



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ALACHUA COUNTY/GAINESVILLE, FL

Understanding the Choices in School Choice: Standards and Accountability

The Florida School Choice Program allows more flexibility in how schools are organized and evaluated. Schools may be managed by the state, county school boards and their staffs, by private for-profit, not-for-profit companies, or by religious institutions. Some large, for-profit companies form not-for-profit subsidiaries. Parents themselves may educate their children and organize cooperative home schooling associations. Understanding management and evaluation requirements for School Choice options helps us know how to judge their effectiveness.

This is the second article by the Education Team of the League of Women Voters of Alachua County/Gainesville in the series “Understanding the Choices in School Choice.” The first article was based on the financial impact of school choice. This article studies the standards and accountability of alternative schools. Key points in this article include:

- Currently, four of the 16 Alachua County charter schools received D or F grades. Four others have been closed. Charter school contracts do not list review guidelines for appropriate salaries or management fees. Abuses of funds have been reported in the press and mismanagement of funds is cited as a common reason for failure of charter schools.
- Most Alachua County private schools are too small to participate in state-wide evaluation studies. In those state-wide studies that have been conducted for students receiving Florida Tax Credit (FTC) scholarships, students do not show significant differences in achievement from their peer groups in public schools, though one study showed slight improvement for FTC elementary students in math.
- Private schools are eligible for FTC scholarships and state funded McKay Scholarships. However, there are apparently no requirements by the State to publicly report information about private school curriculum, teacher certification, accreditation, or student test results. Private schools are not required to administer the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) unless a parent requests it. Private schools receiving State tax dollars are not required to meet the same school and teacher grading requirements as public schools.

Florida leads the nation in the number of students taking online courses. Most students are enrolled in courses offered in either the state-wide Florida Virtual School (FLVS) or in districts using courses available through FLVS. These students must take end-of-course exams and the FCATs. District schools also may contract through corporations that develop independent virtual programs. Although these programs are required to meet guidelines similar to the state sponsored programs, they have much greater flexibility in programming, testing and reporting of student performance. Whereas schools using FLVS programming have their grades publicly

published, this is not the case with those programs that are not part of the state system. Students in the FLVS programs are reported to score above the national average in standardized tests; however a *Tampa Bay Times* article describes how difficult it is to evaluate online schools. See Appendix 1.

Charter Schools

Management. As mentioned in the first article of this series, Florida school districts contract with private not-for-profit entities to manage charter schools. National and Florida cost-effectiveness studies of charter schools have reported mixed results for their effectiveness. Charter schools, however, continue to grow in number, and the involvement of for-profit companies in promoting charter schools raises some questions about how the public tax money supporting charter schools is monitored. While reviewing these studies, we have come across reports of mismanagement, and therefore compiled a list of some important practices that need to be carefully monitored. These practices include not only conflict of interest concerns but also:

- Management fees to parent private-for-profit or not-for-profit companies
- Real estate lease and rental fees and building construction projects
- Staffing requirements, salaries, benefits, and severance packages
- Administrative and student services
- School, teacher, and student evaluation

There are press reports of abuse of funds in charter school budgets (see Appendix 1 for some examples.), but there seem to be no regulations to review the charter school budgets during the contracting process with an eye to appropriate salaries, fees to parent companies, severance packages, or lease or rental payments.

Charter Management Entities in Alachua County. Alachua County has 16 charter schools, and two, SiaTech and MYcro, have holding companies which charge for some expenses; their budgets have a category for "Central Services." All financial aspects of these two schools are handled by a central office, not at the school itself. The other 14 charter schools are all locally managed and operated. Most do hire outside accounting firms to do the accounting. Any profits stay with the school. There are no "charter school companies" as there are in other areas in Florida. The two Sweetwater Schools are under a holding company called Neosprings Inc., but there are no payments listed to that company. State regulations require that unencumbered funds revert to the district if the charter schools fail. There has been one instance where a failing charter school staff encumbered funds to pay severance fees to the school principal.

Real Estate Lease and Rental Fees and Building Construction Projects. Charter school buildings are leased or privately owned and are required to follow the charter school program subgrantee conflict of interest guidelines and meet county building codes and safety rules, but they do not have to meet public school physical facilities requirements: e.g., playgrounds, cafeterias, and libraries. They do, however, receive state PECO construction money as explained in the previous article entitled "Funding School Choice in Florida." The state does not recover the cost of building renovations if the school fails; only furniture and equipment are recovered. In Alachua County, the buildings that the two One Room schools occupy are owned by Central Florida Charter School Development Corporation, and they do pay rent to that company.

Staffing Requirements, Salaries, Benefits and Severance Packages. Staffing rules are more flexible for charter schools. Charter schools do not meet state individual class size limits; they meet a school average class size limit. Moreover, charter schools hire their own teachers who must meet the state teacher certification, but participation in the state pension and benefit plans is optional. In Alachua County, seven charters do participate in the Florida Retirement Plan, and nine offer alternative plans. Three charter schools do not offer health care plans. Charter schools set their own salary schedules, and some offer salary supplements in lieu of a formal retirement plan. See Appendix 2.

Administrative and Student Services. Many charter schools are small, with small administrative staffs; therefore, public school districts receive a 5% fee for the first 250 students from some charter schools for administrative services that districts are required to provide. These services include: behavioral support, assistive technology, speech/language consultation, contract management services, data reporting, student assessment, and various information services. According to an Alachua County School Board member, federal IDEA money for support for student disabilities used to go directly to charter schools, but now it is allocated by the district in order to ensure the money is spent appropriately. Most Alachua County charter schools now do not enroll students with disabilities. Services are explained on the Florida Department of Education website:

http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/information/charter_schools/faqs.asp

Oversight for charter schools comes from their local private boards and various state agencies, depending upon the type of issue under review. The Alachua County School Board reviews the initial applications and the annual fiscal reports to ensure they are fiscally solvent. The Florida Department of Education has contracted with the Charter Schools Support Services Corporation to assist charters with administration, curriculum, governance, and finance concerns. The Charter School Review Commission assists the Department of Education with the review of appeals related to denial of applications or school termination. The State Board of Education makes the final decisions. Charter schools are required to submit annual reports and yearly financial audits to the Florida Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice. Charter schools that consistently receive D or F grades within a three year period are subjective to corrective action including closure. In Alachua County, four charter schools have been closed, and one was reduced to a prekindergarten school. For details on charter school regulations see:

http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1002/Sections/1002.33.html

Charter School, Teacher, and Student Evaluations. The original purpose of charter schools was to promote innovation in school curriculum and instruction. While charter schools must use Common Core Standards and administer the FCAT, they have great flexibility in courses and management. In the third article of the “Understanding School Choice” series, the curriculum differences will be more fully described. In this section, we will describe the Florida Accountability measures.

