated by the teacher's unions. But let me add this about the role of the teachers unions. One sometimes hears critics of the unions reflect unfavorably on them and reminisce about their own school days when there were no unions, or if there were, they had very limited roles in educational policy and practice. I assure you that the most serious of the scholars who study education employment relations have concluded that the debate about the existence of teachers unions is over. Teachers, after

all, have not joined a monastic order, and they have every right to band together to seek higher pay and better working conditions. I believe that if the unions would only confine their efforts to those ends, the profession of teaching would be better served.

So the teachers unions have their role, and they will say what they will about salaries and working conditions. However, it is unfortunate that the teacher's unions by default often become the primary source of school information that is supplied to the news media and the public.

A Different Approach to the Problem

Therefore, what I am now asking the members of this committee to consider is the establishment of an entity in Florida whose primary purpose would be to promote the importance and the value of the teaching profession. This organization would inform the public of the important and deeply satisfying aspects of teaching. It could call the public's attention to teachers who change the lives of their students. Anyone who has worked in K-12 education, and many parents who haven't, could cite endless examples of teachers who go the extra mile and whose dedication, competence and love for their students are there to be seen by anyone who cares enough to look.

I'm thinking of a program in which a responsible and respected group would execute a well-planned effort to call the public's attention to the positive aspects of this noble calling. Establishing such an entity would entail no adversarial relationships with the unions or with administrators or parent groups or any other segment of the school community. The job of this body would be to report on teaching and teachers in an honest, understanding manner in order to better inform the citizens about the positive aspects of the profession of teaching and to express respect and gratitude to people who receive too little.

At my February meeting with the deans of education, they were asked to respond to the suggestion that our teachers might benefit from a program of this kind. The response of the deans to this idea was strongly positive. I have also discussed the idea with several school administrators and have received very positive responses.

Let's consider for a moment what such an organization might do, and who might participate in it. I see a well planned and well executed program of public relations, using the best available methods and techniques to influence public opinion. The media, both free and paid, would surely play a part. Editorial support from newspapers would be solicited, along with the support of broadcast media and several of the local and regional magazines that have an impressive combined readership. I see public service ads on TV and possibly billboard displays and a website. In other words, the sponsoring group would promote the benefits of teaching, the joy of seeing learning take place and the deep satisfaction that comes to those who have the opportunity to make lasting impressions on the lives of young people. Such a program might be an appropriate use of Florida Lottery revenue.

As for who might participate in this enterprise, the organization that I envision would be comprised of people of distinction in Florida, people whose names and positions would be widely recognized and whose message therefore would be widely accepted as credible. The role that the Board of Governors might play in establishing such an independent body would surely be carefully examined, if indeed the idea is of interest to the Board. Jon Rogers, Sundra Kinsey and I have discussed this possibility with several people, and it has been suggested that the Florida Council of 100 might be a suitable participant. We have also been reminded that there are education foundations in a number of communities in Florida, and that the Department of Education has for some time had its own foundation--the Florida Education Foundation. We have also thought of the Council for Education Change, an active school reform organization headquartered in Miami. The Council was established several years ago with a generous grant from the Annenberg Foundation and was founded by Leonard Miller, a greatly respected Miami business leader who had a strong interest in the improvement of educational practice, including programs to strengthen the role of school principals. We had a brief exploratory discussion with the Executive director of the Council and there appears to be some interest.

By the sheerest coincidence, I had an interaction recently with a district superintendent, one that dramatizes the need for a credible public voice on school

matters of interest to the public and especially to teachers. On the morning when I called on Leon County Schools Superintendent Bill Montford to seek his counsel as I prepared this report, the local newspaper, the *Tallahassee Democrat*, had published a front page story on the 7.5 percent raise in Leon County teachers' pay for the 2006-2007 school year. I was eager to thank and congratulate Mr. Montford and the district school board. While he said he appreciated the commendation, the superintendent seemed a bit subdued as we discussed the good news, and I soon discovered why.

Superintendent Montford called my attention to the last paragraph in the rather lengthy news report in which a representative of the Florida Education Association was reported to have said that the FEA had sent two analysts to look at the district's finances, that those analysts had identified the money to permit the raises, and that the analysts' discussions with the school board had made the difference in arriving at the decision to grant the raises.

The following day two letters to the editor appeared in *The Democrat*, each written by a member of the Leon County School Board. In those letters the writers expressed indignation at the statement by the FEA representative and noted that the raises were a result of careful budgeting and planning by the superintendent and his staff with the support of the school board.

I have no reason to doubt the message contained in those letters or to question the superintendent's frustration with the efforts of the FEA to take credit for the work of the superintendent and the school board.

The teachers who read the story would, no doubt, have been pleased about the news of the raise, and some would have thought about expressing their gratitude to the superintendent and school board. In the interest of good relations between the teachers and the school administration, it would have been helpful for the teachers to have been accurately informed as to who was responsible for the raise. The teachers were owed the truth about their 7.5 percent raise, and their morale and their future performance in the classroom might well be affected by the belief that the school board and the administration are not their adversaries, but their friends and supporters.

I mention this sequence of events because I believe it touches upon teacher morale, a matter that must be addressed in any discussion of solving the shortage of good teachers. I believe teacher morale would be improved if teachers had the knowledge that their employer had labored on their behalf and that it was not necessary for the FEA to intrude or to apply pressure on the superintendent and the school board to raise their salaries, as the FEA spokesman had claimed. I do not believe that having teachers and the school administration think of each other as adversaries benefits anyone in education except for officers and employees of the unions..

Mr. Chairman Dasburg, it is therefore my recommendation that this committee consider this proposal, and if it wishes, to recommend to the Board of Governors that the board take steps to provide a distinctly new, clear voice in support of Florida's teachers.

I shall close my report with a comment on the infinite worth of a good teacher by reciting something that came to my attention recently.

James A Michener was once invited by President Eisenhower to a dinner at the White House. He wrote a letter to Eisenhower explaining why he couldn't accept.

"I received your invitation three days after I had agreed to speak a few words at a dinner honoring the wonderful high school teacher who taught me how to write. I know you will not miss me at your dinner, but she might at hers. In his lifetime, a man lives under 15 or 16 Presidents, but a really fine teacher comes into his life but rarely."

Eisenhower wrote back to say that he understood.