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Just Read, Florida!

September 16, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: School District Superintendents

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

RE: Changes to FCAT Writing

In this climate of budget limitations, the Florida Department of Education is making every effort to responsibly minimize expenses while maintaining excellence in our educational system. Some of these cuts were described in my March 31, 2009, memorandum titled "Changes to FCAT in 2009 and Beyond" (see http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-5347/fcat09.pdf). The purpose of this memorandum is to inform you of some additional changes we have made to FCAT Writing.

Beginning this spring, there will be only **one prompt** at all grade levels (4, 8, and 10). The writing mode of the prompt will be either narrative or expository at grade 4 and persuasive or expository at grades 8 and 10. In order to ensure the continuance of instruction using all writing modes, we will not announce in advance which mode will be tested at each grade level. By using one prompt for all students at each grade level, we will accrue cost savings and still maintain the integrity of the assessments. All members of the FCAT writing content advisory committee reviewed this proposal and unanimously supported it.

I announced in my March memo to you that each writing response at grades 4 and 8 would have **one reader** during performance scoring this year. We will include grade 10 in this change. For quality control purposes, 20% of all student responses will be read by a second reader.

The March communication also described how this change in FCAT Writing scoring procedures will affect school grade calculations. The following proposed calculation method will now be used for grades 4, 8, **and 10**:

> We plan to use 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 has 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.

These changes will benefit the state, but they will not alter the integrity or reliability of FCAT Writing. If you have any questions about these changes, please feel free to contact Kris Ellington, Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Accountability, Research, and Measurement, or Victoria Ash, Bureau Chief of K-12 Assessment, at 850-245-0513.

Thank you for joining me in diligently serving the parents and students in our state in support of continued excellence in Florida's schools.

EJS/kee

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