



BALANCING THE SCALES SINCE 1977

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**Information about**  
***Citizens for Strong Schools v. Fla. State Bd. of Educ.***  
**(Fla. 2d Jud. Cir.)**

**Goal:** To ensure that the opportunity to learn is available to all children no matter their circumstances or obstacles to success.

**Some themes:**

- Inefficient education policies emphasize privatization rather than support for public schools which has resulted in over-burdened teachers, failure to hire and retain qualified teachers, low graduation rates and high retention and dropout rates, great disparities in achievement between whites and minorities, excessive classroom time spent on testing, and insufficient college and work readiness.
- From 2008-09 through 2012-13, the State diverted almost \$1.5 billion from public schools to voucher programs. Constitution requires and we seek to have this money used for public education. Increased funding is needed for more teachers and other personnel and to repair, maintain and build new schools.
  - These voucher programs include the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship and the McKay Scholarship.
  - Some problems with the FTC scholarship are that the money is going to private for-profit religious schools which use discriminatory criteria for admittance and these schools often have no certified teachers nor do the students take assessments or have accountability to the Florida Department of Education
  - Some problems with the McKay Scholarship are that the money can be paid to a private school to provide services to students with disabilities. However, that school is not obligated to keep that student in their school, nor are they required to return the money to the student.
  - What our case will achieve is additional resources and services in public schools for all children. In addition to more qualified teachers, we want to see more guidance counselors, paraprofessionals, school psychologists, behavior specialists, social workers, and intervention specialists in our public schools. With these additional resources and services, all students, including students with disabilities, can receive the services they need in public school without having to go to a private setting.
- We seek to level the playing field for the students who need comprehensive educational services to learn. Students should go from school to further education or gainful employment, and not from school to jail.

### **Some Florida statistics:**

- The U.S. Census Bureau ranks Florida 50th in per pupil per capita funding for education for 2011.
- Data from 2011 estimate there are 113,646 youths in Florida aged 16 to 21 years old who are not enrolled in school and have not completed a high school education.
- For the class of 2013, almost four out of every ten African American high school students did not graduate.

### **Alachua County statistics:**

- The 2014 single year drop out rate for Alachua County, the state's 23rd largest school district, is 2.4%. The State rate is 1.9%. To put this in perspective, Duval County, the sixth largest school district in Florida, has a single year drop out rate for 2014 of 2.9%.
- The State's 2014 graduation rate is 79%. Alachua County's 2014 graduation rate was 72%. However, the African American graduation rate for 2014 is 59%.
- Alachua County diverted \$1,737,113 to private schools to McKay Scholarships and \$2,380,560 to private schools for FTC scholarships for the quarter ending April 2015.
- For the 2014 FCAT 2.0 Reading assessment, 32% of African American 3rd grade students were proficient or above. 75% of their white counterparts were proficient or above. This is an achievement gap of 43%.
- And only 27% of African American 10<sup>th</sup> grade students were proficient or above in reading while 77% of 10th grade white students were proficient or above. This is an achievement gap of 50%.
- For that same year, 21% of 3rd grade ESE students were proficient or above and just 8% of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade English Language Learners were proficient or above in reading.
- For the 2014 FCAT 2.0 3<sup>rd</sup> grade math assessment, while 77% of white students tested proficient or above, only 23% of African American students, 33% of English Language Learners and 17% of ESE students tested proficient or above.
- Although it is true the FCAT 2.0 will no longer be given to Florida's students, we should be aware of these figures and consider that the Florida Standards Assessment (the FSA) is more challenging than the FCAT 2.0.
- In 2014, 244 Alachua County 12th graders retook the FCAT 2.0 Reading

assessment. Of those 244 students, 19%, or 46 students, passed.

- In 2014, 17 Alachua County 12th graders retook the FCAT Mathematics assessment. Of those 17 students, 29%, or less than 5 students, passed. It should be noted that Florida shifted from FCAT to FCAT 2.0 in 2011. This means that these students have been trying to take and pass this assessment for at least five years.
- The 12th graders who did not pass these assessments will either return to school to continue to retake the assessments until they pass. Or they will choose to drop out.

### **What we want court to order:**

- Declare that the State is not fulfilling its paramount duty to fully fund education.
- Declare that the State is not providing a high quality comprehensive opportunity for all children, especially for students in poverty, homeless, special education, English Language Learners, minorities.
- Declare that the State is not providing a uniform system of public education by funding private voucher programs that are not accountable, lack teacher certification standards, and teach religious education.
- Declare that aspects of the public education system are not efficient, e.g., testing and accountability, school grades, retention, teacher evaluations and for-profit charter school management companies.
- Order the State to conduct a cost study to determine what resources are necessary.
- Order the State to prepare a plan that will provide a comprehensive educational opportunity for all children.
- Order the State to cease operating the private voucher programs.