



The Florida Senate

Interim Project Report 2004-129

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Committee on Education

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FCAT IMPACT ON PUPIL PROGRESSION AND HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

SUMMARY

The project report examines several aspects of the impact of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) on the state's public schools and their students. Education Committee staff focused research efforts on the effect of FCAT on high school graduation and 3rd grade promotion rates, the effectiveness of remedial activities for 3rd graders and high school students who did not achieve passing scores on the test, the availability and effectiveness of alternative means for meeting student performance standards, and the comparability of the FCAT with commercially produced standardized assessments.

No review of a state assessment program would be complete without examining its relationship with the federal No Child Left Behind Act which became law in 2002. The enactment of this major federal policy has created a challenge for Florida and other states to align their current accountability programs with the rapidly emerging federal requirements. The committee staff also looked at student assessment programs in other states and to what extent these programs embraced "high stakes" features like non-promotion.

The report contains a few recommendations. Most are generally suggested administrative changes that the State Board of Education or the Department of Education could accomplish through administrative rule or procedure.

students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 (the State Student Assessment Test, part I) were assessed in reading, writing, and mathematics. Also, public school students were required to pass the functional literacy test (the State Student Assessment Test, part II, later known as the High School Competency Test) in order to receive a regular high school diploma.

Following the implementation of these tests, the test requirement for high school graduation was challenged. The court noted that not all students had participated in an equal educational opportunity, in that some students began their education under a segregated system in effect prior to 1971. The court prohibited the use of the test as a high school graduation requirement for four years (until the 1982-83 school year). The court was later charged with examining whether or not the test covers material actually taught in Florida's classrooms. The court held that the test was instructionally valid as long as students had an opportunity to learn the material prior to its use as a diploma sanction. [See *Debra P. v. Turlington*, 564 F.Supp. 177).

In 1991, additional accountability legislation was enacted. Popularly known as "Blueprint 2000," the legislation required the establishment of standards, the assessment of students' knowledge against these standards, and public reporting of assessment results. Implementation of these requirements resulted in the adoption of the Sunshine State Standards and new assessments (the FCAT) that were closely aligned with these standards. The FCAT was first administered in 1997-98.

Chapter 99-398, L.O.F., known as the "A+ Plan," expanded the statewide assessment program to cover grades 3 through 10, required the use of test scores in the establishment of performance grades for schools, provided scholarships to enable students in failing schools to attend a different public school or a private school, and required performance-based pay for teachers and administrators.

BACKGROUND

Florida Statewide Assessment System

Florida has a long history of accountability for public schools and measuring student achievement. Subsequent to legislation enacted during the seventies, including the 1976 Educational Accountability Act, the basic skills (minimum performance standards) of

Current state law prohibits the promotion of students based on age or other factors that constitute social promotion. Students may not be promoted to grade 4 unless they pass the reading portion of the grade 3 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The district school board may only exempt 3rd grade students from mandatory retention for good cause. Students may not graduate from high school with a standard high school diploma if they do not meet the required credits and Grade Point Average (GPA) and pass the 10th grade FCAT in reading, writing, and mathematics, unless they are exempt or subject to a waiver of the assessment requirement. State Board of Education rule designates the passing scores for each part of the FCAT.

The FCAT is comprised of two components. A criterion-referenced test measures the student's achievement of benchmarks in reading, writing, science, and mathematics in accordance with the Sunshine State Standards. These standards are Florida's own challenging content standards. The second component is a norm-referenced test that measures the student's performance against national norms.

Florida administrative rule requires the FCAT to be administered to students in grades 3 through 9 no less than once a year on a schedule approved by the Commissioner of Education and up to three times each year for students who do not attain minimum performance expectations on the 10th grade FCAT.

Current law provides that school performance grade designations ("A," "B," "C," "D," and "F") are based upon a combination of student achievement scores, student learning gains (as measured by annual FCAT assessments in grades 3 through 10) and improvement of the lowest 25th percentile of students in the school in reading, math, or writing on the FCAT, unless these students are performing above the satisfactory performance level.

