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New Study: Ohio Poised for Florida-Style Education Gains

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Ohio's recent steps toward greater educational choice pave the way for astonishing academic achievement gains along the lines of those achieved in Florida, according to a new study released today by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice and School Choice Ohio.

The study, "Lessons for Ohio from Florida's K-12 Education Revolution," was authored by Dr. Matthew Ladner, Senior Advisor for Policy and Research at the Foundation for Excellence in Education.

The study, available at www.schoio.org/research, points to steps toward reform Ohio lawmakers took during the 2011 legislative session by expanding the EdChoice scholarship program and creating the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program - both programs which drew upon Florida initiatives.

"In the years ahead, these programs will have the opportunity to contribute in accelerating the pace of academic improvement in Ohio," Dr. Ladner writes in the report. "... National and state test results show that Florida students are making considerable progress in reading and mathematics. These results should provide confidence to Ohio lawmakers to pursue further reforms."

Florida's approach to reforming education was multifaceted. The state's reforms highlighted in Dr. Ladner's report include:

- Assigning all district and charter schools letter grades of A, B, C, D, or F, based on overall academic performance and student learning gains.
- Sending more than 40,000 students to public or private schools of their parents' choice, through the McKay Scholarship Program and the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program.
- Curtailing the social promotion of students out of the third grade, critical to reading skills.
- Creating an environment conducive to active virtual and charter school programs.
- Offering alternative teacher certification paths so that professionals can bring their content knowledge into the classroom.

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Evidence in the study indicates that as a result of reforms increasing families' educational options, Florida students are improving academically at a higher rate than students across the country. Notably, children from minority populations are making the greatest improvements. Florida's low-income students, the study demonstrates, have made more than 2.5 times the academic progress achieved by their Ohio peers since 2003.

"The state of Florida's educational achievements as documented in this study should serve as an inspiration and a model for Ohio's future education reforms," said Chad Aldis, executive director of School Choice Ohio. "Florida has both expanded the school choice options available to families and, at the same time, measurably increased the quality of its public schools."

School Choice Ohio developed the following policy recommendations for the state of Ohio based on Florida's education reforms and successes as documented in Dr. Ladner's report.

- Eliminate the social promotion of 3rd-graders who are not proficient in reading
- Create clear, meaningful state ratings for schools
- Provide state scholarships for low-income students
- Advertise Ohio's new pathways to the teaching profession

"Florida's academic gains demonstrate that meaningful reform is in reach when state leaders act boldly and when parents are given the freedom to choose the best education for their children," said Robert Enlow, president and CEO of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. "Ohio made great strides in 2011, and this study should give them confidence to continue doing what's best for the state's children."

Previously, the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice has released studies by Dr. Ladner comparing Florida's reforms and academic achievements to those in Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Indiana.

Visit www.schoio.org/research to read the full study.

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School Choice Ohio (SCO) is committed to the goal of every child in Ohio having access to a quality education. Because this is not yet a reality, the organization works tirelessly to educate both the public and our leaders on the importance of empowering parents to find the best educational setting for the needs of their children. SCO believes that all parents should have the opportunity to choose which school is best for their children, regardless of their income level.

The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and nonpartisan organization, solely dedicated to advancing Milton and Rose Friedman's vision of school choice for all children. First established as the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation in 1996, the Foundation continues to promote school choice as the most effective and equitable way to improve the quality of K-12 education in America. The Foundation is dedicated to research, education, and outreach on the vital issues and implications related to choice and competition in K-12 education.