



**EPSL** | **EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES LABORATORY**  
Education Policy Research Unit

**Innovation and Accountability:**

**Vouchers, Charters, and the Florida Virtual School**

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**Executive Summary**

In the last half-decade Florida has been in tune with, or on the cutting edge of, several national trends in education. Florida has a comprehensive testing program, and has created range of options for students who seem to be poorly served by traditional public schools. Three Florida programs provide scholarships or vouchers to children from failing schools, to those from low-income families, and to those with disabilities. Florida has also created a large number of charter schools and developed the most extensive “virtual” school in the nation.

This array of options has allowed thousands of children to move out of public schools. In that sense Florida’s program of choices has achieved its first major goal. However, Florida’s system of accountability relies heavily on state-wide testing, and the state’s choice options remain largely outside the testing program. To ensure that children are able to gain access to the best possible system of education, it is recommended that Florida policy makers:

1. Require the FCAT to be given to all students receiving publicly financed vouchers, and to have the results made public. In keeping with the No Child Left Behind Act, children with disabilities using McKay Scholarships to attend private schools should be included in this testing whenever possible and provided any necessary accommodations.
2. Conduct longitudinal studies that examine different theories of how and why voucher programs succeed and fail.
3. Conduct longitudinal studies that examine different theories of how and why charter schools succeed and fail.

The foregoing is a summary of a policy brief in the report *Reform Florida* (Education Policy Research Unit, April 2004). The complete policy brief is available on the Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) website at:

<http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/EPRU/documents/EPSL-0401-109-EPRU.doc>

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