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## **NEW REPORT COMMISSIONED BY FLORIDA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION PROVIDES BLUEPRINT FOR STATE RESPONSE TO FISCAL CRISIS**

CAMBRIDGE – Despite the current economic crisis, Florida has a unique opportunity to improve its current K-12 education system by protecting policies that provide incentives for higher achievement while cutting back on those that do not contribute to performance, according to a new report co-authored by three scholars at Harvard Kennedy School, Stanford University, and Brown University.

In the new report, prepared at the request of the Florida State Board of Education, Paul E. Peterson of Harvard, Eric A. Hanushek of Stanford and Martin R. West of Brown say that the fiscal crisis should be seen as an opportunity to enhance school productivity. For that to happen, says Paul Peterson, Florida needs to “build upon key, relatively low-cost policies that have in recent years driven school improvement in Florida” over the past decade, urging the state to “strengthen its curricular standards and maintain and extend its student and school accountability systems.” It also needs to focus cuts on areas where they “can be made with minimal impact on educational quality,” adds Martin West.

“While current economic conditions have us facing hard truths about funding in our state, we cannot allow difficult times to derail the incredible academic progress our schools are making,” said State Board of Education Chairman T. Willard Fair. “For the sake of our state’s future, the educational priority for Florida must remain the same – providing an environment that fosters high academic achievement for all of our students.”

**The complete report, “Sustaining Progress in Times of Fiscal Crisis,” is available online at: [www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg) The report will be presented by the authors on Monday, March 16 at 12:30 p.m. at a workshop being held by the State Board of Education in the Cabinet Meeting Room of the Capitol Complex in Tallahassee.**

Like many states around the country, Florida is looking closely at its K-12 fiscal policy to identify necessary reductions in spending that do the least damage. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that the recently approved federal stimulus package will provide Florida with as much as \$3.9 billion in additional assistance over the next two years. As Eric Hanushek says, “If used wisely, these federal funds will enable Florida to put into place a longer term strategy that will enhance school quality while preserving the fiscal viability of the state and its school districts.”

To realize this goal, Peterson, Hanushek, and West offer the following recommendations:

- Florida should enhance its curricular standards and maintain a strong accountability system.
- The state should continue to improve and fund its performance pay program.
- The state should provide incentives for districts to eliminate salary premiums for teacher characteristics unrelated to student achievement, including those for advanced degrees.
- If workforce reduction is necessary, economic stimulus funds should be employed to design policies that minimize uniform, expensive “last hired, first fired” approaches to teacher retention in favor of retaining the most effective members of the workforce.
- The legislature should consider strategies to limit the fiscal impact of class-size reduction, including amendments to the Florida Constitution.
- An expansion of school options would very likely yield savings to state and local taxpayers.

Paul E. Peterson is professor of government and director of the Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG), part of the Taubman Center for State and Local Government at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. Eric A. Hanushek is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University. Martin R. West is deputy director of PEPG and assistant professor of Education and Political Science at Brown University.

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