



## Fact sheet on K-12 education in Nevada: Reforms

Prepared by the Nevada Policy Research Institute

**Claim:** School reforms don't work.

### Facts:

- Study after study has shown that choice-based education reforms (including vouchers and tuition tax-credit programs) improve student achievement.
- Ten high-quality, random assignment studies have been conducted on voucher programs. [Nine found that some or all of the participants benefitted academically from vouchers.](#) One found no difference.
  - [Overview of the 10 studies and their results is here.](#)
  - No random assignment study has found students using vouchers did worse than students in public schools.
- In Washington, D.C., students who used a voucher [increased their graduation rate by 21 percent.](#)
- In Charlotte, N.C., [students who used a \\$1,700 scholarship for one year scored 5.9 percentile points higher in math and 6.5 percentile points higher in reading](#) than public school students who had not used the scholarship.
  - Fifty-three percent of parents whose children used the scholarship gave their school an “A” compared to 26 percent of public-school parents.
- Parents love vouchers (and other school-choice programs).
  - Of the five random assignment studies that have studied parental satisfaction, [each has found large positive impacts.](#)
- In 1998, Florida and Nevada posted the exact same score on the National Assessment of Education Progress fourth-grade reading test. In 1999, then-Florida governor Jeb Bush pushed through [a series of education reforms.](#)
- In the subsequent 12 years, the reading scores of Florida's fourth graders increased by about two grade levels. Nevada scores in that period have improved by only half a grade level.
- In the past 12 years, the reading scores of Florida's Hispanic and African-American fourth graders have increased by 2 ½ grade levels. Nevada's have improved, but nowhere near as dramatically.
- In the past 12 years, reading scores of Florida's low-income fourth graders have increased by nearly *three* grade levels. For Nevada's low-income fourth graders, reading performance has increased by only one grade level.
  - [Why Florida succeeds were Nevada fails](#)

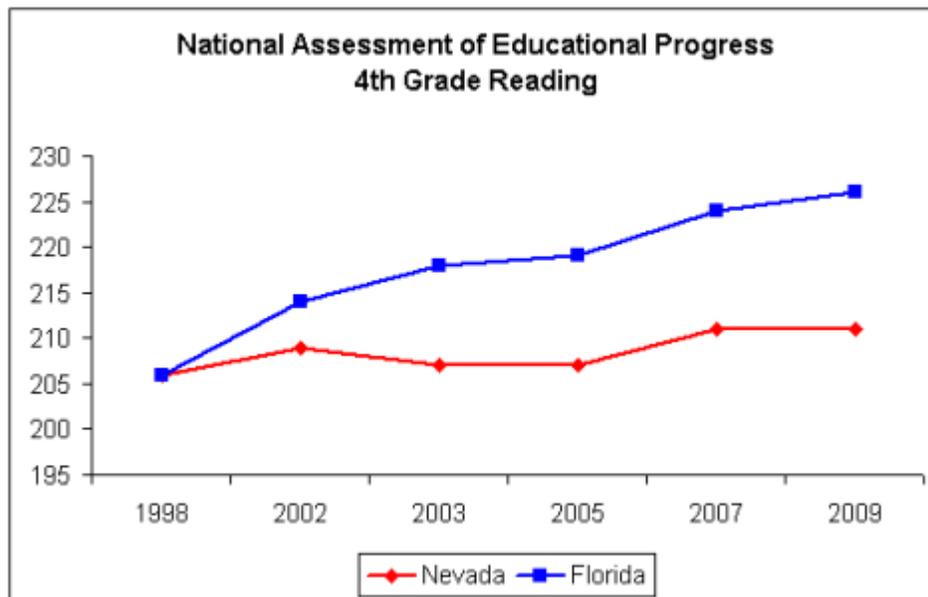
- The results on the NAEP fourth-grade reading test:

<b>NAEP 4th grade reading scores</b>						
	NV 1998	FL 1998	NV 2009	FL 2009	Difference NV	Difference FL
All students	206	206	211	226	+5	+20
Hispanic Students	189	198	199	223	+10	+25
African-American students	183	186	201	211	+18	+25
White students	213	217	222	233	+9	+16
English Language Learners	183 (2002 data)	184 (2002 data)	183	205	0	+21
Low-income students	189	190	200	217	+11	+27
Middle- to high-income students	214	220	220	236	+6	+16

\* Low-income is equivalent to eligible for free and reduced lunch; middle- to high-income students are not eligible.

\*\* [Source: National Center for Education Statistics](#)

\*\*\* Ten points is equal to approximately a year's worth of learning



**Claim:** Public schools are hurt by school choice (educational savings accounts, tax credits or vouchers).

**Claim:** Private schools skim off the best students, leaving public schools stuck with “hard to educate” kids.

**Facts:**

- Competition from school-choice programs actually *improves* public schools.
- Of the 19 high-quality empirical studies that have been conducted on how vouchers (and tuition tax credits) impact public schools, 18 show that [the competition from vouchers and tax credit programs have improved public education](#).
  - [Overview of the 19 studies and their results is available here](#).
  - The other study, [focused on the Washington, D.C., voucher program](#), found vouchers had no discernable impact on the public school system. This is likely because that voucher program was designed specifically to insulate public schools from the impact of competition from the vouchers.
- See also, “[Does competition improve public schools?](#)” by Cassandra M.D. Hart and David Figlio in *Education Next*.
  - “Our results indicate that the increased competitive pressure public schools faced following the introduction of Florida’s Tax Credit Scholarship Program led to general improvements in their performance. ... The gains occur immediately, before any students leave the public schools with a scholarship, implying that competitive threats are responsible for at least some of the estimated effects.”