Recent federal policies are challenging the states to align their current accountability requirements with emerging federal requirements. Some states have expressed concern about the cost of the corrective actions required by the new federal legislation.¹

Requirements of Federal Law

Part A of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act (Title I) as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) sets forth specific testing requirements for public school students. Title I is the single largest source of federal education funding. In order to receive funding under Part A of Title I, states must comply with its requirements, including its testing requirements. Florida received approximately \$477 million in federal funding under Part A of Title I in 2002-2003 and approximately \$524 million in 2003-2004.²

The requirements of Title I are designed to improve student achievement and close academic achievement gaps among subgroups of students. Under Title I, the Florida Department of Education, as the state's educational agency, is required to adopt challenging academic content standards and challenging student academic achievement standards. Florida has adopted the Sunshine State Standards as its academic content standards. The state is required to apply the same academic standards to all schools and children in the state. Subjects to be covered by these standards must include at least mathematics, reading or language arts, and (beginning in 2005-2006), science.

As part of this program, the law also requires states to implement student academic assessments in mathematics, reading/language arts, and (beginning in 2007-2008) science. These tests must be used as the "primary means" of determining the yearly performance of the state, the school districts and schools in meeting the goals of Title I. By law, the tests must be aligned to the state's academic content standards.³ For Florida, this means that the testing instrument used for purposes of meeting federal law requirements must be aligned to the Sunshine State Standards.

Additional federal law requirements with respect to the state's academic assessments dictate that the assessments must, among other requirements:

- be the same for all children
- provide information about students' attainment of the academic content and student achievement standards
- be used for valid and reliable purposes, and be consistent with relevant nationally-recognized professional and technical standards
- be of adequate technical quality, consistent with the requirements of federal law

¹ "Putting the Financial Squeeze on Schools" State Legislatures, September 2003.

² Source: Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Grants Management.

³ 20 U.S.C. s. 6311 (b)(1)(D)(ii).

- provide for the participation of all students in the assessments
- provide for reasonable adaptations and accommodations for disabled students necessary to measure the students’ academic achievement relative to the state standards
- provide for the inclusion of limited English proficient students in the testing program and provide these students with certain reasonable accommodations
- be consistent with widely accepted professional testing standards
- objectively measure academic achievement, knowledge and skills, and
- not evaluate or assess personal or family beliefs and attitudes, or publicly disclose personally identifiable information.⁴

Title I currently requires that the state’s academic assessments measure, at a minimum, the proficiency of students in mathematics and reading or language arts at least once during grades 3 through 5, once during grades 6 through 9, and once during grades 10 through 12. Beginning in 2005-2006, however, assessments in mathematics and reading/language arts will be required every year in grades 3 through 8. Additionally, beginning in the 2007-2008 school year and thereafter, state assessments in science will also be required at least once during grades 3 through 5, once during grades 6 through 9, and once during grades 10 through 12.

Federal law requires student assessment, but does not require states to establish high stakes tests for students. Testing that is performed pursuant to Title I is used to measure whether states and schools are making “adequate yearly progress” toward state student proficiency goals under the Title I requirements.⁵ Title I contains progressively more serious consequences for schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress in improving student proficiency, as measured by test scores: students may be permitted to attend other schools; parents may be permitted to obtain supplemental services for their children and use Title I funds to pay for them; school staff may be replaced and the curriculum may be revised; the school may be

restructured as a charter school; or the state may begin to operate the school.

METHODOLOGY

Staff reviewed FCAT assessment data for grades 3, 10, and 12 and the use of the data by the Department of Education (DOE) and school districts to improve student achievement. Staff also reviewed: the research related to the comparability of FCAT results with scores on four national tests, the student assessment efforts in other states, and the relationship between Florida’s assessment system and the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Several key reports were reviewed and meetings were held with various stakeholders, including representatives from the Florida Reading Initiative, a collaborative effort involving the North East Florida Educational Consortium that fosters teacher development to improve reading.

