



November 14, 2014

Mr. Gary Chartrand
Chair
State Board of Education
325 W. Gaines Street
Suite 1520
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Chair Chartrand:

Florida has been a leader and trendsetter for education reform for 15 years, with its groundbreaking A+ plan as a cornerstone. As we moved from a bottom-ten state to a top-ten state, performance has soared in numerous areas. Florida has become a national leader in making gains in almost every academic category, including slashing illiteracy rates in the early grades, closing the education achievement gap among low-income students, increasing high school graduation rates, and giving all students access to Advanced Placement courses. However, the centerpiece of that success has been a durable commitment to rigorous standards, meaningful assessment, and strong accountability.

For this reason, the Council of 100 fully supports the one-year hold-harmless provisions enacted by the 2014 Legislature to mesh the State's new assessment and accountability requirements. Chapter 2014-23, Laws of Florida, establishes the 2014-15 school year as an informational baseline for schools to work toward improved performance in future years, insulates schools from any penalty or reclassification that would otherwise result from the school's 2014-15 grade, and continues to implement the Florida School Recognition Program. Further delay risks a loss of momentum, deprives students and parents of needed assessment data, and risks undermining the tremendous progress we have made as a state.

That said, we are acutely aware of the growing debate around assessments and accountability. We are sympathetic to the challenges of introducing new standards and implementing a statewide assessment system. It will be hard work, and our school districts and teachers deserve our full support.

We therefore urgently call on the State Board of Education to take the following actions regarding the new Florida Standards Assessment by December 31, 2014:

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- Provide a comprehensive set of test specifications, sample test items, and sample tests to school districts;
- Ensure that school districts are technologically ready to administer the FSA; and
- Ensure that adequate mechanisms are in place to transition student performance results from the FCAT to the FSA.

The global economy is reordering itself and the competition for talent is the driver of future prosperity. Successful implementation of the Florida Standards and development of competent assessment tools is Florida's greatest opportunity to position our state – and our children – for a future of prosperity and opportunity. We must not fail.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if the Council can be of assistance as Florida's new standards, assessments, and accountability measures are implemented.

Sincerely,

Steven T. Halverson
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Rick Scott, Governor, State of Florida
Mr. John Padgett, member, State Board of Education
Dr. Ada Armas, member, State Board of Education
Mr. John Colon, member, State Board of Education
Ms. Marva Johnson, member, State Board of Education
Ms. Rebecca Fishman Lipsey, member, State Board of Education
Mr. Andy Tuck, member, State Board of Education
The Honorable Steve Crisafulli, Speaker, Florida House of Representatives
The Honorable Andy Gardiner, President, Florida Senate
Ms. Pam Stewart, Commissioner, Florida Department of Education