

# Transformation: What South Carolina Can Learn from Florida's K-12 Reforms

An Analysis of 4th Grade Reading & Math  
1998-2013 NAEP Scores

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January 2014

# Florida vs. South Carolina

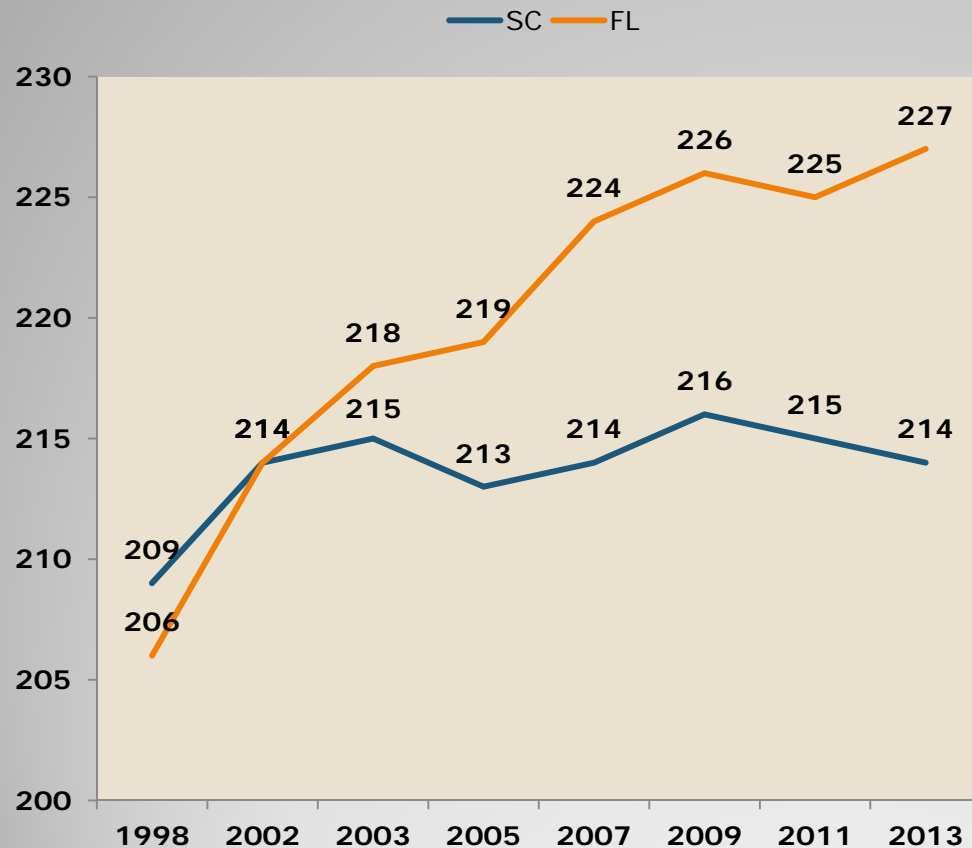
In March 2013, Palmetto Policy Forum released our first major research piece, *Transformation: What South Carolina Can Learn from Florida's K-12 Reforms*. In it, we compared South Carolina to Florida over time on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), or as it is commonly called "The Nation's Report Card." NAEP measures math and reading achievement for Fourth and Eighth Graders.

What we found was that in the year **1998**, South Carolina students scored *ahead* of Florida's (*although still well below most other states*). But from **2003-2011**, Florida leapfrogged South Carolina dramatically.

Florida was enjoying the benefit of a host of transformative reforms championed by then-Governor Jeb Bush...while South Carolina was doing nothing. Since our study was published in the spring of 2013, NAEP has released 2 more years of new scores.