FINDINGS

Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in Florida

In the 2002-2003 school year, Florida failed to make adequate yearly progress under NCLB. NCLB requires reporting of testing information for students disaggregated by certain specific subgroups, including the major ethnic and racial groups, economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficient students, students with disabilities, as well as the overall student population as a whole. The DOE reported the following information regarding testing and adequate yearly progress of the various subgroups in 2002-2003, for all grade levels tested:

Total number of enrolled students in the grades tested:				1,623,700	
Percentage of students tested and performance for each group used to determine AYP:					
Group	Tested 95% of students in 2003?	31% reading at or above grade level in 2003?	38% scoring at or above grade level in math in 2003?	Improved performance in writing by 1% between 2002 and 2003?	Increased graduation rate by 1% between 2002 and 2003?
Total	N (94%)	Y (51%)	Y (54%)	Y	Y
White	Y (95%)	Y (63%)	Y (67%)	Y*	Y*
Black	N (93%)	Y (31%)	N (32%)	Y*	Y*
Hispanic	N (94%)	Y (41%)	Y (47%)	Y*	Y*
Asian	Y (97%)	Y (64%)	Y (76%)	Y*	Y*
Am. Ind.	N (94%)	Y (55%)	Y (59%)	Y*	Y*

⁴ 20 U.S.C. s. 6311 (b)(3)(C).

⁵ The definition of “adequate yearly progress” varies by state and is established by the state’s educational agency within the parameters of NCLB’s requirements. In Florida, the Department of Education sets the standards for adequate yearly progress of all public elementary and secondary schools, local educational agencies, and of the state itself. The determination of adequate yearly progress must be based on academic assessments (testing). See 20 U.S.C. s. 6311(b)(2).

Econ. Disadv.	N (94%)	Y (37%)	Y (39%)	Y*	Y*
LEP	N (93%)	N (15%)	N (26%)	Y*	Y*
SWD	N (90%)	N (23%)	N (24%)	Y*	Y*
KEY: * Compliance was determined using an alternate AYP indicator permitted under federal regulation when students in any group do not meet the state's annual measurable objectives. See 34 CFR 200.20. Accordingly, categories of students indicated with an asterisk achieved AYP because the percentage of students in that group below the state's proficient achievement level decreased by at least 10 percent from the preceding year (2002). Am. Ind.: American Indian Econ. Disadv.: Economically disadvantaged, eligible for free or reduced price lunch LEP: Limited English proficient SWD: Students with disabilities					

Source: Florida Department of Education, August 2003, subject to review and verification by local school district staff. Available at <http://web.fldoe.org/NCLB/report.cfm?level=State>.

District programs for student progress

Prior to the enactment of the federal No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 (P.L. 107-110), Florida had already established a framework for student achievement and accountability. District school boards must establish comprehensive programs for student progress. The State Board of Education is responsible for enforcing provisions of law on student progression. The DOE is monitoring the school districts' compliance with the statutory requirements for student progression, pursuant to a plan approved by the State Board of Education in 2003. As of January 2004, most districts had submitted to DOE a copy of their student progression plans and academic improvement plans.

FLORIDA 2002-2003 THIRD GRADE STUDENTS

For the 2002-2003 school year, sixty-three percent of 3rd grade students scored at Level 3 and above on the reading and mathematics portions of the FCAT. Twenty-three percent of the students scored at Level 1 on the reading portion of the FCAT, while nineteen percent scored at Level 1 on the mathematics portion.⁶

Students who are unable to pass the reading portion of the FCAT may not be promoted to grade 4, unless they qualify for one of six good cause statutory exemptions. These students must score at level 2 or higher on the grade 3 reading FCAT. The following summarizes the statewide third grade student retention and promotion data from the Florida DOE for 2002-2003:

Total Students	Total Promoted		Total Retained	
192,352	164,324	85.4%	28,028	14.6%

⁶ Rule 6A-1.09422(5), F.A.C., establishes five developmental levels and five designated achievement levels (1-low to 5-high) for the criterion-referenced portion of the reading and mathematics FCAT.

