South finally takes lead in push for school reform

EDITOR'S NOTE — The South, long behind in educational performance, has taken the lead in national school reform. From Texas to Virginia, teacher salaries are soaring, test scores are rising. This first report in a series from both the South and the North: "Southern Schools: A Report Card Reform," analyses the impact of new money and innovative teaching methods.

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A few short years ago, high schools in the South would usually thud through major changes from the long summer holidays. Today, the summer break for students is but a slight lull in the long attack on the failure of public education in the South. "Schools are just starting to face the economic realities of the world," says George Hobbs, schools superintendent at Coral Gables High School in Coral Gables, Fla. "The South leads the nation in many ways now."

But the South is not inventing new educational modes. Other Southern states have taken new approaches, too, and even a few other states have moved ahead. "One state in four has substantially increased its educational spending," says Krugman of the Conference Board. "The South is still the leader, but other states are catching up."

In the South, spending has soared. Teachers are getting raises. Students are getting a better chance. "The South has been a leader in most educational changes," says Hobbs. "And it has been more successful than the nation as a whole."

But the South is not alone. Other states are also making changes. "The South is just the tip of the iceberg," says Hobbs. "Other states are stepping up, too."