

## FCAT Scoring Changes

On Monday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, the Florida Board of Education is scheduled to vote on a new scoring system for the FCAT, and it is poised to adopt higher cut off scores for third- through 10th-graders. If the new standards are approved, many more third-graders likely would face retention, while many more high school students likely would fail to meet the state's graduation requirements. Florida Education Commissioner Gerard Robinson is recommending new scores for the high school FCAT reading exam that are two points higher than the levels supported by a majority of the state's superintendents. These developments raise a number of questions and concerns for students, parents, and teachers:

- Doesn't this arbitrary increase of scores seem to drive more actions like state or invention or privatization and charters needlessly, which have far less oversight and no record of greater success than traditional public schools?
- Will students and teachers be given time, support materials to learn the content standards?
- There are already problems with the high-school FCAT scores, where some students struggle with the FCAT, yet do well on the SAT. Superintendents have called for the state to lower the high-school scores for years, contending they have been artificially high, creating the perception that high schools are performing worse than they really are.
- Standardized testing should be used for diagnostic purposes, to help students and teachers, but it has turned into a blunt instrument which is used to reward and punish teachers and schools.
- The basic rule of testing is that a test should be used only for the purpose in which it was designed. A test of fifth grade reading tests whether students can read at a fifth grade level; it is not a test of teacher quality. Testing experts warn that tests are subject to statistical-, measurement-, and human error. Sometimes the answer is wrong. Sometimes the question is wrong. Sometimes a thoughtful child will pick the wrong answer because it sounds plausible.

Our goal should be to invest in our children and provide them with great neighborhood schools and a high quality education. To be a healthy society,

we must improve and fully fund our public schools. If we truly want schools that respect professionalism and encourage creativity and innovation, we need to pursue very different policies for testing and accountability. We must provide better schools in every neighborhood and we must treat our teachers and principals and administrators with respect. If they need support, they should get it.

**To call, email or fax Commissioner Robinson** to express your concern regarding FCAT testing and the upcoming vote on test scores see contact information below. To contact individual Board members, you can call the Department directly at (850) 245-9661.

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