Education Policy in Florida: Explaining County-Level Approval of the 2002 Constitutional Amendments

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EDUCATION POLICY IN FLORIDA:

EXPLAINING COUNTY-LEVEL APPROVAL OF THE 2002 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

by

RACHEL M. FRIANT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors in the Major Program in Political Science in the College of Sciences and in The Burnett Honors College at the University of Central Florida

Orlando, Florida

Fall Term 2017

Thesis Chair: Dr. Aubrey Jewett
ABSTRACT

This research analyzes county-level support for the 2002 Constitutional Amendments for Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten Education (VPK) and Florida’s Amendment to Reduce Class Size (CSA). Three regression models are constructed for each dependent variable (support for VPK and support for CSA): a bivariate model with political party, a full model with all theoretically identified variables, and a best model with just the independent variables that have the most explanatory power. A variety of socioeconomic, demographic and political independent variables are tested. Four independent variables had a statistically significant positive relationship with support for both VPK and CSA: Democratic registration, Hispanic population, higher education, and population density.
DEDICATIONS

For my parents, Dion and Barbara, who always taught me that education is a priority. Thank you always for all of your love, support, and encouragement.

For my professors and mentors, thank you for your patience, wisdom, and guidance.

For all my friends who never let me fail and pushed me to always do my best.

And for my younger sister, Catie, my younger cousins, and the collection of young minds currently in Florida’s Public School Systems who motivate me.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincerest gratitude is extended to Dr. Aubrey Jewett, Dr. Phillip Pollock III, and Dr. Anthony Grajeda for each of your diligent assistance, guidance, and patience throughout this process. Thank you for seeing my thesis to its completion when external factors made it difficult. Special thanks to Dr. Jewett for your experienced input and continued accommodation of my work schedule. Special thanks are also in order for Kelly Astro and my LEAD Scholars professors for your early support and encouragement to begin my thesis making this all possible. To my entire support network at the University of Central Florida – classmates, friends, roommates, sisters, and educators – thank you as your varied support has kept me inspired and passionate.
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RESEARCH QUESTIONS: INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

Education has always been viewed as an investment in our future, but for much of Florida’s recent history it has not been prioritized on the legislative agenda. In 2002, two interest groups led by Democratic politicians successfully placed two constitutional amendments on the ballot, via initiative petition, focused on education reform: Voluntary Universal Pre-Kindergarten Education (VPK) and Florida’s Amendment to Reduce Class Size (CSA) (Florida Department of State Division of Elections, 2002). These amendments and the implementation of subsequent legislation allowed “Florida [to become one] of the first states in the country to offer free pre-kindergarten for all 4-year-olds regardless of family income” (Office of Early Learning, 2016) and to ensure efficient teacher to student ratios in the classrooms for core subjects, respectfully (Florida Department of Education, 2016). These amendments were progressive steps towards improving foundational education in the Sunshine State.

These amendments were proposed in order to help solve two problems in Florida: the educational achievement gap between rich and poor (often minority) students which begins before kindergarten, and the increasingly over-crowded classrooms in many of the state’s urban areas. Unsurprisingly perhaps, both amendments arose from Miami-Dade County. South Florida is no stranger to overcrowding and densely populated urban areas with high minority populations, but Miami-Dade is consistently the most populous and diverse of them all. According to the 2000 Census, just two years before the sponsorship of these proposals, Miami-
Dade had a recorded population of 2,253,362 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Putting that in perspective, this county homed 14.1% of the entire state’s population and beat the next populous county, Broward, by more than 630,000 people. Former Miami Mayor Alex Penelas (Cuban) and Former State Senator and U.S. State Representative Kendrick Meek (African American), also from Miami, sponsored the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten and Class Size Amendment, respectively. These amendments aimed to combat some of the hurdles that were affecting Florida’s educational infrastructure. Mayor Penelas was politically active in his prime engaging in a plethora of other sponsorships and proposals but he was most known for his passion and fervor for the establishment of a Universal Pre-Kindergarten system for the state. In 2002, the Orlando Sentinel reported the issue to be his “crusade” in an article that championed his plan (Marquez, 2002). The proposal was well supported among most voter groups, so Mayor Penelas’ was not forced to win the hearts and minds of the State. The voluntary feature of the program, focus on school readiness, coverage for all 4 year-olds, and relatively modest cost explain its statewide approval by nearly 60%—which is comparatively high to its counterpart. As with many ideas in the diverse state of Florida however, it did not go completely unopposed by the fiscal conservatives and some educational reformers.

