



Democratic Public
Education Caucus of
North Central Florida



FLORIDA EDUCATION POLICY



Lawton Chiles:

The Last Elected Democratic Governor

- Florida Education Reform Act of 1991 - first accountability testing standard.
- First legislation to establish charter schools in Florida was introduced in 1995. It didn't pass.
- A year later, Florida's first charter school law legislation passed with a bipartisan vote.
- Allowed districts to sponsor charter schools to give new options to parents.
- Critics warned these schools would not have the accountability that public schools had.

Charter schools are publicly funded schools that have a more freedom over their "budgets, staffing, curricula, and other operations" ([Charter schools in Florida - Ballotpedia](#)) than traditional schools and can run independent of the restrictions imposed by local school boards and state regulations.



Jeb Bush

Republican Governor from Jan 1999-Jan 2007

- 1999: A+ for Education gave public schools a letter grade A through F based on student test scores. If a school received an F grade twice in four years, students could get state-funded vouchers to attend private schools.
- Struck down in 2006 by Florida Supreme Court stating "the vouchers violate the state constitution's provision that requires a 'uniform' system of public schools for all students."
- In April 2001, Florida created Florida Tax Credit Scholarships.
- Corporations could donate money to fund private school scholarships for low-income students (up to 185% federal poverty level), and get dollar for dollar tax breaks for their donation.

A school voucher is a government issued credit that parents can use to pay for their student's private school cost.

Jeb Bush, continued...

2002: Important Education Amendments

Amendment 9

- Class Size Reduction - reduce the number of students per class:
- PreK to 3rd Grade: Max. of 18 kids
4th-8th Grade: Max. of 22 kids
9th-12th Grade: Max. of 25 kids

FOR	52.39%
AGAINST	47.61%

Dems and teachers union for it
Gov. Bush, business groups against it

Amendment 8

- Universal Pre-kindergarten - free, high quality prekindergarten education to every four year old beginning in 2005.
- Participation was voluntary, had to meet professional standards.

FOR	59.22%
AGAINST	40.78%

Gov. Bush and Democrats both supported this

Jeb Bush, continued...

Republican Governor from Jan 1999-Jan 2007

- In 2006, Bush tried to restore school vouchers (which the Supreme Court had struck down) and also strike down the class-size amendment, but neither of these were successful.
- The same year, Legislators passed the A++ Plan (HB 7087). It was bipartisan and redesigned secondary education to better prepare students for college by highlighting math and science credits, as well as closing some loopholes with the class-size amendment.

Charlie Crist

Republican → Independent: Gov. from Jan 2007-2011

- Received Federal Race to the Top grant which Florida used to implement Common Core Standards.
- In 2010, there was a ballot amendment to relax class-size rules. Crist supported it, but it failed to pass.
- In 2010, Teacher Merit Pay and Tenure Removal passed the legislature.
- It would have eliminated teacher tenure and linked pay directly to student test scores.
- Teachers were extremely against the bill.
- Crist vetoed it because he felt it was jammed through.

Rick Scott

Republican Governor from Jan 2011- Jan 2019

- During the 2010 election, the Republican majority greatly increased in both the House and Senate. (Tea Party Movement)
- Cut \$1.3 Billion from education in first budget (2011-2012).
- One of the first bills Rick Scott passed was similar to the one Charlie Crist had vetoed the previous year:
 - Ended tenure for new teachers
 - Rated teacher's performance on students performance on standardized tests
 - Linked salary to performance
- In 2012, couldn't get a bill to convert failing schools to charter schools through the Senate.
- In 2014, he issued an executive order to get rid of some Common Core Standards and created the FSA standardized test.
- In 2015, the legislature passed the Best and Brightest teacher Bonus program giving big bonuses to teachers with high SAT scores and "highly effective" rating from administrators.

Rick Scott, continued...

Republican Governor from Jan 2011-Jan 2019

- At the end of the 2017 session, a large education bill passed - BARELY (it passed the Senate by one vote):
 - Mandated at least 20 min of recess for K-5 students
 - Some changes to Best and Brightest teacher scholarships
 - Main provision was \$140M in grants to "Schools of Hope" which encouraged charter schools to open near failing schools, forcing districts to share property tax dollars for construction of the charter schools
 - After the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas School Shooting, the legislature passed a bipartisan gun and school safety bill, which:
 - Raised the minimum age to purchase a rifle to 21
 - Established a 3-day waiting period to buy firearms
 - Banned bump stocks
 - Provided \$400M to increase school safety and security in schools
- Was very popular with voters.