Total Promoted With Cause by Good Cause Exemption (N=12,403 or 6.5%)

Students with Disabilities Not Participating in Statewide Assessment per IEP		Students with Disabilities Retained Once with 2+ yrs. of Remediation		Students Retained Twice with 2+ yrs. of Remediation	
1,007	8.1%	3,587	28.9%	581	4.7%

Total Demonstrating Proficiency on Alternate Reading Assessment		Total Demonstrating Proficiency Through Portfolio		LEP Students < 2 yrs. In ESOL	
2,888	23.3%	1,479	11.9%	2,861	23.1%

Five school districts did not promote any students based on any of the six good cause exemptions. Twenty school districts did not promote any students using a portfolio. Hillsborough County School District had the largest number of promotions (638), based on portfolios. Ten school districts did not promote any students using the alternative assessment. The following districts had the largest number of promotions, based on the alternative assessment: Hillsborough (478), Orange (344), Broward (312), and Miami-Dade (285).

Florida administrative rule defines the acceptable levels of performance on alternative assessments (the Norm Referenced Test (NRT) portion of the FCAT and the SAT-9) for the 2002-2003 school year; however, the rule does not provide scores for the 2003-2004 school year or beyond.⁷

Teachers select the contents of a portfolio that must show how the student has mastered the Sunshine State Standards in reading equal to or at least a Level 2 performance on the FCAT. Concerns have been raised that the portfolio option is not consistently applied to students throughout the state. According to the DOE, the State Board of Education adopted criteria in 2003 for use of a student portfolio. However, the criteria were not adopted in rule.

DOE is developing district and state profiles, including information related to the summer reading camps funded by the General Appropriations Act. Statewide summary data indicate that 19,503 students attended the camps for an average of 85 hours of instruction. Approximately 977 mentors participated. According to DOE, this information will be used to target technical assistance and identify promising practices in the districts. The department may audit a sample of schools to determine their level of compliance with student progression requirements.

⁷ Rule 6A-1.094221, F.A.C.

According to DOE, districts have identified plans for meeting the requirements for providing retained third grade students with an intensive program that is different from the previous year’s program (e.g., a differentiated instruction or a 90-minute uninterrupted reading block).

FLORIDA 2002-2003 TWELFTH GRADE STUDENTS

Of the 143,249 students in the 2002-2003 high school graduating class, 131,948 students (or 92 percent) earned either a high school diploma or a certificate of completion. Most of the students who earned a standard high school diploma (98 percent) did not use waivers or other alternatives to the FCAT requirement. The following summarizes the methods used by students to qualify for awards:

Awards: 2002-2003 High School Graduation Class⁸

Diplomas N=125,686									
Total Standard Diplomas		Standard Diploma via ESE waiver		Standard Diploma via ACT/ SAT waiver		Standard Diploma via GED		Special Diploma	
119,787	95%	1,141	.95%	125	.10%	1,635	1.36%	5,899	4.69%

Certificates of Completion N=6,262			
Standard Certificate		Special Certificate	
6,153	98.3%	109	1.74%

Of these students:

- 10.39 percent were Students with Disabilities.
- 3.3 percent were limited English proficient (LEP) students.
- 57.1 percent were White.
- 21.38 percent were Black.
- 17.8 percent were Hispanic.
- 2.6 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander.
- .27 percent were American Indian/Alaskan Native.
- .76 percent were Multiracial.
- 15.19 percent of the students had fewer than the required 24 credits.
- 5.21 percent of the students had less than a 2.0 GPA.

Approximately 7,698 students with disabilities earned a standard high school diploma. Of these students, 13.8% used the newly created ESE waiver to obtain the standard diploma. Approximately 2,576 LEP students

earned a standard high school diploma. Of these students, .74 percent used the ESE waiver to obtain the standard diploma, while .97 percent used their ACT or SAT scores in lieu of the required FCAT score.

For the 11,301 students (or 7.89 percent) who did not receive a diploma or a certificate of completion:

- slightly more than 47 percent were expected to return to school in the 2003-2004 school year;
- almost 40 percent dropped out of school;
- approximately 11 percent entered an adult education program; and
- approximately 1 percent entered a home education program.