**So, how does South Carolina stack up against Florida now?**

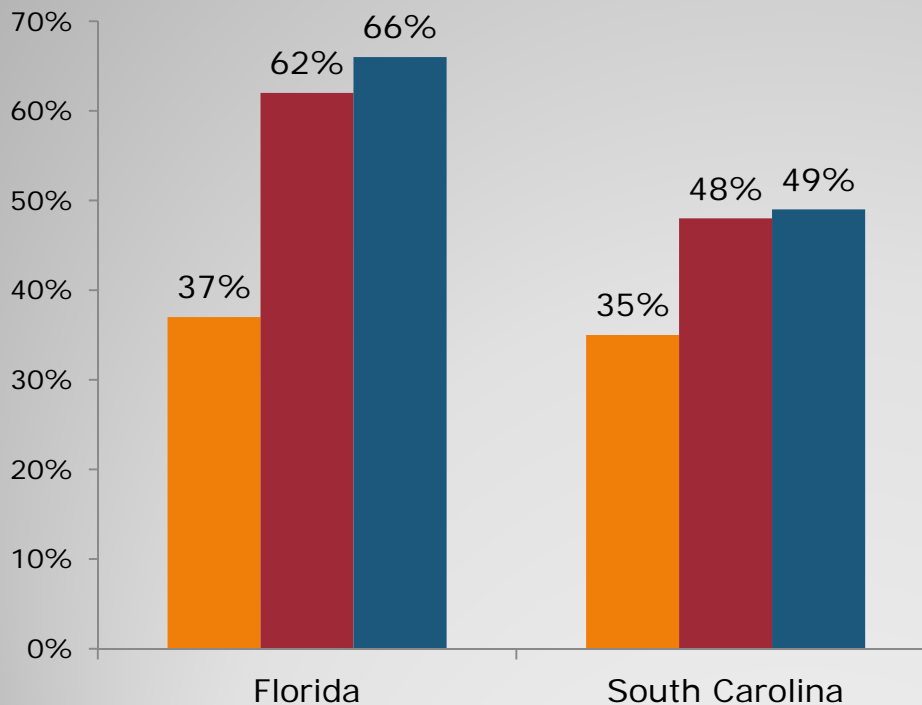
## NAEP 4th Grade Reading Scores for South Carolina & Florida, 1998-2013



## 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading (All Students)

In just the last two years, while Florida's **average score** has increased two points on NAEP for reading among fourth graders, South Carolina has lost another point. That means while Florida has increased nine points in the last decade (from 218 to 227), South Carolina has lost a point (from 215 to 214).

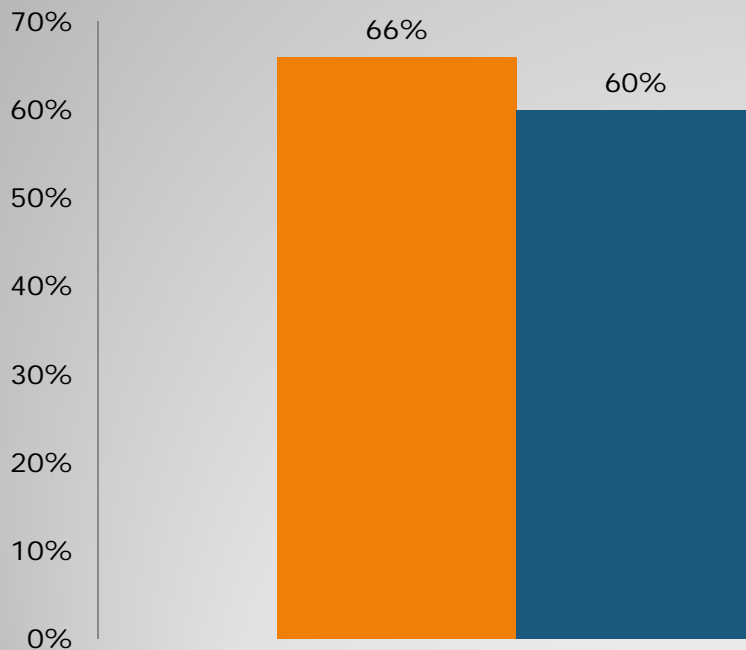
**Low-income students  
Scoring "Basic or Better" on  
NAEP 4th Grade Reading,  
1998 2011 2013**



**4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading**  
*(Free or Reduced  
Lunch)*

NAEP also categorizes student scores as **Below Basic** vs. **Basic or Better**. Among students from low income families, Florida has gained another four points in the past two years toward Basic or Better. South Carolina has gained one percentage point. The score is now Florida 66%, South Carolina 49%.

