

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Gerard Robinson
Commissioner of Education

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

KATHLEEN SHANAHAN, *Chair*

ROBERTO MARTÍNEZ, *Vice Chair*

Members

SALLY BRADSHAW

GARY CHARTRAND

DR. AKSHAY DESAI

BARBARA S. FEINGOLD

JOHN R. PADGET



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. 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 FCAT Writing score reports are enclosed. Since this is the first time in 10 years that Florida has had new reading 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.

Your student's spring 2012 FCAT Writing score report reflects 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.

While we were expecting to see lower writing scores, 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 your student's report on the Department website in *Understanding FCAT 2.0 Reports Spring 2012* (<http://fcats.fldoe.org/fcat2/pdf/s12uf2r.pdf>). More information about FCAT Writing is available at <http://fcats.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,

Handwritten signature of Gerard Robinson.

Gerard Robinson

Note: If we were able to match your student's reading score 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.)