Rick Scott, continued...

Republican Governor from Jan 2011-Jan 2019

- In 2018, Hope Scholarship Voucher provided vouchers to students who had been bullied in their public school.
- Allowed these students to transfer to private schools or go to another public school.
- It is funded by car buyers who direct \$105 of their sales tax on their vehicle purchase to this fund.

At this point, Florida had five voucher programs.

Ron DeSantis

Republican Governor from Jan 2019 - Now

- In 2019, passed Family Empowerment Scholarships which created another voucher program. But this one was different:
 - Focused on middle-class families (up to 300% of FPL)
 - Funded using direct education money (from public schools)
- Democrats warned the law went against the 2006 Florida Supreme Court ruling, but the court had more conservatives now and didn't intervene.
- In 2020, the Best and Brightest teachers bonus was repealed.
- Spent \$500M to raise teacher pay (goal was raising it to \$47,500 for a first year teacher)
- Alachua county raise base pay from \$38,416 (2019-2020) to \$44,143 (2020-2021).
- Veteran teacher (8+ years) only got a 1% raise, adjusted for inflation, they lost money and teacher shortages increased...

Ron DeSantis, continued...

Republican Governor from Jan 2019 - Now

- In 2021, passed Parent's Bill of Rights and the Moment of Silence. The moment of silence was one minute of quiet that would happen in public schools every morning.
- The Parent's Bill of Rights was the start of several bills focused on what teachers were able to teach students in schools.
- In 2022, the Parental Rights in Education Act passed. It "prohibits classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students" ([2022 Bill Summaries - The Florida Senate](#)).
- Allowed parents to sue school districts if they felt these (very vague) directives weren't being followed.

Ron DeSantis, continued...

Republican Governor from Jan 2019 - Now

- In 2022, the legislature also passed the “Stop WOKE Act,” which focused on how race was taught in the classroom (and universities and workplaces), and made it illegal to make anyone feel “psychological distress” or “guilt” for actions in the past of which the person played no part in.

(<https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/faculty/pub/1200/>)

- In 2023, Florida passed universal school vouchers. This bill removed all income restrictions for getting school vouchers, which made it so that any K-12 student from any income bracket could get \$8000 per student that was taken directly from the state education budget.
- This money comes out of public school funds, and is estimated to cost around \$4 BILLION per year.

Ron DeSantis, continued...

Republican Governor from Jan 2019 - Now

- In 2023, the legislature also expanded the parental rights in Education (Don't Say Gay Bill).
 - Made it illegal for school staff to use a student's preferred pronouns, unless a parent signed a consent form.
 - Expanded the law banning the ability to talk about sexual orientation and gender identity.
 - Made it easier for anyone to challenge books as inappropriate.
- Also in 2023, , the legislature passed the Bathroom bill, requiring people to use the bathrooms according to their biological sex in all public buildings.
 - The legislature also passed the Teacher Union and Workforce bill which stated that unions had to maintain 60% participation to stay active and made it so that union dues couldn't be deducted directly from paychecks.

Where We Are - Florida Education Policy:

- **Florida's voucher program is the biggest in the country**
 - Once Florida eliminated voucher requirements in 2023, more than 500,000 children signed up. 70% of enrollees were already private school students.
 - By the end of the 2024-2025 school year, the program cost \$398M more than expected.
 - The Florida education department doesn't know where 30,000 students were going to school (and couldn't account for \$270M in funds to support them).
 - Florida Auditor general found that public schools were shortchanged by \$230M.
- HB1285: Charter schools can now legally take over space in public schools, without having to pay rent for the space
 - **Florida is ranked 50th in US for average pay for teachers (only beating West Virginia).**
 - Alachua County is squeezed from two sides: state diverts millions to private vouchers while also overruling the local school board to convert public schools into charters.
 - PEN has shown 2,304 book bans in Florida during the 2024-2025. Over 4,500 book bans in the 2023-2024 school year. Over 1,400 book bans in 2022-2023 school year. **It's the most for any state.**

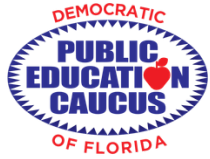
Florida public school enrollment: the cliff after 2023

Statewide K-12 enrollment, 2016-17 through 2025-26



Source: FLDOE School Enrollment via OpenData

tryOpenData.ai



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WHAT THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE IS DOING RIGHT NOW