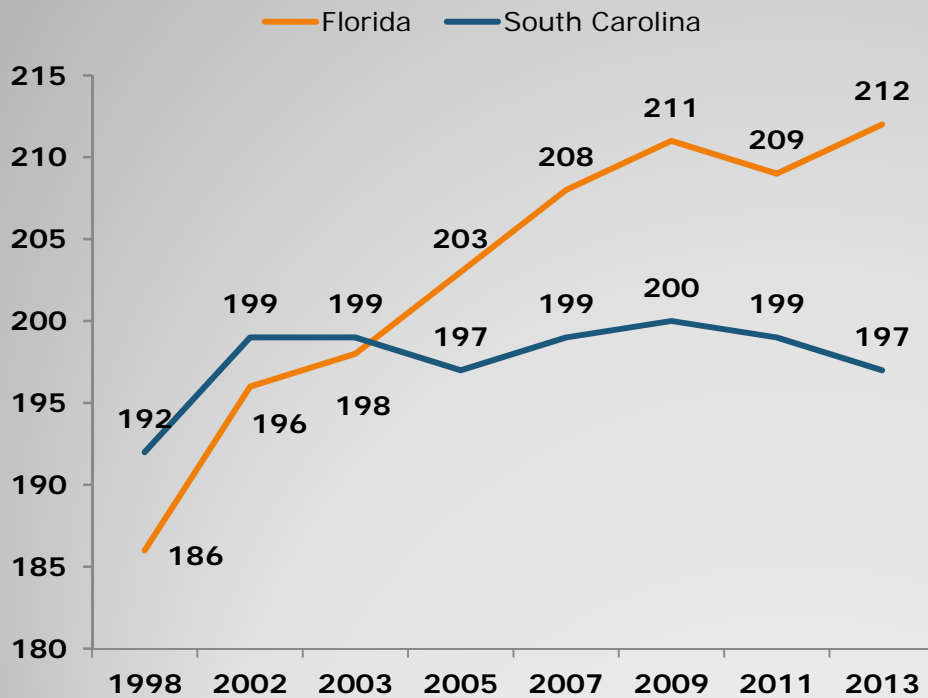
Low-income **Florida**  
Students vs. All **South  
Carolina** Students Scoring  
"Basic or Better" on 2013  
NAEP 4th Grade Reading



**4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading**  
(Free or Reduced  
Lunch)

More *low income* Florida students score **Basic or Better** on NAEP than *all* South Carolina students. That gap had been 62%-61% in our earlier report, but the new 2013 numbers show 66%-60%.

