

Education & Workforce

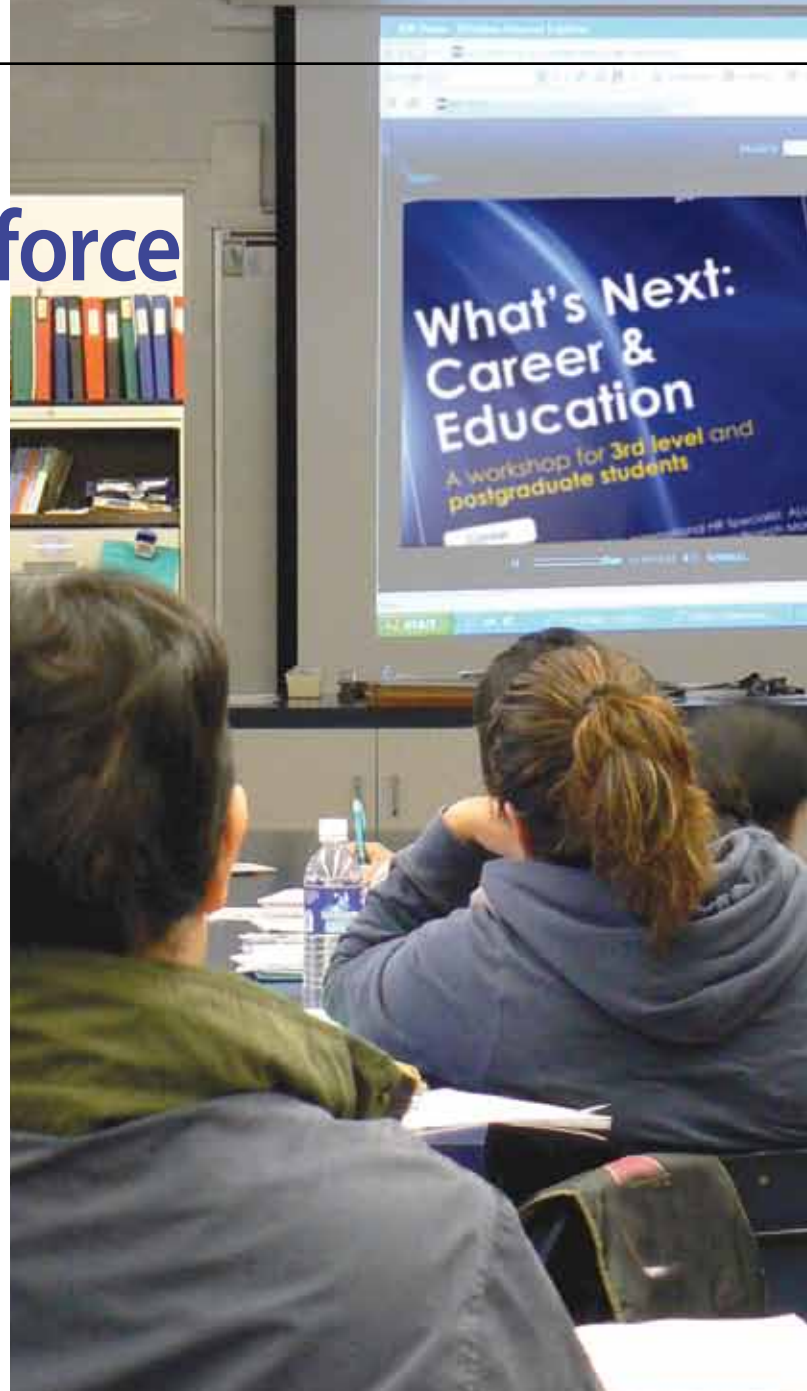
Florida's economic success, future growth and overall quality of life will depend heavily on developing and retaining skilled workers. The state faces critical areas of need in nursing, teaching, construction trades, manufacturing and other knowledge-based professions where specialized skills and experience are indispensable. Recently, AIF joined Education Commissioner Eric Smith in supporting Florida's application for federal **Race to the Top** funding. This type of funding has the potential to transform Florida's educational system into a model for the entire country. The ability to build upon current successes is also very important for the business community because:

- Employers need employees who can speak intelligently, write cogently and think creatively. Students must also be literate in multiculturalism in order to compete in a global economy.
- We must produce a workforce that can compete with the likes of China, India and South Korea, not just with other states.
- Ultimately, no issue impacts the ability of Florida's economy to grow more than education at all levels from pre-kindergarten through college.
- Without an educated workforce, Florida will be unable to compete with other states and countries in attracting qualified individuals to fill these jobs and recruit new industries.
- Employers need employees who also have the requisite "soft" skills such as showing up for work on time, dressing appropriately and a willingness to socialize with other employees.

