

**Lee County Legislative Delegation Meeting, Nov. 8, 2011**

**Summary of headlines from The News-Press Media special regional report on education and the workforce of the future. These were presented at The News-Press Media Group's Market Watch Education Summit on Oct. 5, 2011.**

*The News-Press Media Group set out to discover whether Southwest Florida is doing a good job of educating a world-class workforce of the future. Our team viewed mountains of data; interviewed multiple sources; invited experts in for a roundtable discussion; surveyed business leaders. We videotaped kids, parents, legislators and community leaders, capturing their criticism, ideas and hopes for the future. Here are the headlines.*

**Southwest Florida's economy depends on getting today's students ready for jobs that haven't even been invented yet.**

A lot of experts agree: There will be an increased demand in fields related to STEM – science, technology, engineering and math. STEM jobs pay \$25/hour on average - \$9 more than those in other lines of work. There will be a demand for biomedical engineers, network and data analysts, financial examiners, athletic trainers and computer app engineers – all requiring bachelor's degrees.

Locally, demand is likely to remain for technicians, dental hygienists, health care workers and systems and data analysts. But if the economy is to diversify, we will also need more chemists, biologists, engineers and computer programmers.

**By 2015, Florida will be short about 100,000 science and technology workers.**

**When you compare U.S. student performance to the world, we're nowhere near the top.**

Scores from the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment show 15-year-old students in the U.S. performing about average in reading and science, and below average in math.

Out of 34 countries, the U.S. ranked 14th in reading, 17th in science and 25th in math. Those scores are higher than those from 2003 and 2006, but far behind the highest scoring countries, including China, South Korea, Finland and Singapore and Canada.

The nation fares about average compared to the world. Florida fares at the bottom compared to the nation.

**Florida high school graduates this year ranked near the bottom nationally for their scores on the ACT.**

We tied for 48<sup>th</sup> with the District of Columbia, and only Tennessee and Mississippi had lower scores.

IT IS GENERALLY AND STATISTICALLY TRUE - and most experts agree - that the more people who take the test, the lower the average scores are going to be.

In Massachusetts, the state with the highest scores, only 22 percent of its graduates took the test, compared to 66 percent in Florida.

Still, if you consider the states with the highest participation – participation of 60 percent or more – Florida still ranks near the bottom, 23<sup>rd</sup> out of 26.

**Florida ACT: 48 of 50 states; 23 of 26 with participation of 60 percent or higher**

**Florida SAT: 46 of 50 states; 15 of 20 with participation of 60 percent or higher**

**So the nation ranks in the middle of the world and the state ranks at the bottom of the nation, and now we see that Southwest Florida ranks in the middle of the state.**

While Charlotte County is an exception, ranking 11<sup>th</sup> out of 67 counties on average ACT scores, many of our students are scoring below state and national averages in reading, writing, math and science.

**Rank of 67 Florida counties:**

	<b>ACT</b>	<b>SAT</b>
<b>Charlotte:</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Collier:</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Glades:</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Hendry:</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Lee:</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>35</b>

Of course, a high number of students taking the test and the achievement gap between race and income groups come into play here, too.

We are a community – and a state – with a high number of minority and low-income students. This IS the workforce of the future.

**Local businesses told us that Southwest Florida high school students entering the workforce are NOT well prepared** with the basics, such as reading writing and math. And they can't problem solve or think creatively.

Just 40 percent said that they believed local high school graduates are adequately or well prepared for the workforce.

**“We get people from the K-12 system who lack the basic abilities. Their mathematical abilities are atrocious. Their ability to read for comprehension and their communication skills are bad.” Stephen Calabro, President of Southwest Florida College**

Colleges report a similar concern: Almost 47 percent of students entering community colleges in Florida were not ready in reading, writing and math, according to a Florida Department of Education study. At Edison State College, the number is 70 percent.

Businesses had a more favorable impression of graduates of Southwest Florida colleges and universities: 46 percent reported that skills were adequate and 26 percent said students were well prepared.

Looking ahead, we heard that attention to four key areas could move the needle toward excellence:

1. Fix the reading problem
2. Set and achieve a standard of excellence in STEM education
3. Close the achievement gap
4. Teach critical thinking, problem solving and the ability to navigate the real world

1. First, the high school reading problem.

Either the test is too hard in high school, or it’s too easy in middle and elementary school. Most 15 and 16 year olds don’t meet the state’s reading standard. That means the majority don’t read at grade level, just two years before graduation.

**10<sup>th</sup> graders who don’t read at grade level:**

<b>Charlotte:</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Collier:</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Glades:</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Hendry:</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Lee:</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>State:</b>	<b>61%</b>

2. Set a standard of excellence in STEM education: Science, technology, engineering and math.

**11<sup>th</sup> graders at grade level for science:**

Charlotte:	41%
Collier:	37%
Glades:	37%
Hendry:	29%
Lee:	35%
State:	40%

Educators point to successes in tech and science programs at Dunbar High School, Island Coast and Mariner. And East Naples Middle School’s Gateway to Technology gets praise.

Still there’s a long way to go to produce a steady stream of students

3. Solve the achievement gap between performance of minority and white students with aggressive trouble-shooting and a culture of innovation.

**In Lee County: 47 percent of white students meet the state reading standard; 30 percent of Hispanic students do and just 17 percent of black readers score a 3 or higher on the FCAT.**

Collier scores tell a similar story. 56 percent of white students are at 10<sup>th</sup> grade level for reading; only 17 percent of African Americans are and 27 percent of Hispanic students are.

**This is a top issue in Southwest Florida where minorities make up the majority of students in four of our five counties and more than half of all public school students are considered low income.**

**% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders reading at grade level**

	White	Black	Hispanic
Charlotte	43	28	33
Collier	56	17	27
Glades	36	15	18
Hendry	33	13	20
Lee	47	17	30
State	50	19	35

4. We need to teach our children how to think, how to problem solve and how to navigate the real world.

We heard again and again from teachers and parents: there's too much emphasis on the test.

**One middle school teacher tallied 34 hours of testing alone,** not including the test prep time, rallies meant to pump children up and ease their fears, and many hours of lessons about what to expect on the test.

“The time left to actually educate students, to teach them to reason and comprehend, is less and less each year.” Sandra Andrews, Bonita Springs Middle School teacher.

There is a tension that must be resolved between the drive for accountability and the desire to graduate well-rounded, thoughtful young people.

Teachers, parents and students complain that the number of field trips keeps decreasing when students should be engaging in the community. **Internships, partnerships and business outreach would improve student performance, they said.**

Our friends Susan McManus and Marshall Bower at the Collier and Lee foundations both said it best: **Get the students out of the classroom and get the community into the schools.**

Of course, not everyone will go to college...not everyone NEEDS to go to college. But we can feed the needs of our changing economy by **helping our children choose a clear career path by the time they graduate from high school.**

We are at a crossroads. We can take and demand action of ourselves and legislators or we can sit back and accept the average middle in an average state. Can we, as a community, commit boldly TODAY for excellence TOMORROW?

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**For more information, see [www.news-press.com/educationsummit](http://www.news-press.com/educationsummit) or contact:**

- Terry Eberle, [teberle@news-press.com](mailto:teberle@news-press.com)
- Cindy McCurry-Ross, [cmcross@news-press.com](mailto:cmcross@news-press.com)
- Karin Cherwick-Skala, [kcherwick@news-press.com](mailto:kcherwick@news-press.com)