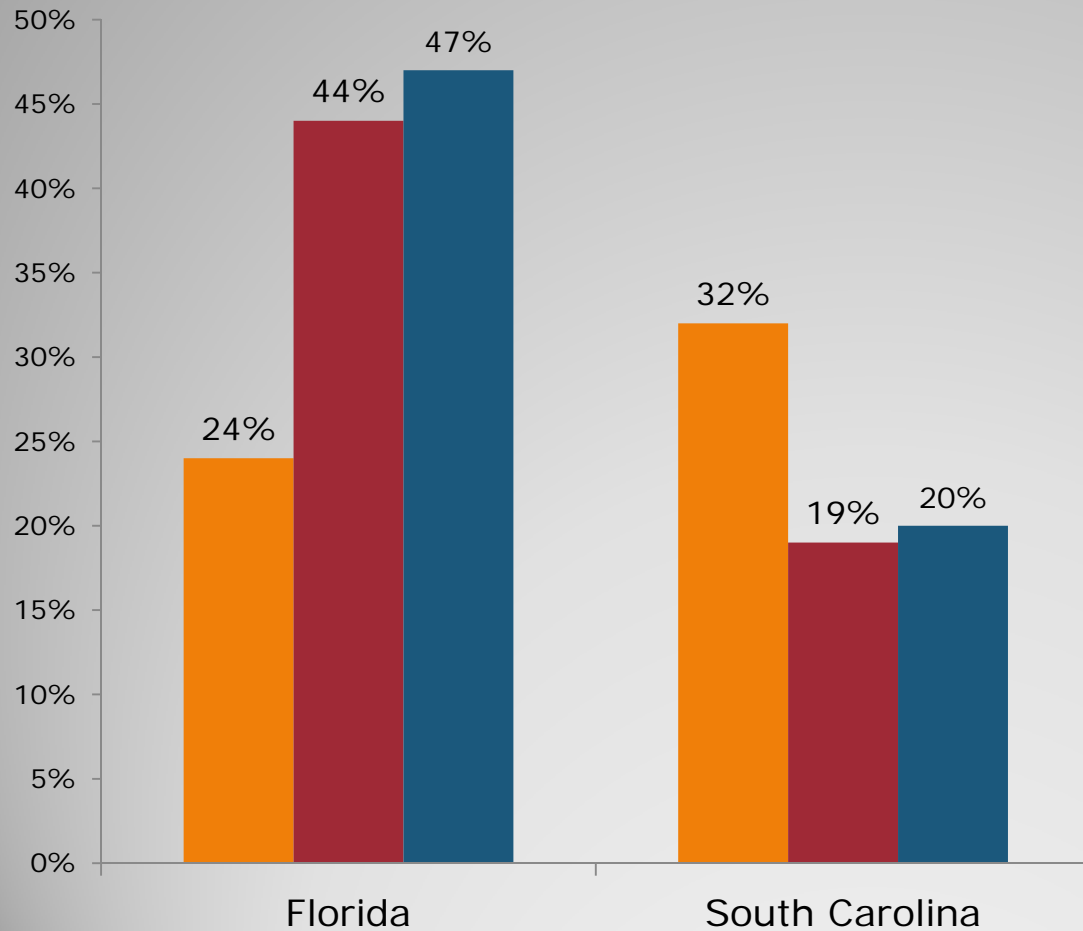
## 4th Grade Reading Scores for Black Students in Florida and South Carolina, 1998-2013



## 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading (African-American)

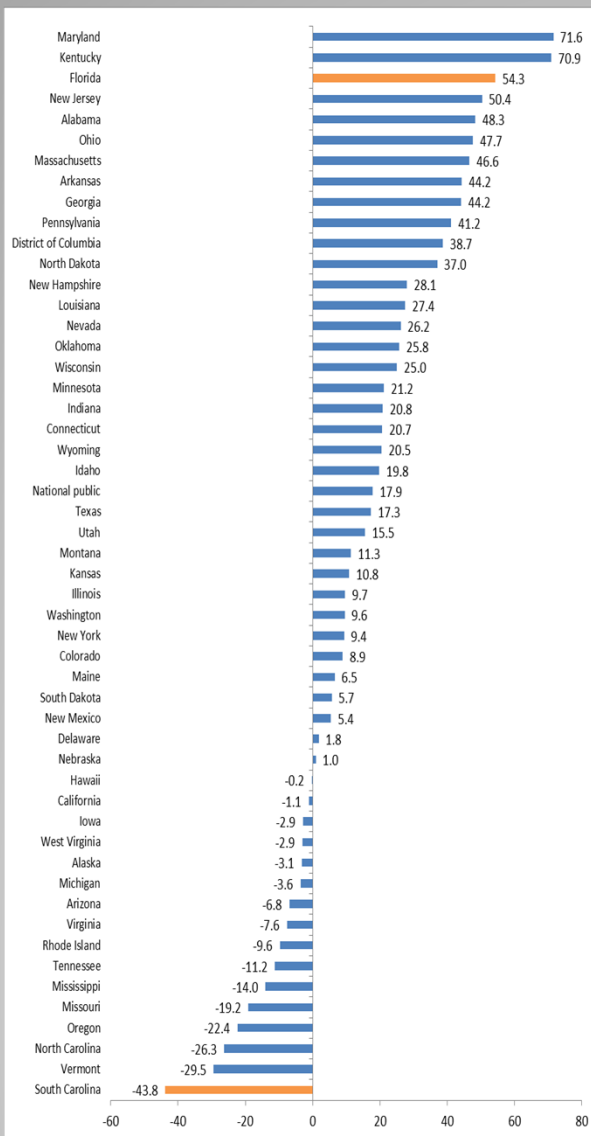
African-American students in Florida lagged their counterparts in South Carolina until 2005. Then the gap occurred. Our revised research for 2013 shows South Carolina black students losing another two points and Florida students continuing to excel, widening the chasm from ten points to fifteen.

