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Dr. Eric J. Smith
Commissioner of Education

March 31, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: School District Superintendents

FROM: Dr. Eric J. Smith, Commissioner of Education

RE: Changes to FCAT in 2009 and Beyond

As you are aware, all aspects of education are facing budget reductions, and the statewide assessment program is no different. In 2008-09, we eliminated the FCAT NRT, the FCAT Parent Network, and the summer 2009 FCAT retake administration. The purpose of this memorandum is to explain the necessary cuts that have been made for the remaining FCAT administrations, the assessments that are being developed based on the new standards, and end-of-course assessments. You may have already heard of some of these changes as we have been discussing them with groups of educators across the state. Below you will find a description of the planned changes for the program's foreseeable future. Attached is a chart that will assist you in understanding the schedule of events as we begin the transition period between FCAT and the new standards assessments.

Please note that no changes are being made to the 2010 FCAT Reading and Mathematics tests. They are being developed based on the current standards, will continue to be administered as in past years, and will be included in the accountability systems consistent with the current implementation. Also, no changes are being made in the FCAT administration schedule for 2009-10: the Writing assessment will be administered in February 2010, and assessments in Reading, Mathematics, and Science will be administered in March 2010.

Changes to the Existing FCAT Program

- FCAT Retakes: All summer FCAT retake administrations will be eliminated beginning with summer 2009.
- FCAT Science: Performance tasks (constructed-response items) for FCAT Science will be removed beginning with the spring 2010 test administration. No changes need to be made to the scores reported or use of these scores in the school accountability system.

- Handscoring: Although no changes are being made to the FCAT Writing, Reading, and Mathematics tests themselves, we can no longer afford to have every response scored by two readers. All responses to reading and mathematics performance tasks at grades 4, 5, 8, and 10, and writing essays at grades 4 and 8, will be scored by one reader. All tenth grade essays will continue to be scored by two readers. The quality statistics for performance task scoring (e.g., interrater agreements) have been consistently high; therefore, we don't anticipate any negative effects on student or school average scores. We will continue to double-score 20% of all responses to demonstrate that the quality of the scoring process is not different from previous years.

  Adjustments will need to be made to the school grading procedures for Writing to accommodate this change. Under the current school grades procedures, schools earn points for Writing based on the percentage of students scoring a 3.5 and above on the essay. Without two readers, a student score of 3.5 will no longer be possible. To accommodate this change for school grades, we propose using the average of the percentage of students scoring a 3 and above and the percentage of students scoring a 4 and above. So, for example, if a school had 80% of its students scoring a 3 and above on Writing and 60% scoring a 4 and above on Writing, the school would earn 70 points ((80+60)/2) for the Writing component of school grades. We will be including this proposed rule change during the rule development processes for high school grades that are anticipated to occur in May.

- FCAT Support Materials: Except for sample test materials and test administration manuals, all previously published support materials will be eliminated, including *Keys to FCAT*, *Lessons Learned*, *Understanding FCAT Reports*, and *Florida Reads!*, *Writes!*, *Solves!*, and *Inquires!* Because sample test materials are intended to provide students with information about the types of questions on the test prior to taking it, they will still be produced and used as prescribed. The test administration manuals are essential to ensure that all persons involved in test administration complete tasks in the standardized manner prescribed in the manuals. Some previously printed documents will be prepared and posted on the Department's Web site only (e.g., item specifications and sample test answer keys).

- FCAT Printed Reports: School and district reports will not be provided in print, but will be available for download from a secure Web site as soon as the accuracy of all results is approved. Printed reports will continue to be distributed for students/parents and will be shipped to districts for distribution.

New FCAT Program

- Continue Previous Reductions: All reductions made for 2009 and 2010 will continue for the new FCAT to be implemented in 2011 and beyond.
  - The FCAT Parent Network will no longer be available (printed reports for students/parents will continue to be provided).
  - Summer retakes will no longer be administered.

- Performance Tasks: Performance tasks (constructed-response items) will not be included in the new FCAT Reading, Mathematics, Science, or end-of-course exams. As we move the testing schedule later in the year (see the attachment) and administer end-of-course exams in the last two weeks of each semester, this elimination of performance tasks will allow a more rapid turn-around time for reporting and an easier transition to computer-based tests.

- End-of-Course Exams: The plans for end-of-course exams are still being finalized. Florida will develop and administer exams in Algebra I beginning in 2010-11, Biology beginning in 2011-12, and American History beginning in 2012-13. The timeline and studies for additional end-of-course exams are still under development, but these exams will likely be a combination of assessments developed in Florida, existing published exams purchased from vendors, and existing exams administered through cooperative agreements with other organizations (e.g., Algebra II with the American Diploma Project).

- Computer-Based Tests: All end-of-course exams will be administered in computer-based format only, except for limited paper-based versions administered to accommodate students with disabilities. Additionally, the new FCAT will begin transitioning to a computer-based format beginning in 2011-12.

There is a strong commitment by the Florida Legislature and the Department of Education to maintain the kind of quality testing and accountability system that has produced national achievement success for the children of Florida. Even though we have made adjustments to the testing program and may need to make future adjustments, you can be assured that the quality of the assessment system will not be compromised. We will keep in close communication and will notify you of any additional changes as they are known.

If you need any clarifications about the attachment describing the transition period between FCAT and the new assessments, please contact Victoria Ash (victoria.ash@fldoe.org) or Cornelia Orr (cornelia.orr@fldoe.org) at 850-245-0513.

EJS/cso

Attachment

cc: Assistant Superintendents for Curriculum and Instruction
District Assessment Coordinators
Dr. Frances Haithcock
Jeff Sellers