Supporters of Florida’s VPK could point to the proven success of Georgia’s similar state-sponsored program. VPK programs promised that universal pre-kindergarten education would close the learning gap between poor/minority kids (whose parents could not afford preschool) and middle class / white kids whose parents could. While the program is booming and new
money is being funneled into pre-kindergarten efforts the program’s start was not as optimistic. A five year longitudinal study of the Georgia program’s success did not point to promising results. Among the major findings of a 1996 – 2001 report was that the “preschool curriculum,” did not “systematically affect grade retention rates or third-grade test scores of children who reach third grade on schedule” (Henry, Gordon, Henderson, & Ponder, 2003). This study still however preceded the vote of the like-system in Florida, and provided time to grow and improve on the process. Research on programs like the Federal Head Start program also showed signs that early education works to improve learning and help poor kids stay in school, avoid crime and drugs, eventually seek higher education and secure jobs in our economy. The institution of VPK is, on the other hand, heavily supported by the third and only other state at the time to implement such a program: Oklahoma. Gormley and Phillips’ 2005 study in the Policy Studies Journal substantiated that the Oklahoma data “showed strong positive effects of the pre-K program on children's language and cognitive test scores,” and the most benefits were felt by Hispanic and Black children who were engaged in the full-day program offerings (Gormley, 2005). Arguments against it were conservative theories that it is not the government’s job to teach the state’s youth before they enter public schools and that it was instead the parent’s responsibility. Fiscal conservatives also believed that the money spent is mostly wasted because a number of other studies suggest early learning gains that shrink the learning gap disappear after several years. These opponents questions if the long-term benefits would be befitting of the cost of such a program or not. Florida voters nevertheless came to support the proposal in favor of the equality and positive impact it offered to the state’s children and education system.
Though VPK faced minor blowback at its introduction due to budget and concerns over its effectiveness, it was certainly nothing compared to the much more mixed reactions toward the Class Size Amendment. Fiscal conservatives and some academics opposed the idea due to the lack of conclusive research substantiating that controlled class sizes actually resulted in higher performance. With the expected cost of implementation of the CSA exceeding $23 billion, this was a proposal that was receiving strict scrutiny and more than its fair share of political controversy (Orange County Public Schools, 2008). One of the most prominent figures on the side of the opposition was then Florida Governor Jeb Bush. Though he eventually came to support the amendment, Bush vehemently criticized the plan’s projected costs and expressed deep skepticism of its possible benefits. The New York Times recorded his attitudes towards CSA in a 2003 review of the state’s obstacles in implementing the newly passed legislation. Former Governor Bush claimed that the associated expenses would “blot out the sun” with its estimated costs nearing half of the annual state budget (Canedy, 2003). Further revealing his disdain for the initiative, he was unknowingly recorded just a month before voters made their decision, saying that he had “a devious plan” to block the Amendment if voters passed it (Canedy, 2003). Fortunately, for his credibility and Florida’s education system as whole, he did not make good on that promise after voters approved it.

There were several arguments for the CSA. Florida class sizes were much higher than the national average and had been for some time and the legislature refused to do anything about it. Limited research offered the optimistic conclusion that smaller class sizes would allow more
one on one attention from the teacher, less distractions for students, increased participation from each student, and ultimately result in a better, more effective student learning environment. Early studies showed full support of the theory but recently there have been more mixed reports. William Mathis of the National Education Policy Center makes the great claim that “All else being equal, reducing class sizes will improve student outcomes” (Mathis, 2017). On the other hand, the main arguments against CSA were that research shows little correlation between class size and student achievement except at younger grades and that most learning gains do not persist over time, that it would cost Floridians too much money and use too many education resources at the expense of other better uses. Other opponents, like Jeremy Finn of the Education and Public Interest Center, cite similar pitfalls of the initiative such as the fruitless practice of “school and district average class sizes are used in the analysis rather than the actual sizes of classes” (Finn, 2010). His study also found that overall there was little definitive connection between class size reduction spending and increased student performance. The CSA would require money be spent to build more buildings and rooms to house the new classrooms and hire new teachers possibly at the expense of teacher quality and providing existing teacher raises. Florida voters determined at the polls that the potential positive impacts outweighed the cost and criticism. Since its implementation, Florida legislators have sought to limit the amendment’s fiscal impact to the overall budget by increasing the list of classes not covered by the CSA and by seeking to apply the standard to school or county averages rather than to each individual class.
In the two decades prior to these amendments in 2002, only one other education policy revision reached the ballot: Public Education of Children, 1998.\textsuperscript{1} Florida’s legislative agenda does not often feature education despite the 1998 Constitutional revision to Article IX section 1 which “declares the education of children to be a fundamental value of the people of Florida” (Florida Department of State Division of Elections, 1998). A review of all educational policies that made the ballot between 1982 and 2002 – including the two mentioned above and regardless of their passed/defeated status – shows these policies made up a lowly 5.4\% of all proposals. Figure 1 below illustrates such proposed initiatives, amendments, and revisions voted within the same time frame broken down by category.

