FCAT Writing+ Recommendation

Commissioner's Recommendation: Remove the multiple-choice items from the FCAT Writing+ tests and delay its use as a graduation requirement.

- The use of a writing test as part of the graduation requirements has been a statutory requirement since 1999.
- In 2005, multiple-choice items were added to the essay test that had been in use since 1993.
- Last year, February 2007, the SBE adopted achievement standards and a graduation score requirement for the FCAT Writing+ test.

Two Reasons for the Recommendation – Budget and Technical Concerns:

- Budget Reduction – During the budget reduction process, we took a hard look at the assessment and accountability requirements and it became clear that the multiple-choice questions were something we could remove without affecting our state or federal accountability systems (see the table below).

Assessment and Accountability Requirements			
K-12 Assess. Programs	**NCLB Required Programs**	**State Required Programs**	**Included in NCLB AYP** (SG-School Grades)
FCAT – Reading	Grades 3-8, and 10	9th, grad. retesting	Yes, all (SG-all)
FCAT – Mathematics	Grades 3-8, and 10	9th, grad. retesting	Yes, all (SG-all)
FCAT – Science	Grades 5, 8, 11		No (SG-all)
FCAT – Writing		Grades 4, 8, 10	Yes, all essay only (SG-all, essay only)
NRT Reading		Grades 3-10	No
NRT Mathematics		Grades 3-10	No
CELLA	All grades		No
Alternate Assessment for SWD	All grades	All grades	Yes (SG-No)
PSAT/PLAN		Grade 10	No
DJJ		All grades	No
Kindergarten Readiness		K only	No

- Technical concerns – The analyses of the 2007 test data identified inconsistencies between scores on the essay and scores on the MC questions, making the combination into a single score problematic.[1]
    - The FCAT Technical Advisory Committee (experts in psychometric issues and local district policy) unanimously recommended that the graduation requirement be delayed.
    - I asked Buros to look at other aspects of the testing program after the review of reading and mathematics was complete. Due to the high stakes nature of the Grade 10 Writing+ test this year, we asked them to focus on

[1] Technically, the scaling of essay and the scaling of the multiple-choice questions are not fitting together in a consistent manner **over time**. These two scales must be combined to create the total score on which the graduation cut point is based. Until such time as this scaling can be **done consistently time after time**, that is **retest after retest**, the test should not be used to make a graduation decision. The technical qualities of the Grades 4, 8, and 10 Writing+ tests as accountability and instructional program measures continue to provide excellent feedback to school, district, and state officials.

it first. The preliminary findings from their investigation have confirmed the conclusion that the test should not be used as a graduation requirement.

Minimizing the Impact on Students:

The recommendation to delay the writing graduation requirement is being made at this point in time so we can minimize the impact on students. The first cohort of students to be required to "sit" for the graduation test is this year's sophomore class. These students took the test thinking they would need to pass it for their scheduled graduation in the spring of 2010. Changing the requirement now means there have not yet been any consequences based on the 2008 writing test scores. Additionally, there is still sufficient time to communicate these changes prior to completing class schedules for the fall and graduation in 2010.

