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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW SOUTH CAROLINA THINK TANK UNVEILS GROUNDBREAKING K-12 EDUCATION REPORT

Compares South Carolina and Florida K-12 education outcomes, highlights success of Florida reform agenda

Columbia, SC – Today, the newly formed Palmetto Policy Forum announced the release of its inaugural policy paper, *Transformation: What South Carolina Can Learn from Florida's K-12 Reforms*.

In 1998, South Carolina students led Florida students in performance on a number of national tests, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as “The Nation’s Report Card.” But over the last decade, Florida far surpassed South Carolina in K-12 education outcomes, most notably among traditionally disadvantaged student populations:

- v **3rd Grade Reading (p.3-5).** While gains were made, 2011 NAEP scores showed only 48% of low-income South Carolina 4th graders were functionally literate. Meanwhile, from 1998-2011, low-income Florida students scoring “Basic or Better” on reading in the 4th grade surged from 37% to 62%, leaving room for additional progress but showing a large improvement. In fact, *low-income* Florida students outscored *all* South Carolina students on the NAEP 4th grade reading exam in 2011, demonstrating the important fact that demography is not destiny. *Dramatic improvement for disadvantaged students is possible.*

- v **Minority Students (p.2-5).**
 - ü From 1998-2010, the number of Black and Hispanic Florida students passing one or more Advanced Placement exam more than tripled (p.2).
 - ü In 1998, Florida’s Hispanic students read approximately one grade level behind the average South Carolina student. Now, Hispanic students have made such strong progress that they outscore the statewide reading averages of *all* students in 21 states and the District of Columbia, including South Carolina.
 - ü In 1998, Black students in South Carolina significantly outscored those in Florida in reading. In 2011, Florida’s Black 4th graders were reading a full grade level ahead of their South Carolina peers (p.5).

- v **Disabled Students (p.8).** Florida saw the *largest gain* in the nation for students with disabilities in combined math and reading NAEP scores from 2003-2011 with a net gain of 54 combined points. Sadly, South Carolina suffered the nation’s *largest decline*, with disabled students scoring 44 combined points lower in 2011 than 2003.

Co-authored by Dr. Matt Ladner, Senior Advisor for Policy and Research at the Foundation for Excellence in Education and Dr. Oran Smith, Senior Fellow at the Palmetto Policy Forum, *Transformation* reveals a broad, interrelated list of reforms that are still paying these dividends for the children of the Sunshine State:

- v **Curtailling social promotion (p.6).** Florida students were promoted to the next grade when they were ready, not when they had completed 180 days of seat time.
- v **Providing school choice (p.7).** Florida parents were given the opportunity to select the school that fit their child best and the dollars followed the child (all while protecting public schools from harm).
- v **Grading schools, focusing on the lowest 25% (pp.9-11).** Florida schools were graded on how well they performed with their most challenged students. A-F grading increased focus and focus increased performance.
- v **Leading the nation in technology (p.5).** Florida bridged the digital divide with aggressive development of online programs.
- v **Concentrating on reading (pp.1-5)** Florida embraced the importance of reading to all academic success and eliminated barriers to progress, especially for disadvantaged student populations.
- v **Welcoming great minds (p.6).** Florida achieved greater access to the abilities of its citizens who had the capacity and life experience to make great teachers without forcing them to follow complicated and redundant certification processes.

"Florida has truly undergone an education transformation, and South Carolina can too," said Patricia Levesque, CEO of the Foundation for Excellence in Education. "Improvements don't happen overnight, but we continue to see the fruits of Florida's long-term revolution into a national model for higher standards, accountability and options to help all children reach their full potential. Through bold leadership and student-centered reforms, the Palmetto State can help ensure every child receives a high-quality education."

Commenting on the study, Forum President Ellen Weaver stated, "Florida's reforms are built on the foundation of equal opportunity and the belief that all children can learn. Harnessing the power of principle-based policy entrepreneurship, Florida leaders came together around a bi-partisan agenda of data-driven accountability, high expectations, funding for achievement, choice for families and rewarding effective teachers.

Weaver continued, "Our challenge – and opportunity – is to apply the lessons learned in Florida and other innovating states. Florida has led a national wave of student-centered reforms that are delivering measurable results for students from every possible background. South Carolina must join that tide."

[Click here](#) to access a full PDF version of *Transformation*, which is also attached.

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more information, visit www.palmettopolicy.org.