\textsuperscript{1} This does not include two other Amendments from 1982 – 2002 concerning specific education funding: Public Education Capital Outlay Bonds, 1984 and Bond for the Construction of Educational Facilities, 1992.
Striding along the progressive approach legislators brought to education reform, the VPK and the CSA amendments were both passed on their first ballot appearances by 59.23% and 52.38%, respectfully (Florida Department of State Division of Elections, 2002). The lack of prior education proposals make it hard to compare, but these amendments passed with significantly less support than one other of its kind less than 5 years earlier. The 1998 Revision to Public Education for Children was confirmed by 71.04% of voters (Florida Department of State Division of Elections, 1998). Is this any indicator of statewide public opinion on the quality and
importance of education? This shift leads one to wonder what factors are at play when determining variance in the support of education across the state. Ironically, neither of these two widespread educational amendments would have been passed if the amendment Requiring Broader Public Support for Constitutional Amendments or Revisions, 2006, had been passed just a few years earlier. This provision requires that proposed amendments be approved by a super majority 60% to become part of the Florida Constitution. A potential explanation for the decline in support is that the 1998 revision was a no cost incremental expansion of the already existing Article XI, Education, Section 1. In 2002, the education initiatives were full-fledged amendments that brought about programmatic changes to the state’s Education system with each potentially having their own high-end price tag. Voters may have been more hesitant to expressly support a call to action, when compared to the 1998 Constitutional revision that spoke more generally about making education a fundamental value of the state and requiring the state to provide “a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality system of free public schools.” This topic and other potential factors will be discussed further and in accordance with later initiatives, revisions, and amendments. Unfortunately, their ballot appearances in the next decade are as few and far between as expected.

Since 2004 relatively few education policies have been proposed for the Florida Constitution. Figure 2 depicts all proposed initiatives, amendments, and revisions voted on within the new frame broken down by category.
Since 2002 there has only been one other item on the ballot regarding education:

Revision of the Class Size Requirements for Public Schools in 2010. Though defeated, this revision attempted to undermine the original intent of the 2002 Class Size Amendment by increasing class size requirements – a slow return to the unregulated environment (Florida Department of State Divisions Elections, 2010). Since its passage, opponents have tried to soften the impact of CSA mandates by attempting to roll back specific provisions and searching for loopholes.
This research seeks to explain the differences in support for K-12 education policy reform throughout Florida. Specifically, multiple political, demographic, and socioeconomic factors will be examined at the county level to explain varied support for the 2002 Constitutional Amendments for Voluntary Universal Pre-Kindergarten Education and Florida’s Amendment to Reduce Class Size. Floridians listed education as the most pressing problem facing the state before 2007 (Macmanus, Jewett, Dye, & Bonanza, 2011, p. 83). Though education reforms and actions have been made somewhat intermittently at the county level, and changes required or endorsed at the state level – like VPK and CSA – have been meager despite statewide push. Since then however, public opinion on education in Florida returned with urgency as more immediate issues brought on by the recession affected the state such as the economy and job market. Nonetheless concern remained for the quality of our growing public school system and Florida legislation finally reflected that.
METHODOLOGY AND HYPOTHESES: COUNTY DIVERSITY

In preparation for this research, a review of the full amendments that enacted the VPK and class size requirements was completed. Additionally, historical ballots and archived election results from the Division of Elections were examined. These reviews will provide the largest portion of operational data regarding measurable education support by county. Demographic and socioeconomic information has been extracted from the 2000 and 2010 United States Censuses for application by county analysis. Voting behavior and party registration were taken from the Florida Division of Election. Finally, that information will be used to create visual aids to demonstrate county comparisons, display demographic trends, and test any patterns that may be found. In summary, the heart of this research is shown through a trio of regression analysis models for each dependent variable in hopes of discerning levels of support for education reform at the county level. The six regression analysis models are processed using SPSS. The overall effect of each independent variable will be measured by statistic standards. An aggregate perspective of each potential relationship will be produce any trends and any statistically accepted correlations. If no credible relationships arise, the compilation of all regression models will at least synthesize county voting behavior into a profile as a potential basis for future research with a larger sampling size.

The unit of analysis for this research is the individual county. The dependent variable is support indicated by the approval rate for each initiative. Overall state totals will be ascertained and presented for comparison and observation. Independent variables include the following...
eight: percent registered Democrats, at book closing 10/2002, percent black population, percent Hispanic population, poverty percent, percent with higher education (post-secondary or higher), population density per square mile, and age (percent 65 and older and percent under 18).