Policies for school evaluations, teacher evaluations and student evaluations vary by school choice option, but there are some consistencies that are mandated by the state for public and charter schools. All public and public charter schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In addition, the Department of Education prepares a school accountability report each year that lists school and district grades as well as school improvement scores. See: <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/>.

Florida's school accountability system originated in 1999 with the passage of Assistance Plus legislation. According to the 2012 Guide to Calculating Alternative School Improvement Ratings by the Florida Department of Education, "Florida is one of the few states that can track student demographic information from year to year and is the first to track annual student learning gains based on the state's academic standards." The school grades are based on scores from the Florida State Assessment examinations adjusted by other learning indicators.

Statewide Assessments. The Florida Bureau of K-12 Assessment (<http://fcats.fldoe.org/>) provides information about student assessments, including the examinations listed below. It should be noted, however, that the FCAT tests are being phased out, and they will be replaced by the Common Core Standards and assessments in 2014.

- FCAT in mathematics (grades 3-8), reading (grades 3-10) and science (grades 5 and 10).
- Florida End of Course examinations (EOC) are being phased in for middle and high school students and will include Algebra, Biology, Geometry, History, and Civics.
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) which includes nine subject areas and is administered periodically across the nation.
- International Assessments are administered periodically to compare students in the United States and abroad in several content areas.

In 2009-10, the Race to the Top (RTTT) competition was announced, and the Common Core Standards in English/Language Arts (ELA) & Math were published. In 2010-11, approximately 40 states adopted them, including Florida, and their implementation in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects in grades 6 through 12 has been accomplished. Florida won a \$700 million RTTT award to create summative and formative assessments will be available for use in classrooms by 2014-15.

School Grades. Every year schools are graded by the State Department of Education on an A-F scale based on the following data:

- Student performance on statewide assessment tests
- Student learning gains
- Student learning gains for the lowest performing 25%
- Middle school students taking EOC exams plus their performance on the exams
- High school students retake performance on high school graduation test; participation and performance in accelerated curricula, graduation rate, at-risk graduation rate, and college readiness

Through the Florida School Recognition Program, schools that improve a letter grade (from a C to B, D to C, or F to D) or that earn an A are given \$100 per student, which by statute 1008.36 FS can be used for nonrecurring bonuses, equipment or materials, or temporary personnel. The school (staff and an advisory council) make the decision. Last year, nearly 90% of the funding was used for bonuses to teachers and staff and the remaining money was used for materials and equipment. There remains a question about the differences in funding for low performing schools and high performing schools. The State Board of Education sends *Assistance Plus* teams to F schools to provide assistance and recommendations for improvement. School superintendents are required to develop a plan to improve schools that are graded an F year after year. Title I funds from the federal government are designated for qualified low income area schools, and these funds may be used to attract more experienced teachers or to provide tutoring or other services to parents and students. School grades data are found at:

<http://www.foundationforfloridasfuture.org/Images/FCAT%20Results%20Graphics/SchoolGradesFAQs.pdf>

Public and Charter School Grades 2012 Results. Five of the 36 Alachua County public schools received grades of D or F. Of the 12 charter schools listed in the 2012 DOE School Accountability report, four received a D or F. Four charter schools were not graded, either because the school had fewer than 30 students per grade, or they served students who were exempt from the assessments because they were part of a Juvenile Justice program or potential drop out program. Results for the 2012 school grades in Alachua County are located in Appendix 3.

School Improvement Scores. Alternative schools have the option of receiving a school grade or an alternative school improvement rating (using criteria applicable to alternative school ratings as described in Rule 6A-1.099822). Schools that elect a school improvement rating in lieu of a school grade will have the rating based on a comparison of current-year and prior-year learning gains for eligible students in reading and mathematics. For each subject in which learning gains are evaluated (reading, math), the following criteria apply:

- Improving means at least a 5-point increase in the percent making learning gains.
- Maintaining means less than a 5-point increase or decrease in the percent making learning gains.
- Declining means at least a 5-point decrease in the percent making learning gains.

A school's rating can be no higher than the status of its lowest performing subject.

The criteria for qualifying to receive a school improvement score can be found in the 2012 “Guide to Calculating Alternative School Improvement Ratings: Florida Department of Education.”

Teacher Evaluations. A new teacher evaluation system, the Value Added Model (VAM) was implemented in Florida this year for public school teachers; however, since charter schools employ their teachers separately, they do not participate in the VAM teacher evaluations. An explanation of the VAM scores is located in Appendix 4.

Private Schools

There are two mechanisms by which some private schools in Florida receive State funds. These are scholarships given to support the education of students through the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship Program and the McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities. See Appendix 5 for a list of FTC and McKay participating schools in Alachua County, religious affiliation, and accreditation status. For sources see:

<http://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2012/1002.395> (FTC)

<http://www.flsenate.gov/laws/statutes/2012/1002.39> (McKay)

There are several concerns about oversight in determining accountability in the FTC program. These include lack of public information about the private schools curriculum, teacher certification, school accreditation, pooled student test results, or financial audits. This section reviews the way in which private schools receive state funding in Florida and summarizes what information is available about the management and evaluation of private schools. Some key information about Alachua County private schools is listed below:

- All schools accepting FTC and McKay students are non-profit except for Brentwood and Logo Springs Academy.

- The only school not accepting FTC students is Gainesville Conductive Education Academy.
- The only school not accepting McKay students is Windsor Christian Academy.
- The only non-religious schools are Brentwood, Gainesville Conductive Education, Logo Springs and Trilogy

The FTC Program is financed through tax credits awarded by the State of Florida to corporations which donate money to a non-profit organization (Step Up For Students). Step Up for Students administers the distribution of these funds to private schools which will provide tuition for students from low- income_families who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Maximum funding for 2011-12 was capped at \$175 million with \$147.4 distributed. The maximum funding for 2012-13 is \$229 million. See:

http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/CTC/quarterly_reports/ftc_report_sept2012.pdf

The McKay Scholarships specifically provide scholarships for students with disabilities such as, but not limited to: intellectual disability, speech, language, hearing impairment, an orthopedic impairment, other health impairments, an emotional or behavioral disability, or a specific learning disability. The scholarship remains in force until the student returns to a public school.

The following section will review the obligations mandated by the legislature that must be met to receive state funds and the accountability measures used to evaluate student progress

Obligations of Private Schools. Participating sectarian or nonsectarian private schools must meet and comply with the general statutory requirements governing private schools such as registering with the State, complying with laws prohibiting discrimination, meeting health and safety laws, certifying that employees have undergone background screening, demonstrating fiscal soundness, employing or contracting with teachers (who hold at least baccalaureate degrees, have at least three years teaching experience , or have special skills, knowledge, or expertise that qualify them to provide instruction in the relevant subject areas taught), providing the parent of a scholarship recipient with a written explanation of student progress at least annually and cooperating with a parent who wishes for his or her child to take the FCAT.