**Children with Disabilities Scoring "Basic or Better" on 4th Grade Reading NAEP, 1998 2011 2013**



## 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading *(Disabilities)*

Students with disabilities in Florida continue to improve and to gain on South Carolina. The narrow gap enjoyed by Florida in 1998 (8%) is now 27%.



Florida Scores up **54** points for 2003-2011 and **73** points for 2003-2013

SC scores down **44** points for 2003-2011 and **60** points for 2003-2013

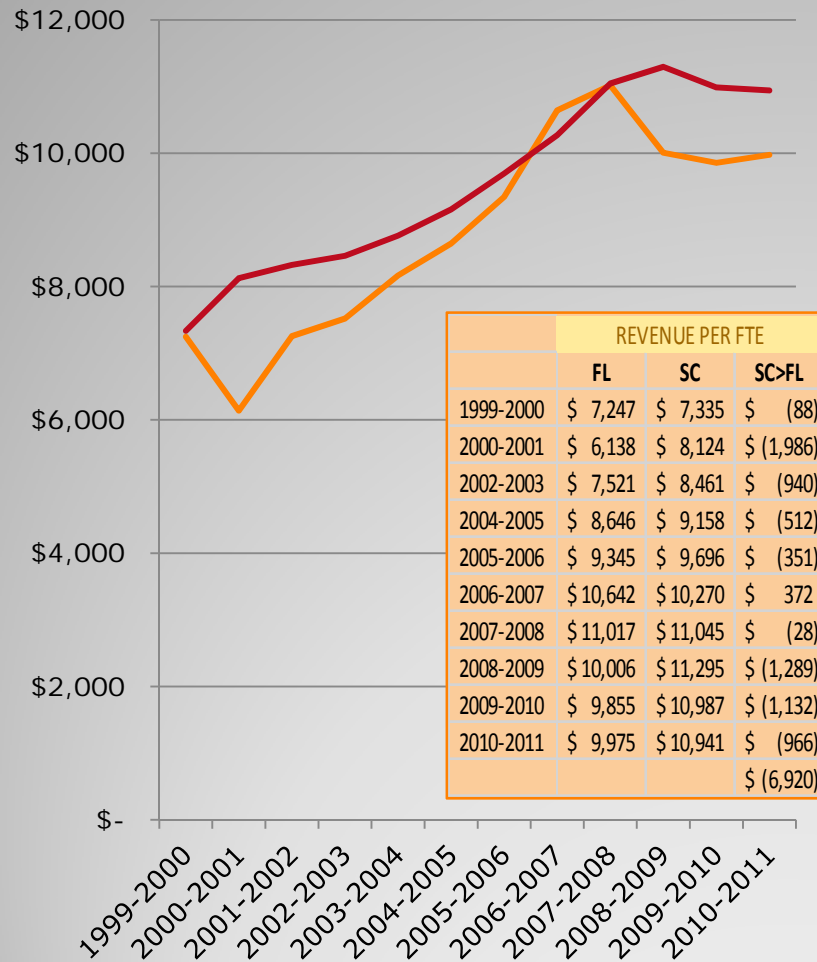
## 4<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading & Math (Disabilities)

Taken in a broader context, from 2003-2011, students with learning disabilities in Florida showed the third strongest gain on NAEP in the nation with a **54** point improvement. South Carolina was weakest, losing **44** points.

New 2013 numbers show Florida at **73** points gained since 2003 and South Carolina losing **60** points.