Two students entered into military service.

Use of Concordance Studies

The DOE completed concordance studies for the FCAT, PLAN, PSAT, SAT and ACT. Concordance studies are a recognized technical procedure for converting scores from one standardized test to another. The DOE noted that although not perfectly aligned, the ACT and SAT cover a majority of the Sunshine State Standards. Twelfth grade students in the 2002-2003 graduating class who attained the SAT or ACT scores concordant with the FCAT passing scores shown below satisfied the assessment requirement for a standard high school diploma. These scores apply only to seniors graduating in 2002-2003.

AUTHORIZED CONCORDANT SCORES			
Reading		Math	
FCAT	287	FCAT	295
SAT	370	SAT	350
ACT	14	ACT	15

Source: Memorandum, Commissioner of Education to School District Superintendents, July 7, 2003.

The department also prepared information related to the ACT, SAT, and the FCAT score of 300 in reading and math.⁹ According to the DOE, the ACT and SAT concordance scores for these FCAT scores are lower than the ACT and SAT scores for college placement and the statewide mean for these tests.

Although the department also conducted concordance studies for the PLAN and the PSAT, the Commissioner of Education did not authorize concordance scores for these tests. The DOE did not recommend that the State

⁸ Florida Department of Education, January 2004

⁹ Effective February 1, 2002, the FCAT passing score for reading and math was increased by administrative rule to 300, beginning with all first time grade 10 FCAT test takers in March 2002. The law (s. 1008.22(3)(c) 5., F.S.) provides that any administrative rules that have the effect of raising the required passing scores must only apply to students taking the FCAT after such rules are adopted by the state.

Board of Education adopt substitute scores for the PLAN and the PSAT because scores may impact 10th grade test taking behavior and a concern that the FCAT would lose the ability to measure rising student achievement statewide.

The DOE did not conduct a concordance study of the FCAT and the tests used for entry into the military, since it does not currently maintain a database of ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) scores to support a concordance study and the sample size is not sufficient to conduct this type of study.

On-line Testing

Computer-based testing is being promoted as a solution to many states' testing problems.¹⁰ Approximately 20 states were in the process of developing computer-based assessments during 2003.¹¹ Considerations in developing on-line assessments include equity, test security, the availability of a sufficient number of test items, and budgetary problems in acquiring the necessary equipment. The DOE is currently under contract with NCS Pearson, Inc., to provide a pilot project of an on-line version of the FCAT for 10th grade students who must re-take the test.

Students with Disabilities

Unless participation in particular tests is individually determined to be inappropriate for a particular student, federal law generally requires inclusion of all students in assessments. Federal law requires states or districts to develop guidelines for the participation of children with disabilities in alternate assessments for those children who cannot participate in state and district-wide assessment programs and to conduct alternate assessments.

The appropriate inclusion of students with disabilities under the No Child Left Behind Act is a major concern. While there is a desire to raise expectations for students with disabilities, there is a concomitant concern that such students could suffer harsh or unintended consequences.¹²

Recent federal rules under the No Child Left Behind Act, require the inclusion of the test results of students with disabilities who have been enrolled in a school for a full academic year in calculating the

progress for the school, the district, and the state. All students taking an alternate assessment are included in calculations of progress as either proficient (and above) or non-proficient.

An individual educational plan (IEP) team may decide to exclude any student with a disability, as defined in s. 1003.01(3)(a), F.S., from statewide or district assessment programs. The decision must be recorded in the student's IEP. A student who is excluded from the FCAT must be assessed through an alternative assessment procedure that is also recorded in the student's IEP. In order to be excluded from the FCAT or district assessments, a student must meet the following requirements according to Rule 6A-1.0943, F.A.C.

- The student's demonstrated cognitive ability prevents the student from completing required coursework and achieving the Sunshine State Standards, even with appropriate and allowable course modifications; and
- The student requires extensive direct instruction to accomplish the application and transfer of skills and competencies needed for domestic, community living, leisure and vocational activities.

A student who is excluded from the statewide or district assessment according to the criteria or alternate assessment in this rule is not eligible for a standard high school diploma.