Schools enrolling FTC students (but not McKay students) must administer a Florida DOE-approved norm-referenced test to each scholarship student in grades 3 through 10 which have 30 or more students enrolled per grade level, and annually report the scores to their parents and also report the scores of all participating students to an independent research organization selected by DOE. Private schools are not required to administer the FCAT unless a parent requests it. They must contract with a certified public accountant for the performance of an agreed-upon procedures review for each fiscal year in which the school received more than \$250,000 in scholarship funds. (This last requirement does not effectively monitor Alachua County schools in this program because their enrollments are quite small.) FTC and McKay students cannot hold both types of scholarship at the same time. See:

<http://www.flsenate.gov/laws/statutes/2012/1002.421> (Private Schools)

Obligations of Step Up for Students. The non-profit Step Up for Students must expend for annual or partial-year FTC scholarships an amount equal to or greater than 75% of the net eligible contributions remaining after administrative expenses during the state fiscal year in which the contributions are collected. Three percent of eligible contributions may be used for administrative expenses. Step Up must also provide the Auditor General and DOE an annual financial and compliance audit of their accounts and records conducted by an independent CPA.

Obligations of State.

- Conduct random site visits of the private schools
- The DOE must verify the eligibility of the non-profit scholarship-funding organization (Step Up for Students).
- For FTC schools, the Department Revenue is responsible for establishing application forms and procedures and governing the allocation of tax credits and carry forward credits for the program on the first-come first-served basis.

Demographic and Fiscal Data. State data describing student enrollment, number of schools involved and fund distribution for the FTC and McKay programs for 2011-12 are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. The State FTC and McKay Programs for 2011-12

	FTC *	McKay **
Student Enrollment	40,248	24,194
Number of Schools	1,218	1,086
Total Funds Distributed	147.4 million	\$151.3 million
Average scholarship/student	\$ 4,335	\$ 4,280 – \$18,529 (average = \$6,849)

*State wide 23.4 % of FTC schools were non-religious and 70.6 % were religious. State wide 16.4% of FTC students attend non-religious schools and 83.6% attended religious schools.

**State wide 35.6 % of McKay schools were non-religious and 64.4 % were religious. State wide 42.6 % of McKay students attend non-religious schools and 57.4% attended religious schools.

Alachua County data on student enrollment, number of schools involved, and fund distribution for the FTC and McKay programs for 2011-12 are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The Alachua County FTC and McKay Programs for 2011-12

	FTC	McKay June 2012 Quarterly Report
Student Enrollment	298	217
Number of Schools	19	18
Total Funds Distributed	\$1,085,863	\$ 1,149,593
Average scholarship/student	\$ 4,335	?

Eighteen schools are non-profit and two private with 14 (83%) of them religious schools. See Appendix 5 for a list of schools, religious association, profit and non-profit status, type of scholarship students enrolled, as well as accreditation, if any. See:

http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/CTC/quarterly_reports/ftc_report_june2012.pdf

http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/McKay/quarterly_reports/mckay_report_june2012.pdf

Evaluation of Student Performance in the FTC Program. An evaluation of the FTC Scholarship Program for participation compliance and test scores in 2010-11 was carried out and published by a DOE selected independent project director, Dr. David N. Figlio. See:

http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/pdf/FTC_Research_2010-11_report.pdf

This was the fifth in a series of reports evaluating the FTC Program. It provided information on private school compliance with program rules regarding required testing, described the attributes of eligible students who participate in the program, and presented data on student test score levels and gains in the program, as well as making comparisons with the eligible population of non-participating students in Florida public schools.

The study included 16,575 scores from students in grades 3-10. This report marked the first time that individual schools' test score gains were reported for schools. Seventy schools met this criterion in 2010-11. Alachua County FTC participants were not included in the Florida schools used in this survey because they did not meet the criteria for the survey that required a minimum number (30) of appropriate student scores per school. The typical student in the program scored at the 45th national percentile in reading and the 46th percentile in mathematics, about the same as in 2008-09 and 2009-10.

The mean gain in national percentile ranking points for program participants in reading and mathematics were statistically indistinguishable from past years' average gains scores. This shows that the FTC participants improved to the same degree as the students nationwide. It is important to note that these national comparisons pertain to all students nationally, and not just low-income students.

Test score gains for program participants were also compared to those of income-eligible non-participants remaining in Florida public schools. Participating students gained slightly relative to comparable public school students in math. Among other observations of the data it was noted that scholarship participants tend to be considerably more disadvantaged and lower-performing in their schools upon entering the program than their non-participating counterparts.

Summary of Dr. Figlio's Studies. Although the data described above indicates some positive effects of the FTC Program, student gains did not show major differences in achievement level or gains for students with FTC vouchers in comparison to otherwise FTC eligible non-participating students. Figlio also stated that there is compelling causal evidence that the FTC Scholarship Program has led to modest and statistically significant improvements in public school performance across the state. Therefore, he said that a cautious read of the available evidence suggests that the FTC Scholarship Program has increased student performance in public schools statewide, that the program draws disproportionately low-income, poorly-performing students from the public schools into private schools, and that the students who moved perform as well or better than before they moved to the private schools. See Appendix 6 for more detailed results.

Online Schools

Background Information. There are different avenues for students in Florida to receive virtual education online. The state-level virtual school is called the Florida Virtual School (FLVS). FLVS began in 1997 as a joint project between the Alachua and Orange County school boards. In 2000 the Florida legislature established the FLVS as an independent school district. Public, private and home schooled students in all Florida school districts are able to enroll free in this state-level online school. In addition, several other modes of online education have been authorized for the education of the state's students. Currently all Florida school districts are also required to offer an online school program to students who reside in their district (Florida statute 1002.45). Furthermore, a 2011 state law required that public high school students must take an

online course prior to graduation and it also permitted charter schools to offer online classes. Florida Virtual School Options 2012-13 are shown in the table below.

