



## The Nevada Policy Research Institute

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### **Study: Florida provides Nevada with a blueprint for educational improvement**

Florida, a state that faces many of the same educational challenges as Nevada, has experienced a significant increase in student achievement over the past 10 years, while Nevada's educational performance during that same time has remained relatively flat. A new study finds that Florida's success has resulted primarily from a series of innovative policy reforms it adopted and concludes that Nevada could replicate Florida's success by implementing similar measures.

Patrick R. Gibbons, an education policy analyst at the Nevada Policy Research Institute, and Dr. Matthew Ladner, vice president of research at the Goldwater Institute and an NPRI policy fellow, authored the study, titled *Failure Is No Longer an Option: Florida's Decade of Education Improvement Proves Reform Works*.

The study comes just days after Nevada Senate Majority Leader Steven Horsford filed Senate Bill No. 330 (see: <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/75th2009/Bills/SB/SB330.pdf>), which includes some of the same elements as Florida's reforms, such as school accountability and merit pay.

"Starting in 1999, Florida lawmakers passed a series of reforms — including real standards and accountability for public schools, parental choice options for students in failing schools, tuition scholarship programs, the termination of 'social promotion,' the institution of instructional reforms and the addition of merit pay to reward quality teachers," Gibbons and Ladner write.

The result of these reforms has been a dramatic improvement in Florida's educational performance. The study finds that:

- In 1998, nearly half of Florida's fourth graders scored "below basic" on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test. By 2007, however, 70 percent scored basic or better.
- Nevada's performance increase on the NAEP reading test between 1998 and 2007 was much more modest, as the percentage of fourth graders who could read at basic level or better only increased from 51 to 57.

- In less than a decade, Florida's fourth-grade reading proficiency went from near the bottom of the 50 states to well above the national average.
- Florida's gains in reading proficiency have been most significant among the state's Hispanic and African-American low-income students. Florida's Hispanic student population now outscores overall student averages for not only Nevada, but for 14 other states as well. If the current trend continues, Florida's African-American student population will outscore the average of all Nevada students by 2011.

“Policymakers in Nevada should examine Florida's reforms as a guide toward improving educational achievement in the Silver State,” Gibbons and Ladner write. “The rapid improvement in low-income and minority students in Florida proves that the minority or income status of certain students can no longer be used as an excuse for public education's failure to improve over recent decades.”

The full study is available at

[http://www.npri.org/docLib/20090318\\_Failure\\_Is\\_No\\_Longer\\_an\\_Option.pdf](http://www.npri.org/docLib/20090318_Failure_Is_No_Longer_an_Option.pdf).

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