EXPLORING VARIATION IN SUPPORT BY COUNTY

Both amendments passed with a majority statewide, however there was wide variation between the two. The vast majority of counties supported VPK with 52 approving and only 15 not approving. As Figure 3 shows the relatively few counties that opposed VPK were pretty evenly distributed around the state. However, such unity is not the case for the CSA. More than half of the counties did not support the Class Size Amendment, with 39 not approving and only a mere 28 approving. Figure 4 indicates that the minority of counties that supported CSA were in the Big Bend region of the state around Tallahassee in North Florida and the Central and Southeastern part of Florida. Despite this glaring difference, the overall approval averages for the state were more similar: 59.23% and 52.38%, respectively.
Figure 3: Florida Counties Not Passing Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Education
Figure 4: Florida Counties Not Passing the Class Size Amendment
As Table 1 displays, two counties approved of VPK by more than 70%: diverse and populous Miami Dade in South Florida and rural heavily African-American Gadsden near Tallahassee in North Florida. Conversely, the two counties with the lowest support for VPK (less than 45%) were rural Baker in Northeast Florida and conservative Santa Rosa in West Florida near Pensacola. Table 2 points out that support for the CSA was highest (over 68%) in urban densely populated Broward and its neighbor Miami-Dade. Lowest levels of support (barely 36%) were found in Baker and Clay both near Jacksonville.
Percent Approval for the Amendment for Voluntary Universal Pre-Kindergarten Education, by County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Miami-Dade</th>
<th>Palm Beach</th>
<th>Seminole</th>
<th>Volusia</th>
<th>Alachua</th>
<th>Charlotte</th>
<th>Duval</th>
<th>Gulf</th>
<th>Holmes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Miami-Dade</th>
<th>Palm Beach</th>
<th>Seminole</th>
<th>Volusia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61.20%</td>
<td>51.44%</td>
<td>56.66%</td>
<td>56.02%</td>
<td>54.76%</td>
<td>60.04%</td>
<td>77.18%</td>
<td>65.39%</td>
<td>57.44%</td>
<td>54.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citrus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43.76%</td>
<td>54.16%</td>
<td>49.70%</td>
<td>64.22%</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>55.57%</td>
<td>62.97%</td>
<td>57.86%</td>
<td>48.69%</td>
<td>59.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escambia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51.73%</td>
<td>47.21%</td>
<td>55.86%</td>
<td>50.24%</td>
<td>59.72%</td>
<td>63.97%</td>
<td>53.12%</td>
<td>59.79%</td>
<td>56.96%</td>
<td>52.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50.77%</td>
<td>47.24%</td>
<td>60.64%</td>
<td>61.13%</td>
<td>62.02%</td>
<td>61.60%</td>
<td>47.16%</td>
<td>56.25%</td>
<td>49.33%</td>
<td>54.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian River</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>56.45%</td>
<td>51.07%</td>
<td>56.68%</td>
<td>51.45%</td>
<td>48.28%</td>
<td>50.58%</td>
<td>65.34%</td>
<td>49.64%</td>
<td>56.50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>57.58%</td>
<td>56.85%</td>
<td>58.01%</td>
<td>61.21%</td>
<td>46.23%</td>
<td>47.63%</td>
<td>66.12%</td>
<td>49.61%</td>
<td>53.34%</td>
<td>59.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Percent Approval for the Amendment for Voluntary Universal Pre-Kindergarten Education, 2002, by County
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Alachua</th>
<th>Charlotte</th>
<th>Duval</th>
<th>Gulf</th>
<th>Holmes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Miami-Dade</th>
<th>Palm Beach</th>
<th>Seminole</th>
<th>Volusia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55.07%</td>
<td>47.25%</td>
<td>45.40%</td>
<td>54.68%</td>
<td>50.09%</td>
<td>52.81%</td>
<td>68.26%</td>
<td>64.84%</td>
<td>51.26%</td>
<td>49.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>36.39%</td>
<td>38.94%</td>
<td>45.13%</td>
<td>60.94%</td>
<td>44.04%</td>
<td>50.51%</td>
<td>61.59%</td>
<td>46.03%</td>
<td>39.28%</td>
<td>53.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay</td>
<td>48.41%</td>
<td>36.88%</td>
<td>49.28%</td>
<td>44.29%</td>
<td>57.54%</td>
<td>55.76%</td>
<td>41.56%</td>
<td>44.72%</td>
<td>56.68%</td>
<td>44.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradford</td>
<td>44.22%</td>
<td>40.56%</td>
<td>55.10%</td>
<td>58.42%</td>
<td>55.91%</td>
<td>58.33%</td>
<td>39.65%</td>
<td>48.74%</td>
<td>40.44%</td>
<td>52.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brevard</td>
<td>47.52%</td>
<td>47.49%</td>
<td>66.23%</td>
<td>43.52%</td>
<td>46.94%</td>
<td>42.34%</td>
<td>59.54%</td>
<td>43.31%</td>
<td>47.66%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broward</td>
<td>69.79%</td>
<td>47.24%</td>
<td>47.09%</td>
<td>40.34%</td>
<td>45.44%</td>
<td>45.58%</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>38.61%</td>
<td>51.18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calhoun</td>
<td>53.31%</td>
<td>50.69%</td>
<td>53.87%</td>
<td>48.82%</td>
<td>41.68%</td>
<td>45.94%</td>
<td>59.97%</td>
<td>42.53%</td>
<td>47.76%</td>
<td>52.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Percent Approval for the Amendment to Reduce Class Size, 2002, by County
HYPOTHESES EXPLAINING VARIATION OF SUPPORT