Table 3. Florida Virtual School Options

Florida's Public Virtual Education Options 2012-13 Virtual Program/School	Program Type	Provider	Grade Levels Served	Student Eligibility
State Level				
Florida Virtual School (FLVS)	Part Time	State	Grades K-1 and 6-12 Grades 2-5	All students Eligibility per s. 1002.455
Florida Virtual School Full Time (FLVS FT)	Full Time	State	Grades K-12	All Students
District Level				
District Virtual Instruction Program (VIP)	Full Time	Provider Operated	Grades K-5 Grades 6-12	All Students Eligibility per s. 1002.455
	Limited Part Time	District Operated	Grades K-1 Grades 2-12	All Students Eligibility per s. 1002.455
District Franchise of FLVS	Same as FLVS	District	Same as FLVS	Same as FLVS
District Virtual Course Offerings	Part Time	District	Grades K-1 Grades 2-12	All students Eligibility per s. 1002.455
	Full-Time	District	Grades K-5 Grades 6-12	All Students Eligibility per s. 1002.455
Virtual Charter School	Full Time	Variable	Grades K-5 Grades 6-12	All Students Eligibility per s. 1002.455

Virtual school coursework blends both online and offline content, and is done from a structured home environment where an adult is responsible for the student's attendance. In general online course work is broken down into modules. Teachers are available via phone, text, email and instant messaging. Students connect with teachers to take online exam and discussion-based assessments over the phone. Students talk with a teacher at least once a month when both students and parents can be updated on student progress. End-of-course grades are available to the student and sent directly to the school or district of record.

- State Level FLVS. State level FLVS serves students both full time and part time in all 67 Florida districts. It also serves other students around the nation and world through a tuition-based instructional program. It offers more than 120 courses including core subjects, world languages, electives, honors, and Advanced Placement course. FLVS has over 1800 staff members. All FLVS teachers have valid Florida teaching certificates and are certified specifically in the subject they teach. FLVS served over 148,000 students in 303,329 half-credit enrollments in the 2011-12 school year. These numbers include students enrolled in AP courses. Many state level FLVS students are part-time. That is, they take one or two courses at FLVS and the balance at a traditional school.

FLVS has joined with a private contractor, Connections Academy (now Pearson), to create Florida Virtual School Full Time (FLVS FT). FLVS FT provides online options for both public school (grades K-12) and home school (grades 6-12) students. Florida Virtual School and Connections Education LLC are both accredited by AdvancED.

Eligibility requirements for Florida Virtual School Full Time (FLVS FT grades K-12) are that the students must reside in the state of Florida. Kindergarten students must be five

years old on or before September 1 of the school year. First grade students must be six years old on or before September 1 of the school year.

The FLVS program is funded through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) as a special district. It is the only public school in Florida where base funding is directly tied to student performance. Students must be enrolled, receive direct instruction, and successfully complete a FLVS course in order to generate funds through the FEFP formula. FLVS does not receive any school property tax money; it does not have any local taxing authority. FLVS receives funding from the development and sale of online courses. The per-student cost of FLVS is less than traditional schools because FLVS is not required to provide all the services given to public schools.

As noted in the previous article on Funding School Choice in Florida, state educational funds that support students exclusively enrolled in the state-level FLVS FT program go to this independent FLVS district. This results in fewer state dollars going to support student education in the local districts. In contrast, state educational funds which support the individual district franchises go directly to the district that enrolls the student.

The state level FLVS Full Time program is available to students in grades K–12 statewide. FLVS will be the student’s school district of record and students will receive a school report card and diploma from FLVS, not the local district school. Students must meet all public school requirements for attendance and standardized test participation. These students must take the FCAT and end of course assessments. Students will also need to attend full-time with 6 courses per semester for grades 6–12 or equivalent for K–5.

The **Home Education Program** is available for full-time or part-time students in grades 6–12. Students may take up to 6 courses per semester and are required to register as Home Education students with their resident school district. There are no other eligibility requirements to participate and students are not required to take the FCAT (but are encouraged to do so), or complete any Florida End of Course Exams or graduation requirements for high school students. Home education students **are not eligible** to receive a diploma from Florida Virtual School. Home School students make up approximately 30% of the FLVS population.

The state level FLVS part-time program provides curriculum flexibility for students (public, private, home education) in grades 6-12 and lets the student set their own pace and the schedule. They can take a single course or multiple courses to supplement their schedule. The courses include core and elective courses and range from credit recovery and general to Honors and AP courses. The traditional school maintains the student’s transcript and determines when they are ready to graduate.

- District VIP (virtual instruction programs). To abide by the requirements of Florida statute 1002.45 on virtual instruction programs, Alachua County school district must provide at least three options for part-time and full-time virtual instruction (VIP) to their students. There are a variety of options that they can use to fulfill this requirement including utilizing programs provided by FLVS via the franchise program (the eSchool in Alachua County) or contracting with outside providers. In the VIPs, the student remains a student of the resident district and must be enrolled with the district.

District virtual school programs are funded through the FEFP at the rate of \$5200 per completed FTE. From this, the eSchool program pays FLVS about \$300 for each full time student (\$50 per each of the six courses) for the on-line programs. Since eSchool hires its own certified teachers it also must pay their teachers from the FEFP funds. At the present time Alachua County's budget does not provide significant funding for the virtual school program.

- Virtual Charter Schools. These online schools may serve eligible district students in grades K-12. They must offer a full-time virtual program. They also must contract with a DOE-approved provider or FLVS for its virtual education program and must submit an application to a school district and be approved to operate a virtual charter school.
- Alachua County Options for Online Education. Alachua county students can be enrolled in a variety of virtual school programs, among them are:
 1. State FLVS-FT Current enrollment is 62 students
 2. eSchool (a franchise of FLVS) Current enrollment is 345 students
 3. VIP (Virtual Instructional Program) Current enrollment is 33 students

The eSchool is a franchise program of the FLVS. In this franchise arrangement, the school district enters into agreement with FLVS which provides curriculum, Learning Management Systems, Student Information System, professional development for teachers and administrators, mentoring, and other tools and resources. The school district provides administration as well as teachers and serves the district students directly. eSchool was started in Alachua County in January of 2012. All public, private and home-schooled students, who are residents of Alachua County, are eligible to enroll. It provides online courses for students in K-12 on a full time or part time basis. It has a total of 345 students currently enrolled as either full-time or part-time students. There are 110 public students who are mostly part-time students and 150 home schooled students who are mostly full time. Part-time students usually take 1-3 courses whereas full-time students take a full 6 course schedule each semester.

The eSchool will offer several advantages to the school district, over the state-FLVS program, among which are 1) the greater flexibility than the state-level program in handling course selections, special area concerns, managing their educational program and student records; 2) offering students, who are enrolled in schools with more limited course choice, access to courses such as AP classes; 3) the ability to select its own state certified teachers for the program; and 4) assisting districts in alleviating pressures from class-size requirements. Furthermore, home schooled students enrolled in this program may earn a high school diploma from that school on completion of their online program. High school students enrolled in the brick-and-mortar school will also be able to use a class period to go to a computer center at school to do their online course.

