

## Frequently Asked Questions: Florida Education Adequacy Litigation

1. How do Florida's constitutional requirements for education compare to the rest of the country?

They are among the strongest if not the strongest standards in the country. It is a paramount duty of the state of Florida to provide all students a high quality education.

2. What does it mean that education is "a paramount duty of the state"? Isn't the state funding public schools?

Those words signify the unique importance of education in Florida. Education is a fundamental value of our citizens and a top priority. The state is responsible for providing an excellent education system. In fact, the state is not fully funding public schools. The state has reduced its share of spending on public education from over 60% to around 44%. The result is shifting the paramount duty to local property tax payers.

3. What are the measures of high quality?

The measures are comparisons with other states or even other countries. Florida is competing in a world economy. Some evaluations do not require comparisons to others but should be based on meeting our own values and expectations - such as measures of school violence.

4. Aren't Florida schools highly rated?

No. The often-quoted report that ranks Florida highly is based more on policies and standards than performance. It is performance that really matters. In fact many ratings are very low. For example graduation rates and funding per pupil are among the lowest in the nation.

5. Does this litigation intend to show, or does your group believe that there are no good schools in Florida?

No. There are good schools. There are good teachers, good students and good parents. But statewide the system is failing. That is what we think the evidence will show.

6. Isn't there a lot of waste in education spending?

No. When people ask this question, they're usually referring to administrative costs, which are lower in Florida than in almost all other states. Of course, no system, public or private is without waste and we hope to identify any waste in the education system.

7. Are you suggesting higher taxes?

No. We are suggesting an assessment of the quality of our educational system. Some factors may relate to funding and some may not.

8. How much do you suggest we must spend to achieve high quality?

There is not a specific answer at this time. That question is part of what this litigation is about: a critical review of education spending.

9. What states have higher-quality education systems?

Based on national test results and graduation rates, the states that tend to have the best educational outcomes are New Hampshire, Vermont, Minnesota and Iowa.

10. Is this a question that the courts should be addressing?

Yes. The courts are the one and only place to answer questions about the constitutionality of government actions. High quality education is a specific constitutional duty of the state of Florida

11. Are you blaming the current legislators?

No. The current situation is based on years and even decades of decisions. This litigation seeks to find an answer for the future rather than fix blame for the past. This lawsuit is a culmination of the new constitutional standards for excellence enacted by Florida's citizens in 1998 by over 70% of the vote.

12. Are you blaming the teachers?

No. Most all Florida teachers are doing as good a job as anyone can with the system and resources we have given them. Can we improve the level of teacher certification and training? Yes.

13. Does President Obama's Race to the Top initiative affect this lawsuit?

No. The goals are fine but education is a state responsibility. We are addressing how the state of Florida will provide education in the future. Funding from the federal government cannot be a basis for a long-range plan.

14. Is this lawsuit funded by any particular interest group?

No. This litigation is supported by citizens and is part of a larger movement to improve education for our children in this state.

15. Who is behind this lawsuit? Who is funding it?

Individuals and citizen organizations from around the state have volunteered their time, money and effort. The legal effort is being handled by a public interest law firm, Southern Legal Counsel.

16. Isn't the lottery funding education?

No. At this time relatively little lottery money goes to K-12 education and the state share of funding of education has dropped dramatically since the lottery started.

17. Isn't the current situation the result of the bad economy that will improve when the economy does?

No. Florida's education issues did not just begin two years ago. Florida ranked at the bottom of the nation for graduation rates and school funding well before the current economic downturn began. The state has also been shifting the burden for school funding to local communities for at least a decade.

18. Isn't this a bad economic time to raise issues about education?

No. This is the right time. This litigation and other efforts are likely to take some time and we can't wait to begin to address this problem. Another reason to begin now is that a major component of economic development and recovery is a strong school system.

19. What do you want the legislature to do?

Acknowledge the problems that exist with the system and work with citizens to improve it.