



MEDIA RELEASE

"Closing the Gap" Education Study

How Hispanic Students in Florida Closed the Gap with all Rhode Island Students

Is a soft bigotry of low-expectations restricting achievement?

[Read the full Study here ...](#)

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Providence, RI -- A clear path for improved educational performance for Rhode Island students - and in particular, economically disadvantaged students - is described in a study released today by the Rhode Island Center for Freedom and Prosperity. The study, *Closing the Gap*, documents how Hispanic students in Florida, following over a decade of aggressive school reform initiatives in that state, gained the equivalent of two and a half grade levels against all students in the Ocean State and by 2009 were able to perform at the exact same level. "There should be renewed hope for all families in underprivileged communities in our state that with proper reform, their children can overcome persistent achievement gaps", said Mike Stenhouse, CEO for the RI Center for Freedom. "It is no longer acceptable to sit on our hands and obstruct reforms that have proven to be successful in other states," Stenhouse continued.

Hispanics are the largest minority group in Rhode Island and represent 11 percent of the total population and 19 percent of the public school population. Unfortunately, Rhode Island Hispanic students have among the lowest scores in the nation in both math and reading, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Commissioner of Education, Deborah Gist, has vowed to improve this ranking. The *Closing the Gap* study shows the way.

"Despite spending per pupil steadily increasing in the Ocean State, K-12 academic achievement for low-income and minority children have stagnated at abysmally low levels", said Dr. Matthew Ladner, a nationally recognized education expert, who conducted the primary research for the study. "Florida's reforms, however, prove that it is possible to dramatically improve the bang for the education buck. Best of all, Florida's children who started with the least have academically gained the most," Ladner added.



Closing the Gap cites reforms in evaluations and accountability for teachers and schools in the terms of transparency as well as parental choice. The study

documents how the latest NAEP scores strengthen the argument that Florida-style reforms should be considered for Rhode Island. The full study can be accessed from the Center for Freedom's website at www.RIFreedom.org .

Closing the Gap explains in some detail why Florida's reforms, while benefiting all students, have been especially beneficial to disadvantaged students in terms of race, income levels, and disabilities. The study details the key components of Florida's K-12 education reform strategy that, if implemented in the Ocean State, could provide more young Rhode Islanders with an opportunity to succeed in school and enhance their chance of pursuing and achieving their dreams.

"Our Center for Freedom categorically rejects the bigoted claim from defenders of the status-quo that schools are failing because of socioeconomic factors and the education level of parents", said Giovanni Cicione, the Center's Senior Policy Advisor. "We firmly believe that with proper reform to our school system, that all students in Rhode Island can have a real chance to excel and that each student possesses the capacity to learn and the right to obtain a meaningful education. Are underprivileged Rhode Island students any less capable than their Florida counterparts," asked Cicione? "We don't think so."

In the study's conclusion, the RI Center for Freedom recommends multiple educational reform policy goals for Rhode Island that closely mirror the successfully implemented initiatives in Florida, and which are mainly consistent with the objectives in the Rhode Island Department of Education's Strategic Plan.

The Rhode Island Center for Freedom and Prosperity is the state's leading free-enterprise public policy think tank. Non-partisan, yet firm in its belief that freedom is indispensable to citizens' well-being and prosperity, the Center for Freedom's mission is to restore competitiveness to Rhode Island through the advancement of market-based reform solutions.

Dr. Matthew Ladner is an education fellow with the RI Center for Freedom. He is also a Senior Fellow with the Foundation for Educational Choice and the Goldwater Institute and is the Senior Advisor of Policy and Research for the Foundation for Excellence in Education and previously served as director of state projects at the Alliance for School Choice. Ladner has written numerous studies on school choice, charter schools and special education reform and coauthored the Report Card on American Education: Ranking State K-12 Performance, Progress and Reform for the American Legislative Exchange Council. Ladner has testified before Congress, the United States Commission of Civil Rights and numerous state legislative committees.