



June 13, 2013

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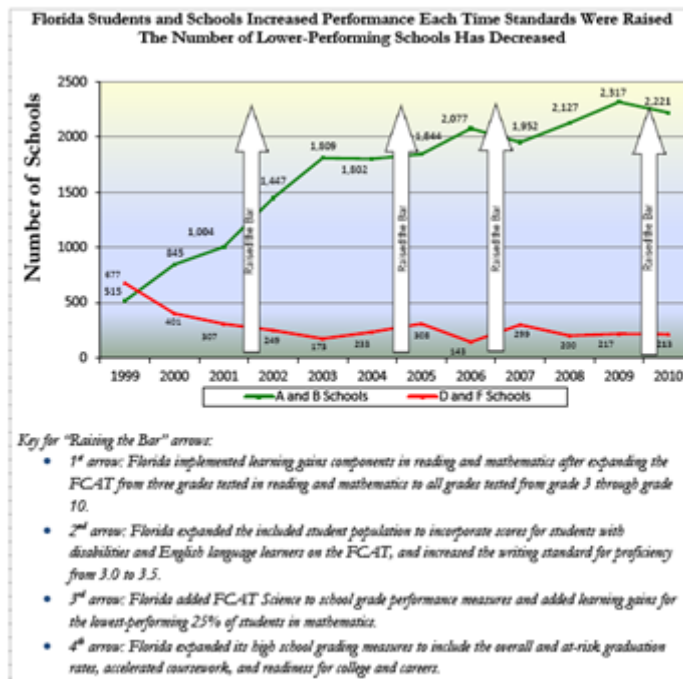
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Mr. Gary Chartrand
Chair
State Board of Education
325 W. Gaines Street
Suite 1520
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Chair Chartrand:

Over the past 15 years, the State Board of Education has established strong assessment and accountability systems to complement the state's comprehensive educational standards. From time to time, the State Board of Education has increased the rigor of these systems, having faith that Florida's teachers and students would rise to the challenge and improve their performance. In fact, that's exactly what's happened.



The State Board of Education continued this practice last year by again raising student and school performance expectations. However, due to the timing of those decisions, the State Board of Education delayed the implementation of some of the



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accountability enhancements for a year in order to give teachers and students a full school year to adjust.

Now, it is our understanding that certain parties have requested that the State Board of Education again delay implementation of key accountability provisions relating to the FCAT Writing standard and the weighting of middle school acceleration classes, and institute a new delay relating to grading points for Biology 1 end-of-course examinations and student performance in the lowest quartile.

In the strongest terms possible, the Florida Council of 100 urges the State Board of Education to stay the course as much as possible with current accountability rules and reject any proposed watering down of the accountability system. Assessment without strong accountability serves no one well, and continued devaluation of Florida's high performance standards would doom yet another student cohort to subpar expectations and behavior.

The following are our point-by-point recommendations relating to certain key accountability elements that are being questioned:

- In 2011-12, the rigor of the FCAT Writing test was greatly increased. As a result, the test passing threshold was reduced from 3.5 to 3.0. This was supposed to be a one-year adjustment to allow teachers and students to transition to the higher requirements. In fact, in 2012-13, scores went up some.

FCAT Writing Percentage Point Increases by Score Level

	3.0 or higher	3.5 or higher	4.0 or higher
Grade 4	2	9	10
Grade 8	1	2	2
Grade 10	1	2	3

However, it is unclear the degree to which these changes were influenced by an increase in the test-taking time from 45 minutes to 1 hour. Further, there are still major gaps between the percentage of students scoring a 3.0 and the percentage scoring 3.5 or higher (Grade 4: 26%; Grade 8: 25%; Grade 10: 23%). (Note: These gaps are consistent with the gaps between the previous test's passing score of 4 and the next highest level of 5.)



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There are two ways to interpret these results (not mutually exclusive) – (1) Teachers and students didn't respond much to the increased rigor; or (2) the rigor of the test is such that there should have been a long-term reduction in the passing threshold. We believe that it's primarily the latter and therefore recommend the following as a way both to recognize this reality and to incent higher performance:

- **Recommendation:** The current school grading formula is based on the percentage of a school's students who meet or exceed the passing threshold. Thus, modify the formula to leave the passing threshold at 3.0, but make:
 - 50% of the points for this grading category based on the percentage of students scoring 3.0 or above
 - 25% of the points for this grading category based on the percentage of students scoring 3.5 or above
 - 10% of the points for this grading category based on the percentage of students scoring 4.0 or above
 - 10% of the points for this grading category based on the percentage of students scoring 4.5 or above
 - 5% of the points for this grading category based on the percentage of students scoring 5.0 or above
- Performance on the Biology 1 end-of-course examination is included in the school grading formula.
 - **Recommendation:** There shouldn't be any change to this component of the school grading formula. Actual performance on the exam (67% of test-takers scoring 3 or higher) exceeded the State Board of Education's expected rate by 8 percentage points.



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- Participation and performance in middle school accelerated classes are included in the school grading formula (50% based on each component).
 - **Recommendation:** There shouldn't be any change to these components of the school grading formula. While participation in acceleration programs is important, participation without commensurate performance can create learning environments that are detrimental to all involved. Thus, any recommendation that would shift the participation/performance grading balance in favor of participation would be counterproductive.
- The FCAT 2.0 performance and learning gains of students in the bottom quartile and the percentage of students scoring below level 3 on the FCAT 2.0 are included in the school grading formula.
 - **Recommendation:** There shouldn't be any change to these components of the school grading formula. These are the students most in need of schools' attention, and incentives to improve their performance should always be at the highest possible level.

In short, the Council of 100 fervently believes that the State Board of Education should continue to increase performance expectations to the maximum extent practical. However, changes to the accountability system must always be carefully designed and timed to spark the best from our students and educators.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Respectfully,

Marshall Criser, III
Chairman

Phil Handy
Chairman, PreK-14 Education Committee



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cc: **The Honorable Rick Scott, Governor, State of Florida**
The Honorable Will Weatherford, Speaker, Florida House of Representatives
The Honorable Don Gaetz, President, Florida Senate
The Honorable John Legg, Chair, Senate Committee on Education
The Honorable Bill Galvano, Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education
The Honorable Marlene O'Toole, Chair, House Education Committee
The Honorable Janet Adkins, Chair, K-12 Education Subcommittee
The Honorable Erik Fresen, Chair, Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Mr. John Padget, Vice Chair, State Board of Education
Dr. Ada Armas, Member, State Board of Education
Mrs. Sally Bradshaw, Member, State Board of Education
Mr. John Colon, Member, State Board of Education
Mrs. Barbara Feingold, Member, State Board of Education
Ms. Kathleen Shanahan, Member, State Board of Education
Dr. Tony Bennett, Commissioner, Florida Department of Education