



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Parents, Educators, Business Leaders Endorse Online Public School Choice
SB 1620 Advances Innovative Education Delivery Options that will Prepare Students for the Future

(Tallahassee, FL) – The Florida Chapter of the National Coalition for Public School Options (NCP SO), representing thousands of parents and students, was joined today by representatives from Foundation for Florida’s Future, The Florida Chamber of Commerce, Associated Industries of Florida, Florida Virtual School, and education leaders from the House and Senate in support of SB 1620, sponsored by Senator Anitere Flores (R- Miami).

Senate Bill 1620 Highlights

- Allows every student, whether in public school, in private school, or home-educated, to take online classes through any of Florida’s certified virtual programs.
- Requires all students, beginning with those entering the 9th grade in 2011-2012, to take at least one online course for graduation.
- Requires the Florida Department of Education to develop an evaluation process for part-time virtual instruction providers.
- Provides more accessible and transparent information to parents looking for virtual learning opportunities for their children.

“Florida has been on the forefront of education innovation that has resulted in measurable student learning gains over the past 15 years,” said Senator Anitere Flores (R-Miami). “This legislation will take us to the next level by offering high quality and cutting edge technology-based curriculum matched to individual’s learning needs and not dictated by their zip code.”

For nearly a decade, Florida has led the nation in providing public school student access to online classes; yet, it ranks relatively low compared to other states in the number of students enrolled in full-time public online schools. For example, in the past two years full-time enrollments in online schools in Georgia have grown to 6,000 students, in South Carolina to 4,500 students, while in Florida’s growth has remained relatively stagnant. This legislation will remove barriers to this effective, economical, and cutting-edge knowledge delivery option.

“I stand with the many parents who are actively involved in our children’s education. Florida should do everything it can to put the tools in our hands to make the best choice for our student’s individual needs,” said Wendy Howard, NCP SO Vice President and Florida Chapter Chair. “This bill contains the common sense reforms that parents are crying out for; we look forward to working with the legislature to make this good idea into law.”

Senate Bill 1620 has passed unanimously out of the first committee of reference and is now in the Senate Budget Committee. There are a number of House vehicles for online public school choice, including HB 7197 by Representative Kelli Stargel (R-Lakeland).

Attached are quotes from participants of today's press conference, as well as other important leaders and advocates for this innovative legislation.

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About The National Coalition for Public School Options

The National Coalition for Public School Options (NCPSO) is an alliance of parents that supports and defends parents' rights to access the best public school options for their children. The Coalition supports the creation of public school options, including charter schools, online schools, magnet schools, open enrollment policies and other innovative education programs. Additionally, NCPSO advocates for free and equal access without restrictions to these public schools for all children. For additional information, go to www.PublicSchoolOptions.org/Florida.



Supporting Statements from Education Leaders and Advocates on SB 1620 April 7, 2011

Dr. Eric J. Smith

Florida Education Commissioner

Prepared Statement on April 5, 2011

"I commend the Senate Education Pre-K – 12 Committee for voting favorably on a critical piece of legislation today. Their decision to move Senate Bill 1620 forward in the legislative process is an important first step in expanding virtual education options for Florida's families.

"Florida is a national leader when it comes to the use of virtual instruction in public education, showcasing programs and entire schools that are using technology to fulfill the academic dreams of students. Should this bill become law, it will mean the dawn of a new era of education innovation in our state, resulting in countless new learning opportunities for every student."

State Senator Anitere Flores (R-Miami)

"Florida has been on the forefront of education innovation that has resulted in measurable student learning gains over the past 15 years. This legislation will take us to the next level by offering high quality and cutting edge technology-based curriculum matched to individual's learning needs and not dictated by their zip code."

State Representative Erik Fresen (R-Miami)

"It is impossible to have a truly quality education curriculum that does not have a component of digital learning. It is not just a wave of the future; it is a marketplace reality of today. There are parents and students who are ready and willing to embrace a total online knowledge delivery structure and we must allow them the ability to access this proven and successful virtual opportunity."

State Representative Kelli Stargel (R-Lakeland)

"Florida has a wealth of school choice options that complement traditional public school instruction. I believe it is important that parents and students have an array of quality choices, in order to choose the best fit for their unique needs. As a parent and House sponsor of both charter school and digital learning legislation, I am proud to work toward ways to expand these and other quality options. Specifically digital learning, whether provided through a total delivery system or a blended learning model, is a viable choice that should be more widely offered to parents and students."

Holly Sagues

Chief Strategist and Policy Officer, Florida Virtual School

"Florida Virtual School's commitment is the student is always at the center of every decision we make. FLVS supports Senate Bill 1620 as it provides every student the opportunity to take an online course before they graduate high school, and, specifically, it allows more choice for Florida students by allowing

us to expand into the K-5 environment. By personalizing learning to what is best for the students and parents, students will be more engaged in their learning producing better results for the state."

Patricia Levesque

Executive Director, Foundation for Florida's Future

"A decade ago, the idea of customizing education for every Sunshine State student was just a dream. Today, technology can make that dream a reality. Integrating technology into Florida's classrooms and expanding access to quality digital learning is critical to preparing students for success in the 21st century. SB 1620 puts Florida on a path to unleash the power of technology and allow every student to customize their education."

Governor Bob Wise (West Virginia, 2001-2005)

President, Alliance for Excellent Education

"Through the internet, today's students are more connected to the outside world than during any other time in history. It is time we stop asking them to power down when they walk into a classroom and instead to power up and use their interest in technology and social networking as a new way to learn. Digital learning offers students the chance to have a more personalized learning environment where they can work at their own pace-they can move on when they master a subject or take extra time in an area where they need more help. It can also provide all students, rural or urban, with access to a number of high-quality subjects that may not be available in their individual schools, including foreign languages, math, and science."

Rose Fernandez

Executive Director, National Parent Network for Online Learning

"Parents in Florida need to have a varied menu of school options for their children. Right now arbitrary details let some families have those options and deny them to others. That is simply discriminatory. Discrimination based on home address or prior public school enrollment or a host of other obstructive hoops must end. SB1620 does that by giving all of Florida's boys and girls equal access to quality, full-time online instruction"

Tom Vander Ark

First Executive Director for Education, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

"We have the opportunity to prepare twice as many young people for the knowledge economy by increasing access to personalized digital learning. If two-thirds rather than one-third of U.S. students were college and career ready, it could mean an extra million participants in the idea economy. Personalized digital learning can make that happen. Doubling the workforce ready graduates could add 3-5% to the Gross Domestic Product while also reducing poverty, incarceration rates, and improving health outcomes. Florida's expansion of access to personalized digital learning will make this entirely possible, and help to lead the nation in transforming our economy through innovative education choices."

Kathleen M. Shanahan

Member, State Board of Education

"As a member of the State Board of Education I am driven to help provide the best system of learning for every child. This bill will continue Florida's leadership in digital learning which is the route to global competition and success for children, educators and business."

Mark Wilson

President and CEO, Florida Chamber of Commerce

“Expanding access to virtual learning opportunities will help ensure students gain the skills needed for the high-wage, high-value jobs in emerging and innovative industries.”

Barney Bishop III

President and CEO, Associated Industries of Florida

“From medicine to mechanics, cutting-edge innovations are taking place on a digital platform. Providing digital learning opportunities now is critical if we are to aptly prepare our students to enter the dynamic economic and employment environment of the future. Florida businesses need a workforce with the right skills if we are to be competitive with Shanghai, Singapore, Seoul and the Far East. It’s imperative that our students’ learning and career training be reflective of the 21stCentury world in which we work.”

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