Here we explore the hypotheses predicting the relationship between each independent variable and support of either education amendment. The predicted effects of these variables with a brief explanation are set forth by the following hypotheses. The first eight hypotheses concern VPK.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between the percentage of Democratic Registration and support for VPK. The Democratic Party typically favors education reform to finance, support and improve public schools. This initiative petition was sponsored by a Florida Democratic Miami Mayor with the support of many elected Democrats and their liberal Democratic supporters. Further Democrats felt frustrated by the inability to successfully pursue legislation in the Republican dominated legislature.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between higher percentages of people living in poverty and support for VPK. Voluntary, state funded Pre-Kindergarten would allow poor parents to afford the costs of preschool that they otherwise might not be able to afford.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between higher percentages of Black populations and support for VPK. Many Black voters feel that voluntary pre-k will help reduce the learning gap between white and minority students and give black students a better opportunity to compete and excel academically. Further the sponsor of the VPK Amendment was African-American legislator Kendrick Meek.
Hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between higher percentages Hispanic populations and support for VPK. Many Hispanic voters feel that voluntary pre-k will help reduce the learning gap between white and minority students and give Hispanic students a better opportunity to compete and excel academically.

Hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between percent of higher education and support for VPK. Those who have sought higher education will be more likely to place value upon educational programming.

Hypothesis 6: There is a positive relationship between population density and support for VPK. Urban areas are more likely to face lack of affordable pre-k and inflated child-care expenses.

Hypothesis 7: There is a negative relationship between age over 65 and support for VPK. Populations above 65 are less likely to have a vested interest in the education system and less likely to have school-aged dependents. This is particularly true in Florida where many seniors have retired to Florida from another state and have left children and grandchildren behind.

Hypothesis 8: There is a positive relationship between age under 5 and support for VPK. This is the population most directly affected by Voluntary Universal Pre-Kindergarten as they, and their families, would be eligible to benefit if passed.

The next eight hypotheses related to the CSA.
Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between percent of Democratic registration and support for CSA. The Democratic Party typically favors education reform to finance, support and improve public schools and Democratic State Senator Kendrick Meek sponsored the initiative petition with backing from other Democratic and progressive leaning groups. Further Democrats felt frustrated by the inability to successfully pursue legislation in the Republican dominated legislature.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between higher percentages of people living in poverty and support for CSA. Counties with more residents in poverty have schools with less funding and larger classrooms that tend to struggle with quality.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between higher percentages of Black populations and support for CSA. Many Black voters feel that their children are more likely to attend crowded classrooms and suffer academically because of it.

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between higher percentages Hispanic populations and support for CSA. Many Hispanic voters feel that their children are more likely to attend crowded classrooms and suffer academically because of it. In addition, the sponsor of the initiative petition was Hispanic Miami mayor Alex Penelas.

Hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between percent of higher education and support for CSA. Those who have achieved higher education are more likely to support efforts to improve education and may see the benefit of class size requirements.
Hypothesis 6: There is a positive relationship between population density and support for CSA. Urban areas are more likely to face overcrowding in their schools and would directly benefit from class size requirements.

Hypothesis 7: There is a negative relationship between age over 65 and support for CSA. Populations above 65 are less likely to have a vested interest in the education system and less likely to have school-aged dependents and more likely to be on fixed income and concerned about the costs.

Hypothesis 8: There is a positive relationship between age under 18 and support for CSA. The higher the presence of school-aged children should indicate a higher level of support for the CSA which directly affects K-12 students and their families.

Regression analysis will be used for the testing of all hypotheses and will reveal if there is any correlation between the independent and dependent variables in each case.
ANALYSIS OF DATA: REGRESSION TO EXPLAIN SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION REFORM

This data is best analyzed for relationships between the independent and dependent variables through regression analysis. For the most efficient explanation of county support for education reform, this has been used to test each hypothesis for both amendments. This will help to explain the exact nature of any relationship that is found as it reveals the “mean change in the dependent variable for each unit change in the independent variable” (Pollock III, 2016). Linear regression analysis is used to explore the hypotheses.

Initially, I projected the sole most important factor for approval in both amendments would be party affiliation due to the partisan nature of both issues. Republicans controlled the legislature and executive branch in Tallahassee having taken unified control of state government in 1998. Thus Democrats were particularly frustrated with their inability to pass legislation to address these educational issues. Specifically, both these education proposals were sponsored by Democrats and supported by the Democratic platform at the time. I projected that the higher percentage of registered Democrats in a county would result in the higher approval rating for either amendment. To test this approach, bivariate regression analysis was run between the approval of each amendment and the registered Democratic percentage of those counties. I employ the standard of .10 for determining statistical significance.
VPK BIVARIATE REGRESSION MODEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>49.279</td>
<td>2.392</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Democrat</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>0.321</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: VPK Bivariate Regression Model

R Square= 0.103  Adj. R. Square= 0.089

The partisan division on the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Proposal showed statistical significance. For every 1% increase in Democratic registration, per county approval increased by .116 percent.

