

WITH STUDENTS AS TOP PRIORITY, FLORIDA CHOOSES REPLACEMENT FOR FCAT
~ *Florida's new assessment tool will assess student progress on new Florida Standards* ~

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Continuing historic steps to ensure all Florida children have the opportunity to succeed, Florida Department of Education Commissioner Pam Stewart today announced a new test has been selected to replace the FCAT 2.0 exams beginning with the 2014-15 school year.

“The new assessment will measure each child’s progress and achievement on the Florida Standards, which were developed with an unprecedented amount of public input,” said Stewart. “This assessment supports our new standards, which emphasize flexibility for teachers to make their own decisions in classrooms while preparing our students to analyze and think.”

“The selection of our new assessment tool is a critical step forward. Florida students will be assessed on their knowledge of the Florida Standards, which will prepare them for success in college, careers and in life,” said State Board of Education Chairman Gary Chartrand.

In August 2013, Governor Rick Scott convened the state’s top education leaders and bipartisan stakeholders to discuss the sustainability and transparency of the state’s accountability system in a three-day accountability summit.

Using input from the summit, Governor Scott issued Executive Order 13-276, which initiated Florida’s departure from the national PARCC consortium as its fiscal agent, to ensure that the state would be able to procure a test specifically designed for Florida’s needs without federal intervention.

Governor Scott also set out eight goals for the new assessment to ensure the best outcome for Florida students. Among those eight objectives were an emphasis on prompt reports of results, no significant change in testing time for students, no significant increase in costs of the assessments and an assurance that testing dates be as close as possible to the end of the school year to maximize learning opportunities. This assessment meets those goals.

Governor Scott also requested additional public comments about the standards, which resulted in public hearings around the state and thousands of comments from Floridians. In February 2014, the State Board of Education approved changes to the standards that reflected the input. The new Florida Standards for mathematics and English language arts stress a broader approach for student learning, including an increased emphasis on analytical thinking. With the new and more rigorous standards, a new assessment was needed to measure student progress.

The Invitation to Negotiate was posted for public review in October 2013 and proposals were received in December. An evaluation team reviewed five proposals and narrowed the choice to three groups. Subsequently, a negotiation team unanimously recommended the not-for-profit American Institutes for Research (AIR) to Commissioner Stewart, who announced her selection of AIR today.

For more information about the new assessment and its benefits for Florida students, please see the attachment.

Q and A**1. Why are we replacing the FCAT?**

With new, more rigorous standards in place to help Florida students succeed, the FCAT 2.0 no longer serves the purpose of measuring student progress and achievement.

Commissioner Pam Stewart's top priority was to choose the best assessment for students, ensuring that the test replacing the FCAT 2.0 in the 2014-15 school year best serves Florida students by accurately measuring education gains and progress. To this end, the following goals were outlined in Governor Scott's Executive Order on September 23, 2013:

- Provide timely and informative reports of results;
- Do not significantly increase the overall cost of testing to the state, districts or schools;
- Allow students to test as late in the school year as possible;
- Measure student mastery of the standards taught;
- Provide a basis for comparing Florida performance to that of other states;
- Meet high quality standards for assessment, including reliability and validity for a variety of accountability purposes;
- Provide the flexibility necessary in order for schools and districts to build technology capacity; and,
- Include appropriate accommodations for exceptional students.

2. Why is this important to Floridians?

It is important that each and every child in this state have the opportunity to learn and succeed in college, career and in life. This new method of assessment will allow teachers to emphasize critical thinking, which will provide our students with even greater opportunities to live and learn in Florida. Business growth will continue as Florida graduates show the ability to be the best in the nation, providing a strong workforce in the nation's most desirable location to live, to work and to learn.

3. What changes will Florida students and teachers see? What are the benefits to students?

The new Florida Standards, adopted by the State Board of Education in February after unprecedented public input and review, will prepare Florida students for success in college, career and in life by emphasizing analytical thinking. The new test will provide a more authentic assessment of the Florida Standards, because it will include more than multiple choice questions. Students will be asked to create graphs, interact with test content and write and respond in different ways than on traditional tests. New question types will assess students' higher-order thinking skills in keeping with the higher expectations of the Florida Standards. This summer, students, educators and parents will be able to preview samples of new question types by taking practice tests that will be made available for anyone interested in reviewing them.

4. How does this affect school grades and teacher evaluations?

After the first administration of the Florida Standards Assessments in English language arts (ELA) and Mathematics in spring of 2015, the required standard-setting process will be

conducted in the summer of 2015 in order to set performance level expectations, also referred to as “cut scores.” This will provide a new baseline for school grading and other accountability measures which will more accurately reflect student performance on the new standards and assessments. This baseline, informational approach in the first year provides parents, schools, districts and all Floridians with a clear understanding of a student’s and a school’s starting point on the new, more rigorous standards and assessments.

During the 2014-15 school year, each school district will continue to set its own performance standards for teachers using data from the new assessment, to ensure continuity with the 2013-14 evaluations within each district.

