

## **Florida's Kids Outperform Georgia's Kids: Georgia Should Follow Florida's A+ Reform Plan to Improve Education**

ATLANTA, GA – On Wednesday, October 26, [the Center for an Educated Georgia at Georgia Family Council \(http://www.educatedgeorgia.org\)](http://www.educatedgeorgia.org) will release a report detailing steps Georgia lawmakers and the Department of Education can take to drastically improve the quality of education in our state. The report examines Florida's A+ Reform Plan and documents how the changes benefited all Florida students, but made the largest impact on minority and low-income students.

If journalists would like to receive the embargoed report in advance, please contact Sarah Douglas at [sarah@sdcllc.net](mailto:sarah@sdcllc.net) or 678-521-5289.

The report begins, "Florida lawmakers began a comprehensive education reform in 1999 combining **accountability, transparency, and parental choice** with other far-reaching changes." The report then documents the profound success of the reforms. For example, from 1998-2009, Georgia's overall fourth grade reading scores increased nine points while Florida's kids' scores increased by 20 points. With a 10-point score increase equaling approximately a grade level's worth of progress, **the average Florida fourth grade student is currently one full grade level ahead of a fourth grade student in Georgia.**

The report also includes NAEP scores by demographic showing that Florida's reforms have remarkably increased the number of high-performing low-income and minority students. **A low-income student's chances of acquiring the basic literacy skills needed to succeed in life are much better in Florida than in Georgia because of Florida's education reforms.**

"Georgia's students' scores increased over the past decade, but compared to the dramatic gains experienced by Florida's students, it is clear that **Georgia failed to provide our students the high-quality education that their peers in Florida received,**" says [Jerri Nims Rooker](#), director of the Center for an Educated Georgia. "Education in Georgia must be reformed, and it must be reformed now so that our kids do not fall further behind their peers."

The Center for an Educated Georgia calls on Georgia's legislators as well as non-elected Department of Education officials to boldly lead our state in modeling Florida's education reform. Important first steps include:

- Expand parental choice – Through a combination of charters schools, online education and scholarship programs, providing school options for low-income and special needs children is critical.
- Evaluate school performance – Create an accountability system that gives schools an easily understood grade of A, B, C, D or F based on measureable student achievement.
- Eliminate social promotion – If a child cannot read, the default should be that he or she will repeat third grade until basic reading is demonstrated, which could result in a mid-year promotion.

- Extend alternative teaching certification – Allow adult professionals to demonstrate content knowledge in order to obtain a teaching certificate – in Florida, half of all new teachers come through alternative routes.

As the report's author, Matthew Ladner, notes, "National and global competitiveness cannot be achieved through minor tweaks of a largely under-performing system... The actual proves the possible. Florida has radically improved student performance, especially among disadvantaged students. Georgia can and must do the same."

The report was commissioned by the Center for an Educated Georgia and written by Matthew Ladner, Ph.D., Senior Advisor of Policy and Research at the Foundation for Excellence in Education.

### **About the Center for an Educated Georgia**

The Center for an Educated Georgia (CEG) is a research, education, and grassroots organization working to ensure that all Georgia students receive a quality education. Through CEG's efforts to increase K-12 school options and improve public school education, thousands of children have the opportunity to attend the school that best meets their needs – whether in a public, charter, private, online, or home-based school. There is significant need for CEG's work in Georgia based on the state's poor education rankings, including being ranked 45<sup>th</sup> in the country for its public high school graduation rate of 65.4% (2007-08) according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

CEG is a division of the Georgia Family Council (GFC), a nonprofit organization committed to fostering conditions in which individuals, families, and communities thrive. Building on GFC's successful efforts to expand education options in Georgia, CEG was created in 2008 as the only state-based organization that actively works on a broad spectrum of education choice and reform issues with the goal of improving K-12 education quality and access in Georgia.

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