CSA BIVARIATE REGRESSION MODEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>40.905</td>
<td>2.622</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Democrat</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.397</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: CSA Bivariate Regression Model

R Square= 0.158  Adj. R. Square= 0.145

As for the more split issue of the Class Size Amendment, we have a slightly stronger correlation. As the more controversial of the two, I expected CSA have a stronger relation with Democratic registration over that of VPK. The relationship was again statistically significant. There was a 0.162 percentage increase in CSA approval for every 1% increase in Democratic registration throughout the counties.
The full models use regression analysis across each variable this research set out to test to explain variances in support for education reform.

**VPK FULL REGRESSION MODEL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>30.818</td>
<td>13.610</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Democrat</td>
<td>0.222</td>
<td>0.616</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-0.086</td>
<td>-0.124</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.213</td>
<td>0.313</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.235</td>
<td>0.599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>0.244</td>
<td>0.290</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td>0.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPSM</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.365</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 65</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>0.195</td>
<td>0.803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5</td>
<td>0.700</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>1.294</td>
<td>0.590</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: VPK Full Regression Model

R Square= 0.445  Adj. R Square= 0.368

The regression analysis reveals that four of the eight predictions have statistically significant relationships: percent Democratic registration, percent Hispanic population, percent with higher education and population per square mile. Each of these four variables had a positive relationship with approval of VPK as predicted. Percent Registered Democrat was the strongest value as measured by standardized coefficient (Beta value of .616), about twice as high as each
of the other three. Percent black, percent in poverty, and percent over 65 and under 5 were not statistically significant. Perhaps the most surprising finding in this model is the unfounded relationship between percent of population under 5 and the approval of VPK as counties with the highest amount of youth stand to benefit the most in enrollment numbers and impact. Perhaps because there would be several years between passage and implementation some parents of three and four year olds did not expect an immediate benefit. Overall, this model explains roughly 44.5% of the total variance in support of education reform in 2002.

### CSA FULL REGRESSION MODEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
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<td>0.641</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Democrat</td>
<td>0.300</td>
<td>0.736</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-0.042</td>
<td>-0.053</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>0.623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.226</td>
<td>0.294</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>0.185</td>
<td>0.117</td>
<td>0.264</td>
<td>0.486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>0.427</td>
<td>0.449</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPSM</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 65</td>
<td>0.221</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>0.235</td>
<td>0.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>0.415</td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>0.347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: CSA Full Regression Model

R Square= 0.398  Adj. R Square= 0.315
The regression analysis of the Class Size Amendment sings a similar tune. Here only three of the variables show a statistically significant relationship, the same relationships for VPK except for population per square mile that had a significance level of .127. Surprisingly, this research did not show a statistically significant correlation between counties with higher population density and higher support of the CSA. One of the prominent motivations for smaller class sizes is the overcrowding epidemic negatively affecting the school system. This relationship can be affected by the fact that population per square mile is highly correlated with black population and poverty. It is possible that statistical significance might appear in a larger study or in a more streamlined model that did not include some of these other factors.

Democratic registration was the most important variable with a standardized coefficient (Beta value) of .736. This result was not surprising given that classroom size was a much more partisan issue leading up to the vote and given the results of the earlier bivariate analysis. Higher education was the 2nd most influential variable with a Beta coefficient of .449. Overall the combination of these variables explains nearly 39.8% of the overall variation in support for the amendment. The full model was slightly less effective for explaining approval in CSA than it was for VPK – contrasted to the original bivariate comparison. A best model of regression will also attempt to uncover any additional connections.

Although the regression did not identify a statistically significant relationship between the Black population and support for either reform plan, both sets point out something of interest. The B and Beta values for both full regression models reveal the only independent variable
tested to display an inverse relationship to the percent of population Black in each county. If these relationships were significant this would suggest an exact contradiction to hypothesis 3 for each dependent variable. It is possible that the high correlation between black population, Democratic registration, and urban population has caused these unexpected results.

**VPK BEST REGRESSION MODEL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>35.219</td>
<td>3.926</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Democrat</td>
<td>0.238</td>
<td>0.661</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.219</td>
<td>0.322</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>0.242</td>
<td>0.288</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPSM</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7: VPK Best Regression Model**

R Square: .422  Adj. R Square: .385

When utilizing the best model to explain variance in the vote for VPK all four variables identified in the full model maintain statistical significance. The percent of registered Democrats, Hispanics, and higher educated residents, and population per square mile, all have a positive relationship with approval of VPK. This model’s adjusted R square is higher (.385) than that of its full model (.368), indicating more explanatory power from fewer, but all statistically significant, independent variables.
On the other hand, for CSA’s best model there is a slight change in the results compared to the full model. Population per square mile is statistically significant in the best model where before it was not. This suggests that correlation with other variables like black population and poverty may have been the issue in the full model. As before, Democratic registration is the variable with the most impact. Higher education and Hispanic population continue to have a positive relationship as well.

