



Math Readiness & Opportunity in Florida

A Conversation Starter for Education Foundations

A Conversation between the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations, Dr. Edward Dieterle, Education Research Partners, and Stu Greenberg, Curriculum and Associates

Key Takeaway:

Florida's youngest students are leading the way in math, but we still have work to do as they move into middle school. Strengthening instruction, supporting teachers, and building "math-friendly" communities will keep that momentum going strong.

Why This Matters:

Math isn't just about numbers; it's about opportunity. Students who are math-ready tend to earn more, go further, and help power Florida's innovation economy. More than half of our matching grant funds already support STEM learning, so this work is squarely in our wheelhouse.

Every investment we make in math readiness, whether through teacher training, classroom grants, or community programming, helps strengthen Florida's future workforce.

What the Data Tell Us:

- Only about 30% of U.S. eighth graders are proficient in math, even though nearly nine in ten parents believe their child is on grade level.
- Florida's fourth graders are ahead of the national average, but by eighth grade, performance slips, a sign of challenges during the middle-grade transition.
- Adjusted for demographics, Florida's math results hold strong: younger students exceed, and older students match national peers.
- High performers have rebounded quickly; students who started behind still need focused support.

Florida's "Formula for Success"

The state's renewed focus on math instruction mirrors the success of Just Read, Florida!, this time applied to math.

This includes:

- Strong, standards-aligned core instruction.
- Targeted interventions for struggling learners.
- Regular progress monitoring, feedback, and goal-setting.
- Teacher PD that builds prerequisite and foundational knowledge.
- Results show strong early-grade performance and steady gains for students who begin behind.



Why Middle School Is the Turning Point:

Middle school is where math often gets tough. Students carry “Swiss-cheese knowledge”—strong in some areas, full of gaps in others. Teachers have short class periods and limited time to reteach fundamentals.

Combined with screen-driven instant gratification, students can lose persistence. They need coaching, encouragement, and confidence-building.

Smart Ways for Education Foundations to Invest in Math Readiness:

Fund programs aligned to state standards and rich in teacher-student interaction.
Invest in professional development that helps teachers identify and fill gaps.
Support before- and after-school programs that complement classroom learning.
Celebrate student math progress through recognition programs.

A good rule of thumb: Ask whether an investment strengthens the relationship between teacher, student, and curriculum.

Creating Numeracy-Rich Communities:

- Add math storybooks, estimation games, and time-based activities in classrooms and community spaces.
- Integrate math into art, music, PE, and science.
- Encourage students to write their own problems or riddles.
- When kids see math everywhere, they stop fearing it and start owning it.

Algebra: The Ultimate Gatekeeper:

Algebra I by eighth grade is one of the strongest predictors of post-secondary success. It opens doors to trades, tech, engineering, and more. Every student can master algebra with time, practice, and encouragement.

Talking Point:

Florida’s math story is one of progress and promise. With the right support, our students will continue to rise. When Florida’s students succeed in math, Florida’s communities and economy thrive.