In another district level program (VIP), Alachua County contracts with two private companies to offer virtual education to students in grades K-5 (K¹² Company) and grades 6-12 (Ed Options Academy). These companies hire their own state certified teachers, provide online programs, administration, oversight, accountability and assess student progress, maintain student records and send end of course reports to the District. Students in this program are considered to be home schooled and will receive a diploma on completion of their program but the diploma will not be from the state.

All students who enrolled either part time or full time in the state FLVS or the District franchises of FLVS public must take end of course exams and FCAT. Home schooled students must take end of course exams but do not have to take FCAT exams and most do not. All grades for students in the District franchise are recorded and retained in the local district school. Students in the District franchise of FLVS Public program will get a diploma from the local District on completion of their program. Students in the VIP Option and Home Schooled students in the state-FLVS program will not receive a state diploma.

To earn a diploma, a home education student may opt to re-enroll into the local public high school and finish school meeting all district graduation requirements. Home education students may also earn a state diploma by opting to enroll during high school into the FLVS Full Time Public School option under the status of “public.” Students enrolling into the FLVS Full Time Public school must also meet all district graduation requirements. Alternatively, some home school students may elect to take the General Education Development (GED) test and on receiving a passing score will be awarded a Florida High School diploma from the state. (Some of the data presented here was obtained from a phone conversation with Assistant Principal Ed Stefansen, the VIP contact for the Alachua County School District.)

Accountability for Online Education Programs. All FLVS courses meet the Sunshine State Standards, and the school is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. A chief executive officer leads the FLVS program and reports to a seven-member board of trustees appointed by the governor. Responsibilities of the Board of Trustees of FLVS, the FLVS and District Franchises are listed in Appendix 7. Appendix 8 provides data on the performance of FLVS programs on Advanced Placement Exams compared with national data, and average final grade by subject for FLVS students compared with all public high school students.

Conclusion

Florida School Choice options have very different management and accountability standards from those of the traditional public schools even though all of these alternative schools may be qualified to receive some form of state funding. In the next article of this series on “Understanding School Choice,” we will consider the social impact of school choice. Social impact issues involve school population shifts and potential school closures, demographic descriptions of families choosing alternative schools, and actual curriculum differences among school choice alternatives.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Some Press Coverage of School Choice Management Issues

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/article1209497.ece> . Success of Florida Virtual School is difficult to measure.

http://staugustine.com/stories/041905/new_2988791.shtml. This article reviews problems at failing schools in Gainesville and St. Augustine.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/reports-on-charter-schools-expose-new-problems/2011/10/31/gIQAcMye3M_blog.html

In 2007, the Orlando Sentinel ran a series of four articles that dealt with concerns about low performance, lax financial oversight and lack of accountability in charter schools. The Sentinel reported that 43% of charters were exempted from school grades because they either served students from the Juvenile Justice system or were potential drop outs or they had fewer than 30 students per grade level.

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/12/13/2545377/academica-florida-richest-charter.html> South Florida charter schools management company, Academica, received \$9 million in management fees and 19 million in lease payments for property they own. The company reports high achievement for the schools it operates.

Appendix 2. Charter School Employee Benefit Availability

	FRS* Y/N	Other ret. Y/N	Health ins Y/N
Alachua Learning Middle	N	Y	Y
Alachua Learning Elem	N	Y	Y
Caring/Sharing	Y	N	N
Einstein	N	Y	Y
Expressions	N	Y	N
Genesis	Y	Y	Y
Healthy Learning	N	Y	N
Hoggetowne	N	N	Y
Micanopy Area	N	Y	Y
Micanopy Middle	Y	N	Y
One Room Schoolhouse	N	Y	Y
One Room Middle	N	Y	Y
SIA Tech	Y	N	Y
MYcroSchool	Y	N	Y
Sweetwater Elementary	Y	N	Y
Sweetwater Middle	Y	N	Y

*Florida Retirement System

Appendix 3: Alachua County Regular Public and Charter School Grades 2012

School	Minority Rate	Title I	School Grade 2012	Charter
CHARLES W. DUVAL ELEMENTARY	97	Yes	C	No
J. J. FINLEY ELEMENTARY	60	Yes	A	No
STEPHEN FOSTER ELEMENTARY *	66	Yes	A	No
LAKE FOREST ELEMENTARY	88	Yes	F	No
LITTLEWOOD ELEMENTARY	48	Yes	A	No
W. A. METCALFE ELEMENTARY	93	Yes	F	No
JOSEPH WILLIAMS ELEMENTARY	82	Yes	C	No
ABRAHAM LINCOLN MIDDLE	72	No	A	No
HOWARD W. BISHOP MIDDLE	63	No	B	No
WESTWOOD MIDDLE	58	No	A	No
GAINESVILLE HIGH	52	No	A	No
ALACHUA ELEMENTARY	50	Yes	D	No
ARCHER ELEMENTARY*	38	Yes	A	No
HAWTHORNE MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL	36	No	D	No
A. L. MEBANE MIDDLE SCHOOL	40	No	C	No
NEWBERRY HIGH SCHOOL	32	No	B	No
SANTA FE HIGH SCHOOL*	32	No	B	No
CHESTER SHELL ELEMENTARY	52	Yes	D	No
WALDO COMMUNITY ELEMENTARY	32	Yes	D	No
MYRA TERWILLIGER ELEMENTARY	80	Yes	A	No
IDYLVILD ELEMENTARY	73	Yes	B	No
GLEN SPRINGS ELEMENTARY	42	Yes	B	No
MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS ELEM.	98	Yes	C	No
PROFESSIONAL LOFTEN HIGH *	59	No	B	No
EASTSIDE HIGH*	70	No	A	No
F. W. BUCHHOLZ HIGH*	40	No	A	No
HIGH SPRINGS COMMUNITY K-8	23	No	A	No
FORT CLARKE MIDDLE	48	No	A	No
HIDDEN OAK ELEMENTARY	32	No	A	No
IRBY ELEMENTARY PK-2 +	43.7			
KIMBALL WILES ELEMENTARY	47	Yes	A	No
KANAPAHA MIDDLE SCHOOL	47	No	A	No
LAWTON M. CHILES ELEMENTARY	52	Yes	A	No
NEWBERRY ELEMENTARY	36	Yes	B	No
C. W. NORTON ELEMENTARY	52	Yes	C	No
WILLIAM S. TALBOT ELEMENTARY	38	No	A	No
HOWARD BISHOP MIDDLE				
OAK VIEW MIDDLE	32	No	A	No
THE ONE ROOM SCHOOL HOUSE PROJECT	59	Yes	B	Yes
ONE ROOM MIDDLE SCHOOL	50	No		Yes
MICANOPY AREA COOPERATIVE, INC.	19	Yes	A	Yes