![Table](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>25.336</td>
<td>4.617</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Democrat</td>
<td>0.291</td>
<td>0.715</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.222</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>0.352</td>
<td>0.370</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPSM</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.186</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: CSA Best Regression Model

R Square= 0.375   Adj. R Square= 0.335

The overall variance in support for CSA is better explained by this model as evinced by the higher adjusted R Square, 0.335 as opposed to just 0.315 of the full model. Since both amendments were partisan issues during the campaign, it should not come as a surprise that the regression analysis confirmed that the percent of Democratic registration in a county was the most influential statistically significant independent variable in all the models. Significant relationships were also demonstrated between Hispanic population, population density and
percent of the county’s population who has received post-secondary education, but these correlations were not quite as strong.
RESULTS AND AFTERMATH

In 2002, only a simple majority was required to pass state amendments. Since then the state decided to increase amendment approvals from a simple majority of 50% + 1 to a supermajority of 60%. If these results repeated themselves now, only about 25% of counties would have successfully passed VPK (17) and less than 1% of counties would have passed the CSA (6). Overall both initiatives would have failed under the requirements of a supermajority, but the amendment for Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten would have had a fighting shot as they state approval rate was within half a percentage point from the new threshold. Of the respective 17 and 6 counties who supported the amendments the highest, there was full overlap. All 6 of the counties who voted above 60% to pass the CSA, all also voted to pass the VPK amendment by the same margin without deviation. This discovery led for a cross comparisons of any counties who supported one initiative and not the other and the possible reasons why.

The range of support varied likely as a result of the difference between the perceptions of the two amendments. The three counties that showed the highest support and the three counties that showed the lowest support for both amendments are nearly identical. The top supporting counties for both amendments are Miami-Dade, Broward, and Gadsden. Two of the three lowest supporting counties are shared, Baker and Santa Rosa. Indian River comes in third lowest support for VPK and Clay in the lowest three for CSA. The geographic/political reputations of these counties are highlighted in the comparative range table with two of the statistically significant variables: Democratic registration and Hispanic population.
COMPARATIVE RANGE OF COUNTY SUPPORT ON 2002 AMENDMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VPK</th>
<th>County Vote</th>
<th>Democratic Registration, 2002</th>
<th>% Hispanic Population, 2000</th>
<th>Democratic Registration, 2002</th>
<th>% Hispanic Population, 2000</th>
<th>County Vote</th>
<th>CSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIGHEST SUPPORT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HIGHEST SUPPORT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami-Dade</td>
<td>77.18%</td>
<td>83.91%</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>50.76%</td>
<td>69.79%</td>
<td>Broward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gadsden</td>
<td>71.43%</td>
<td>43.59%</td>
<td>6.17%</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
<td>83.91%</td>
<td>68.26%</td>
<td>Miami-Dade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broward</td>
<td>69.99%</td>
<td>50.76%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>6.17%</td>
<td>43.59%</td>
<td>66.23%</td>
<td>Gadsden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOWEST SUPPORT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LOWEST SUPPORT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>43.76%</td>
<td>78.58%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>78.58%</td>
<td>36.39%</td>
<td>Baker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Rosa</td>
<td>44.74%</td>
<td>31.48%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>27.96%</td>
<td>36.88%</td>
<td>Clay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian River</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>30.71%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>31.48%</td>
<td>38.61%</td>
<td>Santa Rosa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Comparative Range of County Support

Congruent with the results of this research, in the seven counties above the most polarized decisions are represented. In the three highest supporting counties, Democratic registration and Hispanic population are high. Gadsden has a seemingly low Hispanic population but the overwhelming Democratic registration explains its place in the top three. Meanwhile, historically conservative Santa Rosa, Indian River, and Clay are among the least supportive counties for either amendment. Starkly contrasting our prior findings, however, is Baker’s place
as the absolute lowest approval of both amendments while having 78.58% registered Democrats as reported by the Florida Division of Elections (County Voter Registration By Party, Bookclosing August 12, 2002, 2002). The explanation for this seemingly contradictory result is most like that most white Democrats in Baker County in 2002 were quite conservative compared to the more progressive Democrats found in the more diverse Southern part of the state.

These conclusions support the need for more research in this area. If individual level data were available about voting behavior on the Amendments it would be interesting to see if the results stayed the same with a different unit of analysis. Additionally, increasing the sample size by looking at the country overall may reveal other indicators of education policy support. Finally, a comparative project between states with different demographic compositions from Florida might highlight similarities and differences across the country.

Studies are ongoing testing the effectiveness of both amendments to see if either has contributed to improving education quality in the state. After VPK’s approval on the 2002 ballot, full-fledged rollout and enrollment began in 2005. With increasing enrollment numbers every year, in 2014 80% of all four year-olds in the state were enrolled in Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten programs across the state (Bassok, 2014). According to a paper published by researchers from the University of Virginia, the positive academic effects of students who were enrolled in VPK versus students who were not can be seen through assessments up to the third grade (Bassok, 2014). Many Floridians seem to support VPK and most critics of the programs argue for expansion and higher quality (like more money, longer school day and certified pre-K teachers).
rather than for abolition of the program. I am personally interested to track the long-term results of largest state-funded pre-school program in the country, and how its educational impacts compare to similar measures in other states, like Georgia.

