

Dear Friends,

Florida's students deserve a high quality and solid educational foundation because their future, and our future depends on student success. We cannot, and must not, let them down. That's why I am proud to report on significant progress in our education system that we have made this week.

First, there are several important bills making their way through the legislative process that will enhance our system by increasing curriculum standards, replacing the FCAT with end of course examinations, and ensuring that quality teachers are paid more for their hard work. Many of the provisions in these bills are included in Florida's "*Race to the Top*" grant application which could bring hundreds of millions of dollars in additional funds for our schools this year.

I am proud of Florida's strong and measurable educational gains in recent years. This week, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading results were released, and Florida was one of only nine states to achieve significant increases in eighth grade reading scores. I am particularly proud of our African American and Hispanic students who significantly outpaced their national counterparts in reading.

As I continue to fight to protect and increase funding for public education, I also support parental choice for their children's education. Wednesday I stood alongside over 5,000 students and their parents, teachers and administrators to support the *Step Up for Students* program. This is one of four Scholarship Funding Organizations eligible to participate in the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program. Last year, school choice programs saved taxpayers \$39 million. I support an expansion of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program sponsored by Senator Joe Negron and Representative Will Weatherford because it will increase and expand the scholarship while also strengthening the academic accountability and transparency of the program.

A strong state university system is also critical to our future success. As we work to build Florida's knowledge-based economy we must ensure that our universities encourage the innovation and talented workforce the Sunshine State needs. The decision by the Board of Governors of the State University System of Florida to drop the long-standing lawsuit against the Florida Legislature was welcomed news this week. I am thankful to the talented and dedicated members of the Board of Governors and Legislature for their leadership and commitment to bettering higher education in Florida.

Nothing is more important to Florida's future than the talent and knowledge of tomorrow's leaders.