School	Minority Rate	Title I	School Grade 2012	Charter
MICANOPY MIDDLE SCHOOL, INC.	31	No	I	Yes
CARING & SHARING LEARNING SCHOOL	97	Yes	F	Yes
EINSTEIN MONTESSORI SCHOOL	35	No	D	Yes
EXPRESSIONS LEARNING ARTS ACADEMY	24	No		Yes
ALACHUA LEARNING CENTER, INC. ELEM.	39	Yes	A	Yes
HOGGETOWNE MIDDLE SCHOOL	59	No	D	Yes
SWEETWATER BRANCH ACADEMY	69	No	B	Yes
SWEETWATER BRANCH ACADEMY ELEM.	68	Yes	F	Yes
ALACHUA LEARNING CENTER, INC. MIDDLE	48	No		Yes
MEADOWBROOK (opens 2013)				Yes
FLORIDA SIATECH JOB CORPS**				Yes
MYcro School ALACHUA**				Yes
GENESIS PREPARATORY K-3				Yes
HEALTHY LEARNING ACADEMY ELEM. K-5				Yes
CHANCE CARTER (CLOSED)				Yes
OASIS ENRICHMENT ACADEMY (CLOSED)				Yes
DESOTO INC. ONLINE HIGH (CLOSED)				Yes
LOVE TO LEARN ELEMENTARY (CLOSED)				Yes

*Magnet Schools

<http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/>

** Schools operated under contract to companies external to Alachua County

+ Irby Elementary is not listed for school grades because it is a PK-2 school. The statistics come from:

<http://www.neighborhoodscout.com/fl/alachua/schools/120003000034/>

Appendix 4. Teacher Assessment with the Value Added Model (VAM)

The VAM score includes two components: indicators of student learning growth measured by statewide assessments, or, by district assessments for subjects and grade levels not measured by statewide assessments, as provided in s. 1008.22(8), F.S. -*Section 1012.34(3)(a)1, Florida Statutes*, and the school component that is the (weighted) average performance of students in a school that is different than the statistical expectation. The “final” teacher value-added score is computed as:

$$\text{Teacher Value-Added Score} = \text{Unique Teacher Component} + .50 * \text{Common School Component}$$

“The teacher’s *value added score* reflects the average amount of learning growth of the teacher’s students above or below the expected learning growth of similar students in the state, using the variables accounted for in the model. For example, if a teacher’s *value added score* is 10, it means students taught by that teacher, on average, demonstrated learning growth of 10 points higher than expected for similar students in the state. In the model recommended by the committee, the teacher’s *value added score* is expressed as a sum of two components: one that reflects how much the school’s students on average gained above or below similar students in the state (a “school component”), and another that reflects how much the teacher’s students on average gained above or below similar students within the school (a “teacher component”).” For a more complete discussion see:

<http://www.fldoe.org/committees/pdf/august12tammpres.pdf>.

The scores for schools and teachers are submitted to the districts, and each district creates its own formula for implementing the district VAM score. This process caused considerable alarm in Alachua County when the district first published the unadjusted VAM scores when about 20% of the teachers received ‘needs improvement or unsatisfactory’ scores. After the adjusted scores were released, 99.5% Alachua County teachers were rated in the top two categories. Teachers are questioning the validity of the process. The variables used to statistically adjust the scores to account for differences among classes and schools are listed below.

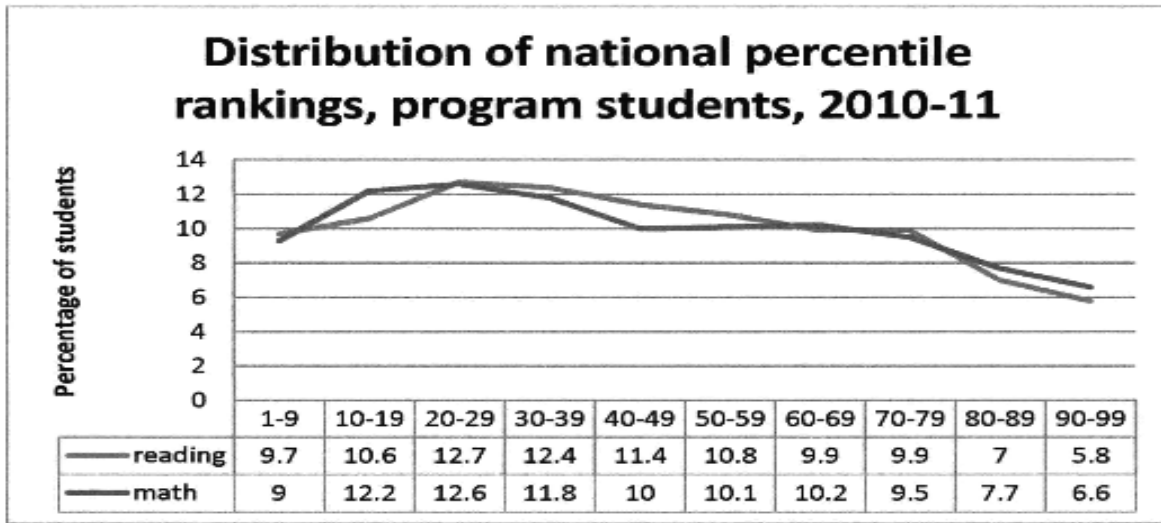
Variables Used to Adjust VAM Scores

- The number subject-relevant courses in which the student is enrolled
- Up to two prior years of achievement scores
- Students with Disabilities (SWD) status
- English Language Learner (ELL) status
- Gifted status
- Attendance
- Mobility (number of transitions)
- Difference from modal age in grade (as an indicator of retention)
- Class size
- Homogeneity of entering test scores in the class

Appendix 5. Alachua County Private Schools with FTC and McKay Scholarships

Private Schools	FTC	McKay	Religious	Denomination	Non-profit Status	Accrediting Agency*
Bhaktivedanta Academy	+	+	YES	Krishna	Yes	
Brentwood School	+	+	No		No	
Christian Life Academy	+	+	YES	nondenom	YES	
Cornerstone Academy	+	+	YES	nondenom	YES	FCCPSA
Countryside Christian School	+	+	YES	Baptist	YES	
Family Life Academy	+	+	YES	Church of God	YES	
First Christian Academy	+	+	YES	Baptist	YES	
Forest Grove Christian Academy	+	+	YES	Baptist	YES	
Gainesville Conductive Education		+	No		No	
Living Springs Academy	+	+	YES	7 th Adventist	YES	
Logo Springs Academy	+	+	No		No	
Passage Christian Academy	+	+	YES	nondenom	YES	
Saint Francis Catholic High School	+	+	YES	Catholic	YES	SACS/CASI
Saint Patrick Catholic Interparish School	+	+	YES	Catholic	YES	FCCAP
Star Christian Academy	+	+	YES	nondenom	YES	
The Rock School	+	+	YES	nondenom	YES	FLOCS,ACTS SACS/CASI
Trilogy School of Learning Alternatives	+	+	No		YES	
Windsor Christian Academy	+	+	YES	Baptist		
Z.L. Sung S.D.A. School	+	+	YES	7 th Adventist		
<p>Accreditation Agencies: FCCPSA Florida Coalition of Christian Private School Association, Inc. SACS/CASI Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation, Inc. FCCAP Florida Catholic Conference Accreditation Program FLOCS/ACTS Florida League of Christian Schools and Association of Christian Teachers and Schools http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/PrivateSchoolDirectory/Default.aspx</p>						