According to DOE, too many students with disabilities took an alternate assessment instead of the FCAT in 2002-2003. Of the 261,553 Florida students with disabilities in grades three through ten, 30,036 students or 11.5% of the state's total population of students with disabilities in these grades were assessed using an alternate assessment.¹³ The following indicates the proportions of students with disabilities (grades 3 to 10) taking alternate assessment, by primary exceptionality:

• Educable Mentally Handicapped	32%
• Specific Learning Disabled	23%
• Trainable Mentally Handicapped	15%
• Other	9%
• Emotionally Handicapped	6%
• Autistic	6%
• Profoundly Mentally Handicapped	5%
• Severe Emotional Disturbance	4%

Districts choose the alternate assessment instruments they will use, and the instruments vary by district. Districts report what alternate assessments they use in

¹⁰ *Access to Computer-Based Testing for Students with Disabilities*, National Center on Educational Outcomes, June 2002.

¹¹ *2003 State Special Education Outcomes: Marching On*. National Center on Educational Outcomes, December 2003.

¹² *Quality Counts 2004: "Count Me In: Special Education in an Era of Standards,"* Education Week, January 8, 2004.

¹³ Memorandum, K-12 Chancellor, Florida DOE, to District School Superintendents, December 29, 2003.

their Special Programs and Procedures report that they make to the DOE.

The 2003 Legislature provided for waiving the requirement to earn a passing score on the FCAT in order to receive a standard high school diploma. This waiver applies to a student with a disability, as defined in s. 1007.02(2), F.S., for whom the individual educational plan (IEP) committee determines that the FCAT cannot accurately measure the student’s abilities, taking into consideration all allowable accommodations. The law (s. 1003.43(11)(b), F.S.) provides that a waiver may be granted if the student:

- completes the minimum number of credits and other requirements prescribed by subsections (1) and (4) of the section.
- does not earn a passing score on the FCAT, after one opportunity in 10th grade and one opportunity in 11th grade.

Use of High-Stakes Tests in SREB and Selected Other States.

The following data were compiled from a survey of states that are members of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). SREB member states include (in addition to Florida): Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. New York and California were also surveyed in order to add some additional large states to the sample.

The primary questions asked were (1) whether the state had a high-stakes exam for elementary and high-school students, (2) if the state did have such an exam, whether non-disabled students were permitted to use an alternative test for purposes of grade advancement or high school graduation instead of the standard state test, and (3) if the state had a high-stakes exam, whether a waiver or appeals process was offered for students who failed the exam. “High-stakes” as used in this context means a test the results of which, as the *sole factor*, will subject a student to mandatory retention or failure to graduate (regardless of whether waivers or exceptions were permitted after failure to pass the test.) Additional corollary information was gathered as further detailed in the charts below.

High-Stakes Testing of Elementary School Students

Number of states that administer a high-stakes test to elementary school students:		
• SREB member states:	Yes: 6	No: 9
• Other states ¹⁴ :	Yes: 0	No: 2
Of states with high-stakes testing (includes SREB states only), number that permit non-disabled students to use an alternative test instead of the standard state test:		
• SREB member states:	Yes: 5	No: 1
Of states with high-stakes testing (includes SREB states only), number that offer waivers or an appeals process for non-disabled students:		
• SREB member states:	Yes: 6	No: 0
Number of times most states permit students to retake the high-stakes exam:		
States generally permit students to retake the high-stakes exam one or two times.		
Types of remediation offered by states surveyed to students who fail high-stakes exam:		
Summer school; additional instruction during the school year; intensive help for identified students <i>prior to</i> administration of the high-stakes exam (based on previous test scores); smaller classes for struggling students; and personalized education plans.		