Further Action Needed

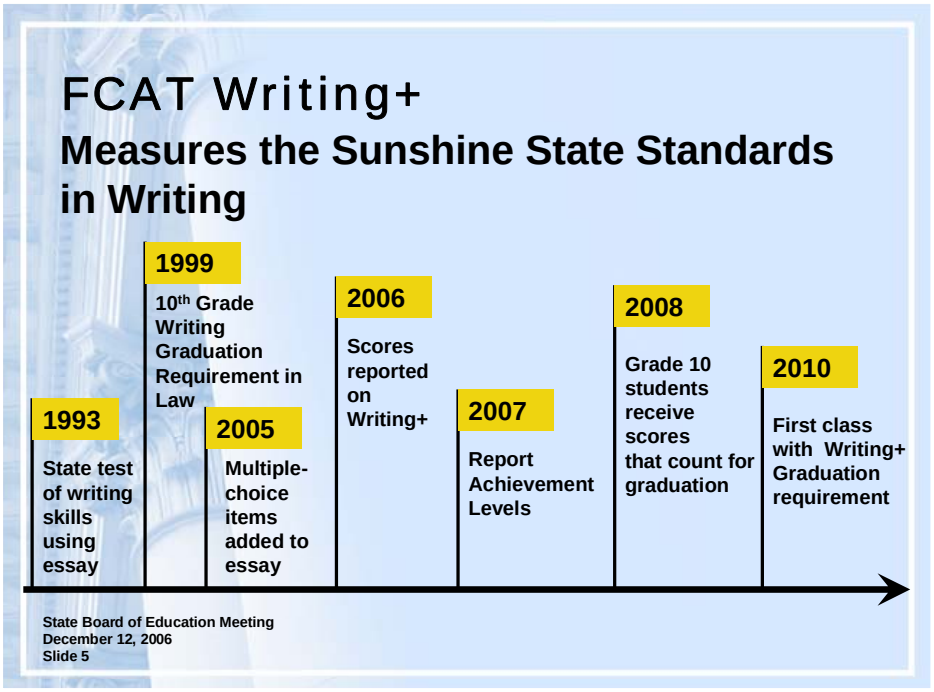
1. Notify students and schools of the recommended change because of the impact on scheduling students for the next school year (2008-09).
2. Begin rulemaking to codify these recommendations.
3. Amend existing contracts to eliminate related tasks.
4. Continue to explore options that would permit us to include an assessment of writing skill in our graduation requirements.

Current Legal Citations

- ***Florida Statutes Section 1008.22 (3)(c)5.,*** "Except as provided in s. 1003.428(8)(b) or s. 1003.43(11)(b), students must earn a passing score on the grade 10 assessment test described in this paragraph or attain concordant scores as described in subsection (9) in reading, **writing**, and mathematics to qualify for a standard high school diploma. The State Board of Education shall designate a passing score for each part of the grade 10 assessment test. In establishing passing scores, the state board shall consider any possible negative impact of the test on minority students. The State Board of Education shall adopt rules which specify the passing scores for the grade 10 FCAT. Any such rules, which have the effect of raising the required passing scores, shall only apply to students taking the grade 10 FCAT for the first time after such rules are adopted by the State Board of Education." Emphasis (bold and underlining) added.
- ***SBE Rule 6A-1.09422, FAC***, "(5) The total scores on FCAT Reading, Mathematics, **Writing+**, and Science are also reported on an achievement-level scale. The total scores that correspond to each achievement level are shown in the following paragraphs. …" "(8) For students in the graduating class of 2009-10 school year and beyond, the passing score for the **writing test** shall be a score equal to or greater than 300 on the 100 to 500 scale." Emphasis (bold and underlining) added.

FCAT Writing+ Recommendation

History of Writing Implementation:



- The writing essay test, Florida Writes! began in 1993 at grades 4 and 8, and in 1994, at grade 10.
- In 1995, the State Board of Education established the first school accountability program and identified critically low schools based on student achievement criteria, including the writing essay. Other indicators were norm-referenced test (NRT) and High School Competency Test (HSCT) scores.
- In 1999, the requirement to use writing for high school graduation was added to *Section 1008.22 (3)(c)5., F.S.,* as part of the A+ legislation.
- The requirements specified in the A+ legislation were phased in as fiscal and human resources were available to do so. First, new grade levels of Reading and Mathematics were added in 2001, Science was added in 2003, and in 2006 the essay test was expanded to include multiple choice questions.
- A longer and more comprehensive assessment was desirable for measuring all aspects of writing, not just composition, and for a high stakes student decision about graduation.
- In February 2007, the SBE amended *Rule 6A-1.09422, FAC*, to include achievement level scores for all grades and the graduation passing score. This rule also identifies the first group of students who must pass the FCAT Writing+ Grade 10 test, students who were enrolled in grade 9 in 2006-07 – seniors of 2010.