

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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Commissioner of Education

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

You may have heard or read about changes in testing and school grades and are wondering what this means for your child and your family.

To help better prepare students for college and careers, the Florida Department of Education has transitioned to new standards that set expectations for what students need to learn by each grade level and in various subjects. New assessments measure a student's progress toward meeting the standards.

Raising educational standards and measuring a student's progress toward meeting them is the right thing to do because it works. Every time we have raised the bar in Florida, after dropping at first, scores have moved higher. In December, after input from educators, parents, and the community, the State Board of Education set higher achievement levels for reading and mathematics.

Your student's spring 2012 FCAT 2.0 Reading and Mathematics score report is enclosed. Since this is the first time in 10 years that Florida has had new reading and math achievement levels, you may see a lower score for your student than in the past. That does not mean your child knows less, or that his or her teacher is not doing a good job. Any time standards are raised, some students will struggle to meet the new expectations.

We encourage you to use the scores that your child receives on these assessments as a point of conversation with your child's teacher to determine the next steps in helping them achieve their academic goals.

You can find more information about your student's report on the Department's website in *Understanding FCAT 2.0 Reports Spring 2012* (<http://fcats.fldoe.org/fcats2/pdf/s12uf2r.pdf>). There is also a new website for parents where you can sign up to receive information about your child's education (<http://www.floridapathtosuccess.org>).

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Gerard Robinson.

Gerard Robinson

Please note: If we were able to match your student's score on a subject to the score received last year, you will find it on the new FCAT 2.0 reporting scale so you can compare it to this year's score. Because achievement standards are higher, your student's converted score from 2011 may appear lower on the new scale than it actually was. For example, a student who scored in Achievement Level 3 in 2011 might appear on the new scale as having a score in Achievement Level 2. (This does not mean that your student's 2011 scores have been changed; the converted scores are only for comparison so that you can see how this year's score compares to last year's.)

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Dear Parent/Guardian of a Grade 3 Student,

The Florida Department of Education has transitioned to new standards that set expectations for what students need to learn by each grade level and in various subjects to help better prepare students as they move through school and on to college and careers. New assessments measure a student's progress toward meeting the standards.

Raising educational standards and measuring a student's progress toward meeting them is the right thing to do. Every time we have raised the bar in Florida, after dropping at first, scores have moved higher. In December, after input from educators, parents, and the community, the State Board of Education set higher achievement levels for reading and mathematics.

Your student's spring 2012 FCAT 2.0 Reading and Mathematics score report is enclosed. While it may seem early to be thinking about your child graduating and moving into the next phase of life, studies show that third grade is a critical year for measuring learning, especially when it comes to reading. A child who does not learn how to read proficiently by the end of third grade is more likely to have difficulty and fall behind in school. Identifying struggling readers early allows teachers and schools to provide the resources students need to succeed. If you have concerns about your child's scores, we encourage you to contact your child's teacher to determine the next steps in meeting his or her academic goals.

You can find more information about your student's report on the Department's website in *Understanding FCAT 2.0 Reports Spring 2012* (<http://fcat.fldoe.org/fcat2/pdf/s12uf2r.pdf>). More information about Florida's third grade reading policy is available at <http://www.justreadflorida.com/pdf/2011ReadToLearnFinal.pdf>. There is also a new website for parents where you can sign up to receive information about your child's education (<http://www.floridapathtosuccess.org>).

Thank you for supporting your child's education.

Sincerely,

Gerard Robinson

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

One of the most important ways we communicate with others is through writing. Writing well is important whether we are in school or at work, whether we are sending a message to a friend or writing a resume.

To help better prepare students for college and careers, the Florida Department of Education has transitioned to new standards that set expectations for what students need to learn by each grade level and in various subjects. New assessments measure a student's progress toward meeting the standards.

Your student's spring 2012 FCAT Writing score report is enclosed and the results reflect some changes in how your child's writing assessment was scored. There were two scorers this year instead of one, and they placed more emphasis on proper punctuation, spelling, and grammar, as well as the way your student included supporting details in the essay he or she wrote.

Since we were raising the bar for FCAT writing, we expected to see lower scores. However, when the preliminary results began coming in from around the state, they were markedly lower than projected. We had raised the bar. We were grading more stringently. We knew that our students' writing ability had not suddenly changed.

On May 15, the State Board of Education approved changing the writing performance-level standard used for school grades from 4.0 to 3.0 on a 6-point scale to allow time to review the results and the process. That also meant that lower scores would not have as significant an impact on school grades this year.

It is important to understand that Florida does not use the writing score to make decisions about your child's promotion. The state uses the score when it calculates school grades. (Your school district may take the writing score into consideration at a district level. You can check with your student's teacher or school to see whether that applies in your district.)

Raising educational standards and measuring a student's progress toward meeting them is the right thing to do. It works. Every time we have raised the bar in Florida, after dropping at first, scores have moved higher.

You can find more information about FCAT Writing on the Department's website at <http://fcat.fldoe.org/fwinfopg.asp>. There is also a new website for parents where you can sign up to receive information about your child's education (<http://www.floridapathtosuccess.org>).

Sincerely,

Gerard Robinson