5. Will students be required to pass the new assessments in order to meet promotion and graduation requirements?

The guidelines for promotion and graduation will remain largely the same. Students entering 3rd grade in 2014-2015, who have only been taught using the Florida Standards since kindergarten, will be required to achieve a certain score on the 3rd grade ELA assessment in order to meet promotion requirements. The score will be determined this spring ensuring that students are appropriately identified for retention or promotion. Students not meeting these criteria may still meet promotion requirements through any one of six good cause exemptions. None of that has changed.

Students entering 10th grade and/ or taking Algebra 1 in 2014-2015 will be required to achieve a certain score on the respective 10th grade ELA test and the Algebra 1 assessment in order to meet graduation requirements. These students will continue to have the opportunity for retakes that all students have had before. Students who need to retake an assessment based on an FCAT 2.0 score will be able to retake the FCAT 2.0.

6. Will the new assessment have been field tested prior to 2014-15?

Yes. The test questions that Florida students will see beginning in spring of 2015 will have been through all of the rigorous review processes currently used in large-scale assessment development. The questions will have been field tested and will have been reviewed for statistical quality prior to placement on the test. Florida educators and department staff will be closely involved in all test development activities, throughout the entire process from development to administration, to ensure that test questions meet Florida’s quality standards, reflect community expectations and are free of any type of bias.

7. Why was the American Institutes for Research (AIR) selected?

AIR is a not-for-profit organization that provides research, assessment services and technical assistance. AIR has been delivering online tests for more than seven years and will deliver such tests to nearly five million students across more than 20 states this spring.

The delivery system that AIR will provide is designed to work on all technological levels. The technology requires minimal bandwidth and minimal technical support in schools.

In addition, AIR will partner with Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) to develop test content and to score student responses. DRC has 30 years of experience in developing assessments and has successfully scored millions of student responses for large-scale statewide assessment programs across the nation.

8. Have AIR or DRC been involved in any activities related to other major assessment consortia?

As with every major contractor that has experience and expertise in large-scale assessments, (and every entity that submitted a response to the Invitation to Negotiate), both AIR and DRC have been involved in consortia work. However, the work that each of the contractors will be performing for Florida will be independent of any consortium work and performed with oversight by the Florida Department of Education. Their work is focused solely on fulfilling the department's requirements as related to this contract and on meeting the needs of Florida students.

9. Will any students be taking the FCAT 2.0 in 2014-15?

High school students trying to achieve the necessary score to graduate on their 10th grade Reading test will take the FCAT 2.0 to maintain consistency. The FCAT 2.0 science exam will be used in grades 5 and 8.

10. Will the tests that will be developed and administered under this contract cost less than what the state currently pays for comparable tests? Will they cost less than PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) or SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium)?

The cost per test and cost per student will decline.

Comparison of Total Costs for Statewide Assessments in All Subject Areas (English, Language Arts/Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies)		
	Current Costs	New Costs
Per Test	\$14.58	\$11.47
Per Student	\$36.17	\$34.23

The contract is for \$220 million over six years. The tests cost significantly less than the publicly reported costs projected for either PARCC or SBAC.

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Pam Stewart
Commissioner of Education

March 17, 2014

Dear Principals:

I know that this has been an exciting time for all of us involved in education and especially for those of you who devote each and every day to helping prepare Florida children for success in college, career and in life. Your work has resulted in improved student performance in so many areas and in Florida becoming a national model in public education. I cannot thank you enough.

With your input and dedication, we have successfully taken the steps to implement the Florida Standards for mathematics and English language arts for all students. I appreciate the support and excitement so many of you have shown for the new standards, and I have heard from so many of you who are embracing the flexibility in daily instruction and opportunities for our children to develop more critical and analytical thinking skills.

Building on our history of improving student achievement, we are ready to move forward. With the State Board of Education's unanimous approval of updates to the Florida Standards in February, I have chosen the not-for-profit American Institutes for Research to provide the new English language arts and mathematics assessments, which will be administered in the 2014-15 school year. I am confident that this new assessment is the best decision for Florida students. The new assessment will measure each child's progress and achievement on the Florida Standards. With the high-quality instruction that your leadership provides, the assessment will help us keep all students on their path to be college and career ready. In his Executive Order, Governor Rick Scott outlined the objectives for this new assessment, and these assessments meet each of those.

I also have heard over and over from a number of educators that you want tests that provide a more authentic assessment of our students' grasp of the Florida Standards. These assessments will do that, because they will include more than multiple choice questions. Students will be asked to create graphs, interact with test content and write and respond in different ways than they would on traditional tests. New question types will assess students' higher order thinking

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skills in keeping with the higher expectations of the Florida Standards. Later this spring, students, educators and parents will be able to preview samples of new question types by taking practice tests that will be made available for anyone interested in reviewing them.

I am sure many of you will have questions and receive many questions from parents and colleagues. We have prepared some answers to potential questions. Please feel free to review that document and our press release announcing this decision at www.fldoe.org/eduaccsummit.asp.

I am proud to say that the Florida Standards and this new assessment are the result of unprecedented input from educators and the public. We will continue to work directly with educators and school districts as we develop this new assessment.

We will also continue to provide information to support your work. Please share this message and encourage your colleagues to email us at PrincipallySpeaking@fldoe.org or JustforTeachers@fldoe.org to continue receiving updates on this and other topics.

I look forward to working with you on this truly historic effort to help our students succeed. Thank you for all you do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pam Stewart". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Pam Stewart