

Florida Summit on Science and Mathematics Education (Florida Summit I)

The first Florida Summit on Mathematics and Science Education was held in February 2005, funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation. Additional support for the Florida Summit was provided by the National Alliance of State Science and Mathematics Coalitions (NASSMC) from grants provided by NASA and the U.S. Department of Education. The ExxonMobil Foundation, which has provided funding for Florida science educators to implement Building a Presence for Science (BAP), also supported the participation of BAP members in the summit.

The goal of the summit was to enhance Florida's economic development by preparing its workforce in mathematics and science, with the objective of strengthening student achievement in science and mathematics by increasing teacher effectiveness. Legislators, the Governor's staff, Florida Department of Education officials, business and industry representatives, and science and mathematics educators at all levels convened to establish a common understanding of the need for science and mathematics literacy in our workforce, the challenges of today's schools, effective methods of mathematics and science instruction, the nature and dimensions of creating change in mathematics and science instruction, and action plans necessary to achieve them.

The summit set the stage for developing action plans and securing support for action. Securing support requires that legislators have an opportunity to focus on understanding and internalizing the need for better mathematics and science. The first part of the summit provided that opportunity. It included presentations on the national perspective and on Florida's specific needs and interests. Speakers conveyed an understanding of current conditions, with respect to both demographics and culture in our schools, and contrasted traditional teaching with inquiry-based, active learning approaches that are research-based. Speakers discussed parameters and strategies important to understanding what is needed to produce changes in student learning and attitudes. Points made included the cost of education in terms of human resources as well as dollars, the complexities of competing demands on resources, the need for core leadership in the legislature, and recommendations from the Business Higher Education Forum. The last formal part of the program focused on discussing strategies for change and models and processes that make it happen.

For the second part of the summit, selected education experts, business and industry representatives, and Florida Department of Education staff met to propose action plans for the legislature, the Department of Education, and local businesses and school districts. Speakers provided additional understanding of the need for better mathematics and science education, and what works in mathematics and science education.