## Spending/Revenue (per student "Full Time Equivalency")

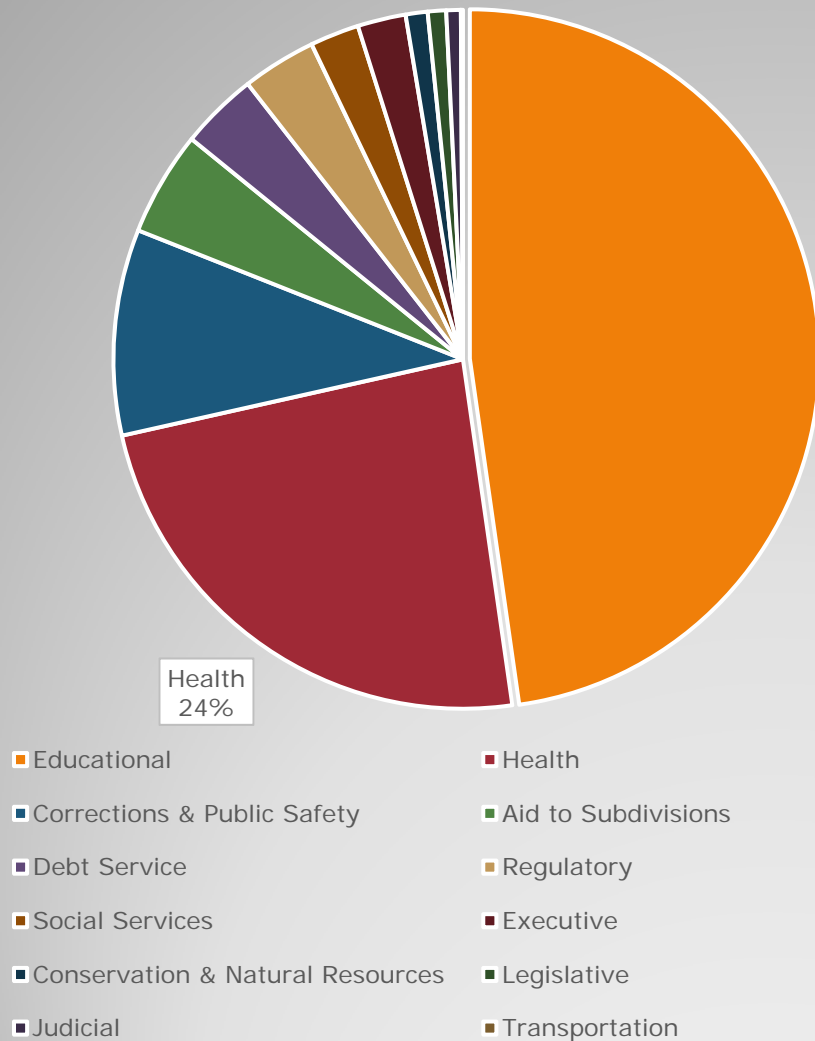


— FL  
— SC

It has been asserted that during the time Florida was overtaking South Carolina in achievement the Sunshine State was simply spending more. The facts do not bear this out.

Whether calculated as Revenue or as Expenditures, South Carolina's spending per FTE outpaced Florida in nearly every year of our study. For 1999-2011, South Carolina spent nearly \$7,000 more per FTE on education than Florida.

