

Ohio Comparison with Florida: Policy Recommendations

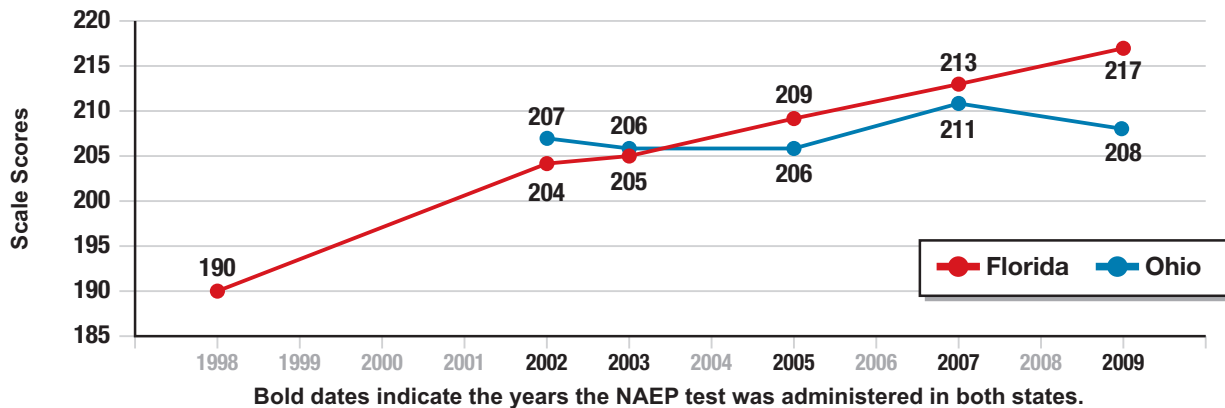


The phenomenal advancements of Florida's low-income and minority students that stemmed from their education reform package in the late 1990s are a call to Ohio to make key changes to raise achievement levels for the students who are most vulnerable.

Florida's low-income fourth graders score almost a year's worth of progress ahead of low-income Ohio students.

Figure 3

Fourth-grade reading scores for free and reduced-price lunch eligible students in Ohio and Florida (NAEP, 1998-2009)



Because of the dramatic improvements in outcome for Florida's low-income students, Ohio should learn from their success.

Recommendation 1: Eliminate social promotion of 3rd graders who do not read well

Florida: Third grade students cannot advance to 4th grade unless they are proficient in reading. Students must have the skills to thrive in the reading-based curricula of higher grades before moving on.

Ohio: Although 20% of Ohio 3rd graders were not proficient in reading as judged by the state assessment, just 0.6% of them were retained in the 2010-11 school year. Those who advance to 4th grade without being proficient in reading are not prepared to succeed.

Recommendation 2: Create crystal clear, meaningful state ratings for schools

Florida: Clear ratings – A, B, C, D, F – led to improvement among lowest-rated schools despite increasing rigor in ratings. Increases in highly-rated schools reflected substantial growth in student achievement.

Ohio: Fuzzy ratings – Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, Academic Emergency – give a general sense of the school's level, but are potentially misleading. Unfortunately, the ratings of schools in Ohio have increased with little measureable gain in student performance.

Recommendation 3: Provide state scholarships for low-income students

Florida: Low-income students (approximately 50% of students in the state) can access the private or public school of their choice through a state scholarship. Studies show that these options have opened doors for students and also increased the achievement of students who remain in public school.

Ohio: While students in the state's lowest-rated schools can use a state scholarship, this only opens the door for about 8% of Ohio's students. Low-income students outside those school boundary zones do not have the same access to school choice. Two proposals pending in the state legislature would create income-based scholarships.

Recommendation 4: Advertise Ohio's new pathways to the teaching profession

Florida: Fully half of Florida's teachers now come to the profession through routes other than colleges of education. Their development of accessible alternative certification expands the pool of high quality teachers with significant professional experience and varied academic backgrounds for districts to hire.

Ohio: Just recently, Ohio has developed new straightforward routes to alternative teacher certification. The Ohio Department of Education should make sure that the options are widely known.