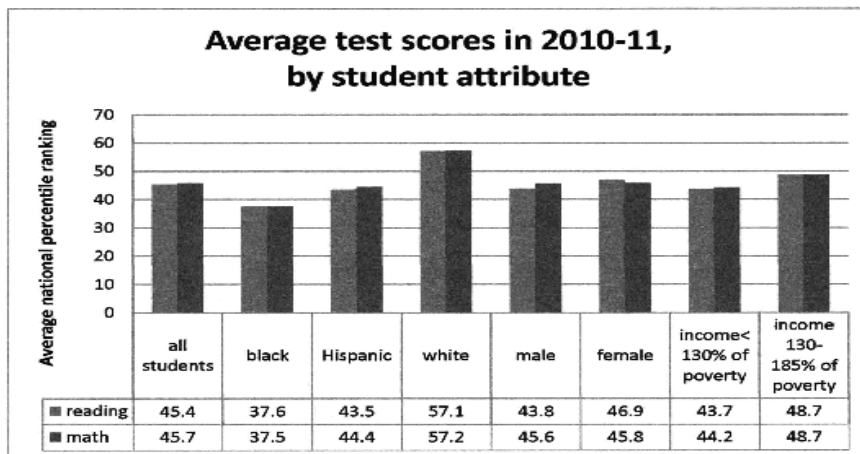
Appendix 6. 2010-11 Data Analysis of FTC Student Performance Test Scores from Dr. Figlio's Study



An analysis of national percentile rankings of 2010-2011 FCT participants was made to compare these students against a nationally-representative group of students.

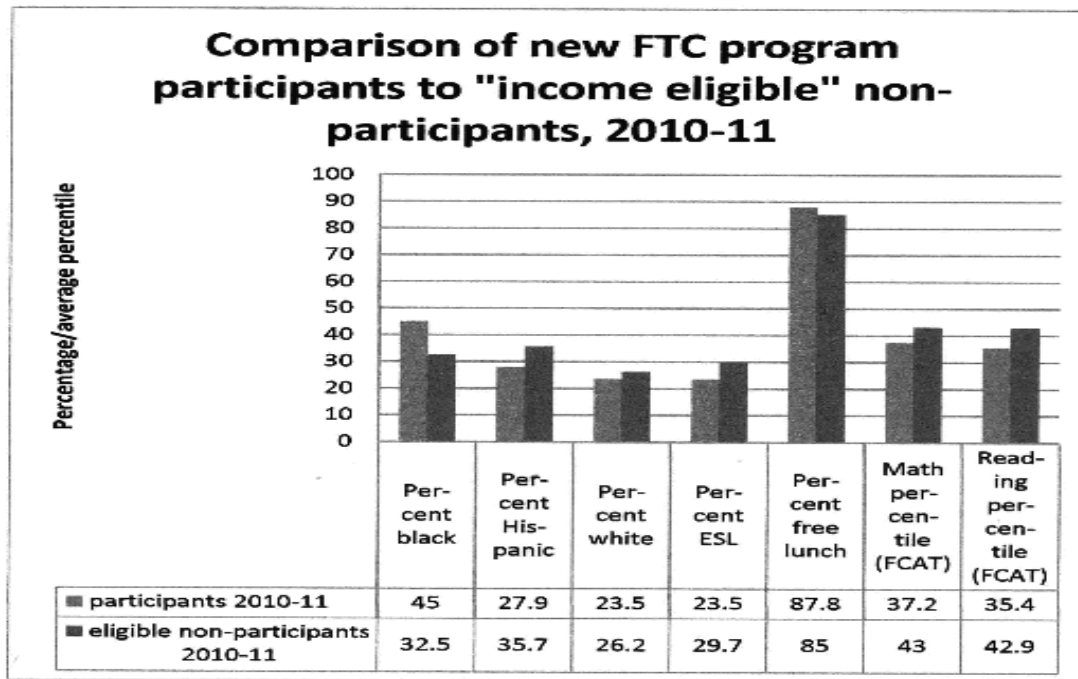
The chart above presents the basic distribution of national percentile rankings among FTC students participating in the program in 2010-11. The typical student in the program scored at the 45th percentile in reading and the 46th percentile in mathematics. This is unchanged from 2007-08, 2008-09, or 2009-10.

Average national percentile rankings of the FTC Scholarship recipient population in math and reading stratified by race, sex and income are presented below.



The chart above presents average norm referenced test scores, expressed in terms of national percentile rankings, for various subsets FTC participants. White participants tend to score better than do minority participants, females tend to perform better than do males, and in data not shown students with married parents tend to score better than do students with unmarried parents, and relatively high-income families tend to score better than do relatively low-income families.

Performance differences between FTC Program students and other income-eligible students across different variables are shown in the table below.



The study compared a set of students who all spent the prior year (2009-10) in Florida public schools and who received subsidized school meals (making them plausibly eligible to participate in the program) with the students who entered the FTC Scholarship Program in 2010-11.

Several confounding factors that were noted during the analysis of the data are as follows

1. Differing choices for why an eligible family selects to have the child participate.
2. Participants were more likely to receive free lunch than eligible non-participants.
3. Uncertainty as to the level of poverty among the self-described low income non-participants since only a small percentage of audits were made on those students and their testing performance was used for comparison.
4. Participants performed more poorly than non-participants in tests the year before entering program.
5. Participants came from lower performing public schools as compared to non-participants.
6. Whichever school the participant came from, the participant was one of the lower performers.
7. Determining whether test scores obtained from different testing programs are valid (It was concluded that they probably are.).

Appendix 7. Responsibilities of the Board of Trustees of the FLVS

The board must annually submit to the Governor, the Legislature, the Commissioner of Education, and the State Board of Education a complete and detailed report setting forth:

1. The operations and accomplishments of the FLVS.
2. Plans for improving the delivery of education through the Internet and other distance learning technology.
3. The assets and liabilities of the FLVS.
4. A copy of an annual financial audit of the accounts and records of the FLVS, conducted by an independent certified public accountant.
5. Recommendations regarding the unit cost of providing services to students.
6. Recommendations regarding an accountability mechanism to assess the effectiveness of the services provided by the Florida Virtual School.