**Claim:** School reforms (educational savings accounts, tax credits or vouchers) are a radical experiment.

**Facts:**

- At least 16 states and Washington, D.C., offer or have offered [some form of school choice](#).
- Milwaukee’s vouchers program is more than 20 years old and [has grown from 341 students to 20,000](#).
- Many states, including Indiana, Florida and Wisconsin, are [currently pushing school-choice programs](#) as part of their efforts to increase student achievement and the quality of their public schools.

**Claim:** School choice programs (educational savings accounts, tax credits or vouchers) are not constitutional.

**Facts:**

- The United States Supreme Court has ruled that well-designed school-choice programs that allow parents to direct money to religious schools are constitutional. ([Zelman v. Simmons-Harris, 2002](#))
  - The *Zelman* ruling had to do specifically with vouchers, but tuition tax credit programs and education savings accounts face fewer constitutional challenges than voucher programs.

- No court decision has yet been rendered regarding the constitutionality of school-choice programs under the Nevada Constitution.
  - In general, vouchers face the highest constitutional hurdles. Tuition tax credit programs and education savings accounts both allow parents to choose where to send their children, but their funding mechanisms are less likely to be ruled unconstitutional.
  - [An analysis from the American Legislative Exchange Council](#) finds that both vouchers and tuition tax credit programs would be constitutional in Nevada.
  - The Wisconsin Supreme Court has ruled that [the Milwaukee voucher program is constitutional](#). (*Jackson v. Benson*, 1998)
  - [Florida's Blaine Amendment](#) — under which the [Florida Supreme Court ruled that state's voucher program unconstitutional](#) — is *much* more restrictive than Nevada's Blaine Amendment.

**Claim:** School-choice programs (educational savings accounts, tax credits or vouchers) will cost taxpayers more money.

**Facts:**

- If designed correctly, school-choice programs will result in significant short- and long-term savings to Nevada while delivering a quality education that increases graduation rates, student achievement and parental satisfaction.
- Milwaukee's school-choice program has [saved Wisconsin more than \\$180 million](#) over 20 years.
- The Washington, D.C., voucher program increased student achievement and graduation rates while [costing less than a quarter of what the District normally spends](#).
- NPRI's "[Choosing to Save](#)" study details how an education tax-credit program in Nevada would save taxpayers \$30 million in its first two years and \$1 billion in its first 10 years.
- To achieve cost-savings initially, school-choice programs may need to be designed to *exclude* students not currently using the public school system (private school, online school, home school, etc.). These students can be added in once the school-choice program has grown large enough to absorb the "cost" of admitting all students.

**Claim:** Evaluating teachers (and awarding merit pay) based upon student performance is unfair because student quality varies significantly.

**Claim:** Evaluating school quality based upon test scores and static standards is unfair because of variations in student quality and parental involvement.

**Facts:**

- [Value Added Assessment](#) addresses these valid concerns by measuring student growth, rather than relying upon static benchmarks.
  - [Tennessee has been using this approach since 1992](#).
  - "The evidence is overwhelming," Williams Sanders (the father of Value Added Assessment) says, "that if any child catches two very weak teachers in a row, unless there is a major intervention, that kid never recovers from it. And that's something that as a society we can't ignore."

- [Research that Sanders conducted revealed](#) that students in classrooms with highly effective teachers learned 50 percent more over a three-year period than did peers with teachers who were in the bottom 20 percent.

**Claim:** Some private/charter/online schools do a poor job of educating kids and, therefore, fail.

**Fact:**

- Some private, charter or online schools will fail. Likewise, some public schools will fail to educate their students. However, unlike failing public schools (which continue to fail tens of thousands of kids, decade after decade), failing private, charter and online schools will cease to exist as parents move their kids to higher-performing schools.

**Claim:** School-choice reforms only benefit rich/white students.

**Facts:**

- Choice programs give low-income students opportunities (to choose their own school) that currently only wealthy families can afford.
- School-choice programs frequently confine participation to students in failing schools, as [Ohio](#) has done, or to low-income families, as the programs in [Milwaukee](#) and [Washington, D.C.](#), have done.
- Florida's school-reform efforts have increased test scores for all students, but showing the most improvement have been low-income, Hispanic and African-American students.

**Read more:**

- Educational Savings Accounts: A new front in the fight for choice
  - [Florida Gov. Rick Scott's Educational Savings Account plan](#) (p.6)
  - [Rick Scott's Plan for Florida: Choice, Charters, Early College and More](#)
  - [Education Savings Accounts in Florida: Moving beyond vouchers](#)
- [A primer on tuition tax-credit programs](#) by Adam B. Schaeffer of the CATO Institute.