**High-Stakes Testing of High School Students
(Use of “Exit Exam(s)” as a High School Graduation Requirement)**

Number of states that administer an exit exam or exams to high school students:		
• SREB member states:	Yes: 10	No: 5
• Other states ¹⁵ :	Yes: 2	No: 0
Of states with exit exam(s), number that permit non-disabled students to use an alternative test instead of the standard state test:		
• SREB member states:	Yes: 1	No: 9
• Other states:	Yes: 1	No: 1
Of states with exit exam(s), number that offer waivers or an appeals process for non-disabled students:		
• SREB member states:	Yes: 1	No: 9
• Other states:	Yes: 0	No: 2
Number of times most states permit students to retake the exit exam or exams:		
States generally permit students to retake the exit exam(s) 2 or 3 times per year until passed.		
Types of remediation offered by states surveyed to students who fail exit exam(s):		
Additional classes, study groups, provision of study guides, tutoring, or summer school.		

A majority of the surveyed states do not administer a high-stakes test to elementary school students, but a majority of states surveyed *do* administer a high-stakes exit exam or exams to high school students. While all states that required a passing score on a high school

¹⁴ Other states surveyed were California and New York.

¹⁵ Other states surveyed were California and New York.

exit exam offered students additional opportunities to retake necessary exams, none of these states actually required that students take re-tests after having failed the exam once. Waivers or appeals are generally offered to elementary school students who fail the high-stakes exam, but of the states surveyed, only 1 of 12 offered a waiver or appeals process for high school students who failed high-stakes exit exams. Alternative tests were sometimes permitted for both elementary and high school students.

Comparison of Florida and Federal Requirements

Florida currently requires public school students in grades 3 through 10 to take the reading and math portions of the FCAT annually. Students in grades 4, 8, and 10 must also take the writing portion of the FCAT, and students in grades 5, 8, and 10 must take the science portion of the FCAT.

Below is a table comparing Florida’s current testing program with the federal testing requirements that will be effective in 2007-2008 (once the full federal testing requirements are implemented).

Comparison of Federal Testing Requirements and Current Florida Testing Practice

Grade	Testing Required Under NCLB			Testing Performed in Florida Using the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)			
	All Students Required to Take Test, Unless Exempt – Required Subjects			All Students Required to Take Test, Unless Exempt – Required Subjects			
	Reading	Math	Science	Reading	Math	Science	Writing
3	×	×	× ^A	×	×		
4	×	×	× ^A	×	×		×
5	×	×	× ^A	×	×	×	
6	×	×	× ^B	×	×		
7	×	×	× ^B	×	×		
8	×	×	× ^B	×	×	×	×
9			× ^B	×	×		
10	× ^C	× ^C	× ^C	×	×	×	×
11	× ^C	× ^C	× ^C				
12	× ^C	× ^C	× ^C				

- ^A Test must be administered *at least once* in grades 3-5.
- ^B Test must be administered *at least once* in grades 6-9.
- ^C Test must be administered *at least once* in grades 10-12.

In addition to the requirements set forth above, federal law also calls for a sample of 4th grade and 8th grade students to take NAEP¹⁶ tests biennially to enable

¹⁶ National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). A sample of Florida fourth and eighth grade students must take biennial NAEP reading and math tests. However, NAEP will not satisfy statewide testing requirements under Title I. States must participate in NAEP in order to allow the federal government to make cross-state comparisons of educational progress.

comparison of test results between states. Florida complies with this requirement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The provisions of s. 1008.22(9), F.S., related to conducting concordance studies, should be repealed. Unless there are a significant number of students in the 2003-2004 graduation class who are unable to graduate based solely on their inability to pass the 10th grade FCAT, the use of ACT or SAT concordant scores should not be continued for the 2003-04 graduation class.

The State Board of Education should immediately initiate amendments to Rule 6A-1.094221, F.A.C., to continue the availability of the alternate assessment option for third grade students. Alternatively, the Legislature may set these scores retroactively for the 2003-2004 school year. As well, the guidelines for portfolios should be established in rule by the State Board of Education.

The DOE district profiles hold promise as a useful tool for determining how well school districts are meeting the student progression requirements. The DOE and the State Board of Education should carefully monitor district progress in this area, especially for reading.

The State Board of Education should carefully monitor the pilot on-line project and the use of alternate assessments by students with disabilities and LEP students to ensure the appropriateness of these assessments.