The private sector must work hand-in-hand with education leaders to develop a skilled workforce to support Florida business and to bridge the gap between academic research and marketable technologies, thereby increasing our state's competitiveness in attracting industry and diversifying Florida-based businesses.

For the last two years, AIF has concentrated on supporting policy proposals that address the current lag on several indicators of **college and career readiness**, most notably graduation requirements.

The preliminary agenda is centered on the following priorities:



College and Career Readiness

AIF SUPPORTS a continued emphasis on increasing the rigor of high school course offerings and graduation requirements. Much work has been done to raise curricular standards and align them to college and career readiness, but work remains to be done on the actual courses required to graduate with a standard high school diploma in Florida. Currently, the passing 10th grade FCAT score is a ticket to remediation in college and the courses needed to succeed at a college-ready level (Algebra 2 and specific sciences) are not required for graduation. This will be a top priority for AIF this session because decreasing funds for remediation will provide much-needed dollars for other educational needs.

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AIF will also SUPPORT efforts to upgrade foundational skills. One criticism of the move to increase high school graduation requirements is that some students currently in the system would not be prepared for these new requirements. AIF doesn't believe this is a valid reason not to increase standards and proposes that along with new requirements, a focus on improving foundational skills at all levels should be included. One example of a program to increase foundational skills is the Florida Ready to Work program that has been in law for several years in Florida. **AIF SUPPORTS the Ready to Work program and other programs that focus on getting students prepared for more rigorous courses in high school and, thus, prepared for college and the workplace.**

School Accountability

AIF has supported changes to school accountability and will continue to support modifications that broaden our education accountability while maintaining all the educational gains that have been seen in the past decade. In addition, Florida's accountability system is part of the reason we are so well positioned for federal Race to the Top funds. AIF will work to ensure this position is not harmed by any proposed changes. Since the passage of Governor Bush's A+ Plan for Education, which created an accountability program linking FCAT scores to school grades, opponents have tried to do away with the FCAT. Meanwhile, proponents praise it for the tremendous gains in student achievement that



Senate Education Pre-K - 12 Appropriations Chair Sen. Stephen Wise (R-Jacksonville) outlines his education priorities during an AIF Pre-Session Briefing.

have been seen in Florida. Over the past few years, lawmakers have passed legislation that continues to refine the accountability system by adding end-of-course exams and changing the high school grading system to be less reliant on 10th grade FCAT scores.

Increase Use of Technology in Public Schools

AIF SUPPORTS efforts to increase the use of technology in our state's public schools. With a strong focus on the skills needed for the "knowledge economy" of Florida's future, AIF will continue to work with the Legislature to improve students' use of technology in the classroom as technology skills are such a fundamental part of today's society and global workforce.

Class Size

The Legislature has completed the capital outlay required to meet the class size reduction mandate and the DOE reports that compliance is high. However, the next phase of implementation requires compliance at the class level and many agree that this phase poses significant financial concerns that need to be addressed. The 2010 legislature is expected to consider legislation, much like last year's House Joint Resolution 919, to address these implementation issues. **AIF SUPPORTS the "Right Size Class Size" proposal sponsored by Rep. Will Weatherford and Sen. Don Gaetz because it strikes the right balance of maintaining the spirit of the class size reduction mandate, but gives a workable solution to implementation issues.**

Workforce Development

AIF SUPPORTS funding for Quick Response Training and the Incumbent Worker Training Programs. The availability of a qualified workforce is essential to the economic prosperity of our state. These two programs ensure that companies looking to make investments in Florida can access the skilled workforce they need or quickly retrain employees in order to begin operations as soon as possible.

AIF Lobby Team Members Assigned to the Area of Education & Workforce:

Peter Harris – Workforce Development

Stacey Webb – Education