## Spending 2012 (State Budget)



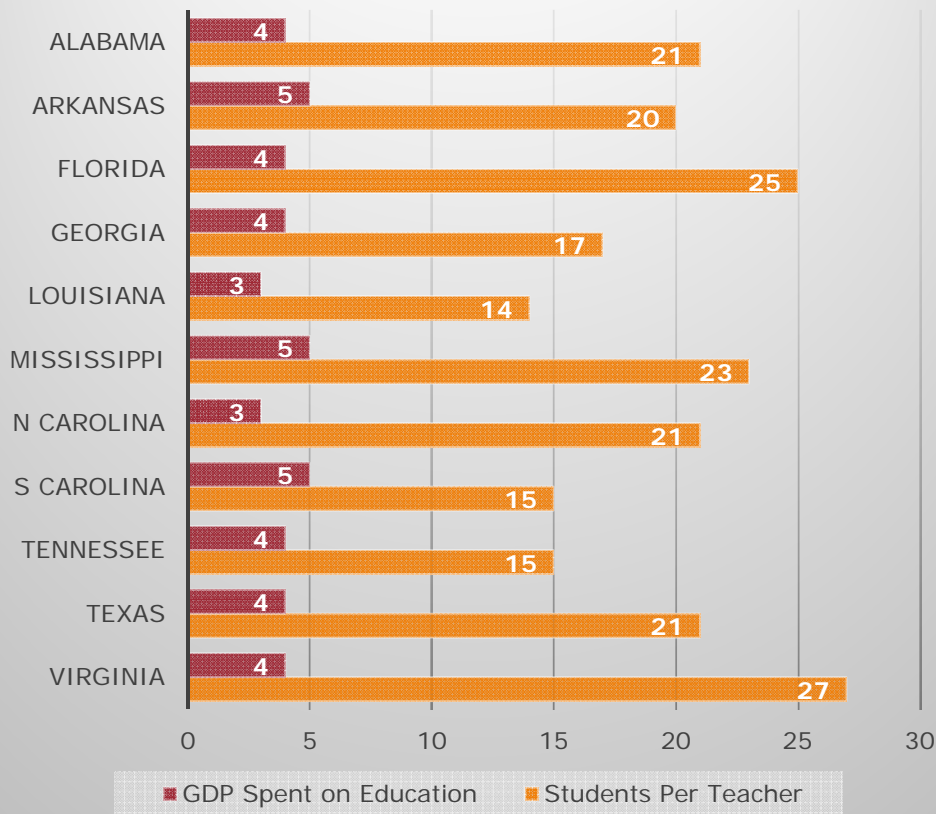
Educational  
48%

Health  
24%

For the state government budget year ending June 30, 2012 the most recent year available, Education dominated spending.

Final figures show that of the \$5,349,203,000 state budget, education spending alone totaled \$2,569,723,000. Only Health came close with \$1,349,705,000.

## Spending (% of GDP) and Student-Teacher Ratio 2012



## Other Factors (GDP & Class Size)

NAEP releases a number of reports in addition to its flagship scores publication. In *U.S. States in Global Context*, NAEP with TIMSS and IES provides world and state spending in percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As the chart indicates, South Carolina is in a three-way tie in the South for first place in spending as a percentage of GDP.

Another interesting fact in the publication is the ratio of students to teachers. Of Southern states, only Louisiana has a smaller number of students per each elementary school teacher.

- **Curtailling social promotion (p.6) \***. Florida students were promoted to the next grade when they were ready, not when they had completed 180 days of seat time.
- **Providing school choice (p.7)**. Florida parents were given the opportunity to select the school that fit their child best and the dollars followed the child (all while protecting public schools from harm).
- **Grading schools, focusing on the lowest 25% (pp.9-11)**. Florida schools were graded on how well they performed with their most challenged students. A-F grading increased focus and focus increased performance.
- **Leading the nation in technology (p.5)**. Florida bridged the digital divide with aggressive development of online programs.
- **Concentrating on reading (pp.1-5)**. Florida embraced the importance of reading to all academic success and eliminated barriers to progress, especially for disadvantaged student populations.
- **Welcoming great minds (p.6)**. Florida achieved greater access to the abilities of its citizens who had the capacity and life experience to make great teachers without forcing them to follow complicated and redundant certification processes.

\* From the original 16-page Transformation report (March 2013)  
found at [tinyurl.com/TransformEducation](http://tinyurl.com/TransformEducation)

## FLORIDA'S REFORMS

"Florida has truly undergone an education transformation, and South Carolina can too. Improvements don't happen overnight, but we continue to see the fruits of Florida's long-term revolution into a national model for higher standards, accountability and options to help all children reach their full potential. Through bold leadership and student-centered reforms, the Palmetto State can help ensure every child receives a high-quality education."

Patricia Levesque

CEO

Foundation for Excellence in Education

# Conclusion

“Reform is never finished and success is never final. A perpetual cycle of reform will lead to sustained improvement for the long-term.”  
– Governor Jeb Bush

Florida’s reforms are built on the foundation of equal opportunity and the belief that *all* children can learn. Harnessing the power of principle-based policy entrepreneurship, Florida leaders came together around a bi-partisan agenda of data-driven accountability, high expectations, funding for achievement, choice for families and rewarding effective teachers. Our challenge – and opportunity – is to apply the lessons learned in Florida and other innovating states. Florida has led a national wave of student-centered reforms that are delivering measurable results for students from every possible background. South Carolina must join that tide.