The Class Size Amendment has reduced Florida class sizes down to or below national averages over the past decade in an incremental process. Whether its effect can be proven to better the quality of learning in the classroom is still up for debate, but the amendment inarguably combated the above-average classroom size and overcrowding issues that were rampant in Florida schools in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. CSA remains somewhat controversial, as direct benefits of controlled class sizes are not easily tracked. Fueling this controversy is mostly the unknown benefit-to-cost. A study by Harvard University tracked the impact of this mandate in the 2010-11 school year claiming that it is not as effective as many believe. Matthew Chingos suggests “a naïve approach to estimating the effect of the [Class Size Amendment] would be to examine whether the rate of student achievement accelerated following [it] introduction” due to how many other major education policies were being implemented in Florida around the same time (Chingos, 2010). There have been other scholarly approaches to disproving the long-term benefits of smaller classes and even more that can only evince tangible benefit among the youngest groups of children in third-grade and below (Chingos, 2010). Taking into consideration the multi-billion dollar implementation it cost Florida taxpayers and the annual $4 billion dollar price tag it still carries, it will remain controversial until research can provide justification for the high cost. To date, the total cost of Class Size Implementation in
Florida has cost taxpayers $33,650,127,731, (Florida Department of Education). Critics of CSA in Florida continue to seek ways to soften its budget impact or to overturn it and instead focus on other reforms that they argue will produce more tangible improvement in student achievement. Some of these attempts have been fruitful as legislative opponents of CSA in Florida have delayed implementation, changed the courses to which class size limits applied, and sought to measure average class size at the school or county level rather than individual classrooms. Needless to say, additional research can certainly be done in the area to ensure it is a worthy endeavor for both students and Florida taxpayers.
CONCLUSION AND THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN FLORIDA

This research found that four independent variables had statistically significant relationships to both dependent variables: approval of VPK and CSA. These variables will most likely be helpful in identifying and predicting future support of education reform in Florida. Bivariate-, Full-, and Best Model regression analysis identified the most important variables from those tested and explained around 40% of variation in county-level support across the state. The four relationships pinpointed with statistical significance through this method are as follows:

I. A very strong positive relationship exists between a county’s percentage of registered Democrats and subsequent support of education reform and initiative, such as VPK and CSA.

II. A positive relationship exists between a county’s percentage of Hispanic identifying population and subsequent support of education reform and initiative, such as VPK and CSA.

III. A positive relationship exists between a county’s population density per square mile and subsequent support of education reform and initiative, such as VPK and CSA.

IV. A positive relationship exists between a county’s percentage of voters with higher education (post-secondary and beyond) and subsequent support of education reform and initiative, such as VPK and CSA.
Several variables did not have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variables: Black population, poverty, population over 65, and population under 18 (or 5). A limitation of this research that may be downplaying the importance of these demographic variables is the measurement level and sample size. Florida only constitutes 67 counties and a larger pool may unearth additional patterns. A comparison review of voting practices in counties in a region of the country (South, North, etc.) would likely offer more insight and would be a beneficial avenue for future research. I suspect other variables might evince statistically significant relationships in a sample with extended size and diversity and might increase our understanding and ability to predict the success of future education initiatives.

Additionally, population data used in this research was collected from the 2000 census. Over the last fifteen years the demographic landscape of Florida has surely changed, but at what rate of significance is the question. The results of this study project that counties that have experienced fluctuations in Democratic registration will yield the most significant changes in support for education. Secondarily, variations in county Hispanic population, population density, and percent of residents with higher education could alter traditional approval rates. With the population of Florida growing at a rate well above that of the national average, change in county-by-county population and public opinion is inevitable. A current question is which counties saw the most diverse population fluctuations and can the findings of this analysis be applied to predicting their current voting behavior?
It is hard to predict the future of education policy in the state with the dramatic changes anticipated under the administration and with the wavering governing body of officials in the state. The youngest representative, with a stark focus on education, has recently been voted into the Florida House of Representatives offering optimism. We can hope for policy to be worthwhile in both quantity and quality to make tangible differences in the state when education is at a critical time by national comparison. I expect the majority of upcoming policy to focus around public education at the colligate level with funding changes, Bright Futures Scholarships’ summer application, STEM incentives and elementary and secondary levels seeing a similar push for STEM fields. This is one the campaign promises of the youngest addition to the Florida House as “she hopes to continue representing college students all across Florida by advocating for Bright Futures scholarship reform” according to a December interview with USA Today (Hoyt, 2016). With the four statistically significant variables affirmed through this research, we can try to predict key counties and influential counties for the future of education reform. Using these in conjunction with tried and true predictors for voting behavior, it is vital to gauge public opinion on new proposals and identify geographic and political opportunities. It is likely that education reform in Florida will continue to be a prominent issue given the challenges facing the state. Lawmakers and voters alike must remain diligent to educational commitments, for in the words of Malcolm X: "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today" (X, 1964).
REFERENCES