Some responsibilities of the FLVS

1. Provide programming and access to same
2. Providing systems training
3. Provide mid-point and year-end evaluation of the program
4. Provide annual accountability report to Department of Education
5. Provide Franchise Media and Instruction Leadership Training
6. Provide monthly meetings for all district franchise managers.

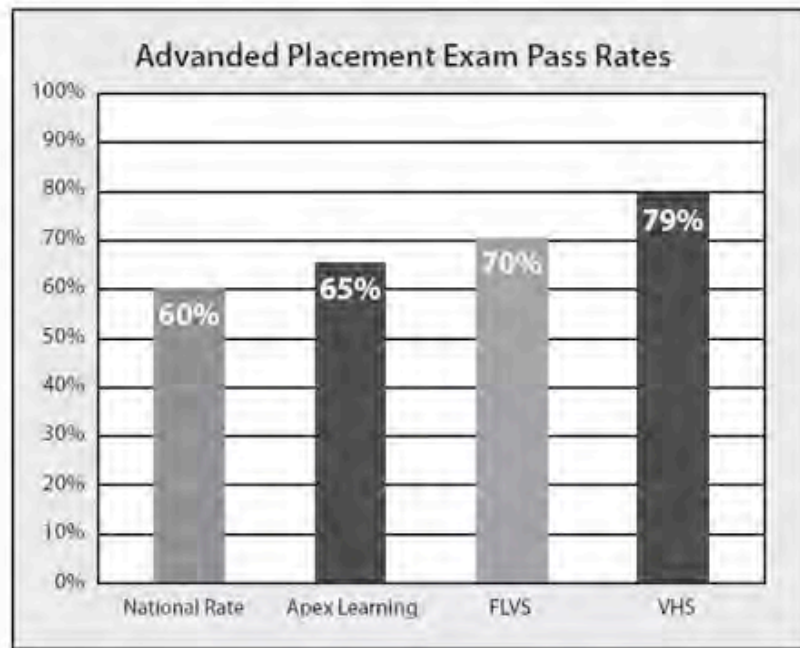
Some responsibilities of the District Franchises

1. Meet regularly with representatives of FLVS prior to implementation of the Franchise agreement before yearly renewal.
2. Provide payment as specified for services.
3. Provide points of contact for FLVS at the district level and at the franchise leadership level.
4. Use the FLVS Learning Management System and Student Information System.
5. Provide only FLVS courses with the franchise.
6. Use the academic integrity policies establish by FLVS.
7. Require that all teachers have completed new teacher training before placement with students.
8. Provide certified teacher in the subject they are teaching or statement of their eligibility
9. Insure that AP courses are College Board authorized.
10. Participate in mid-point and end-of-year franchise evaluation with FLVS approved third party organization
11. Participate in franchise instructional leadership training. The franchise will apply appropriate corrective or disciplinary action to any teachers that FLVS identifies as failing to properly deliver the curriculum.
12. Include the requirement for an independent financial audit.
13. Report on students compulsory attendance requirements.
14. Participate in the statewide assessment program (i.e. see that both full-time and part-time students take assessment tests).
15. Receive a school grade.

From Florida 2012 Statues 1002.37 (Florida virtual school) and 1002.45 (Virtual Instruction Program)

Appendix 8. Advanced Placement Pass Rates and Course Grades for FLVS Students

Figure 3: Advanced Placement Exam Pass Rates



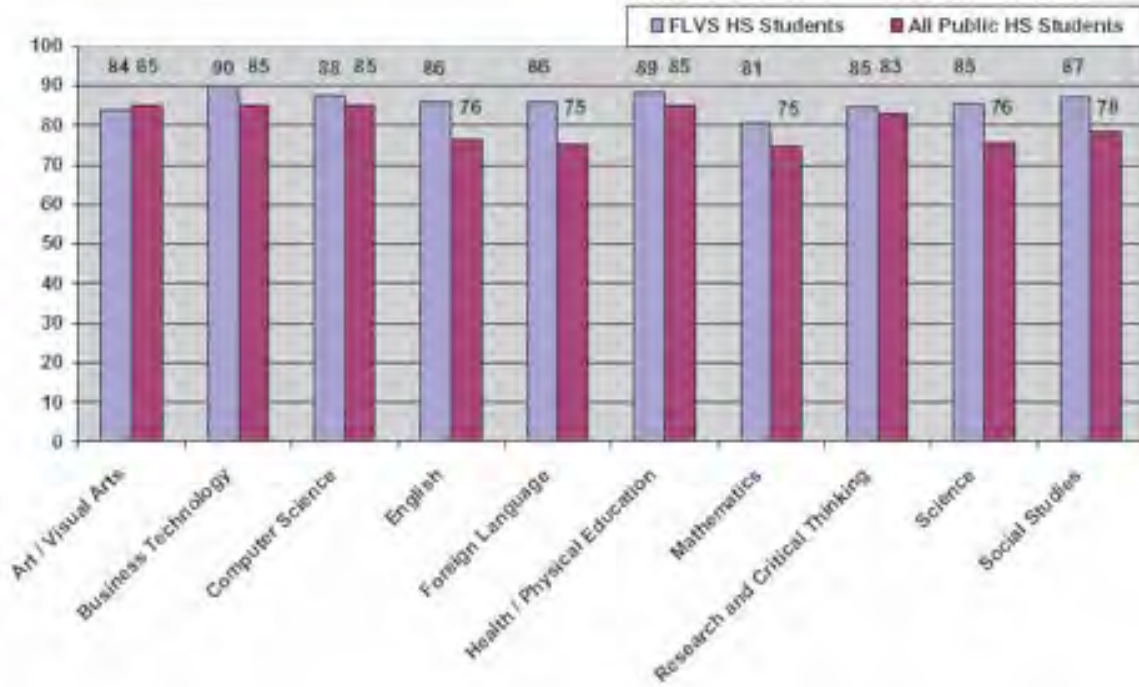
Apex learning, Florida Virtual School., and Virtual High School were compared against the national average of all students taking AP exams. Note the FLVS exceeding national averages for exam results.

“A National Primer on K-12 Online Learning, Version 2,” Matthew Wicks, International Association for K-12 Online Learning October 2010 at

http://www.inacol.org/research/docs/iNCL_NationalPrimerv22010-web.pdf

Appendix 8 (continued). Advanced Placement Pass Rates and Course Grades for FLVS Students

Chart 25: Average Final Grade by Subject for FLVS Students Compared with All Public High School Students for SY 2005-06



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