

How Much Time Do Florida Students Spend Testing?

A deeper dive into an issue facing parents, teachers and policy makers

With the arrival of the new Florida Standards Assessment replacing FCAT 2.0 this spring, testing has once again surfaced as a hot topic of conversation throughout the state. From community members to district leaders to legislators, much of that conversation has centered around concerns about too much time spent on testing in Florida schools. But how much time are students actually spending taking tests?

In the sections below, we take a closer look and try to separate perception from reality to help move the conversation toward the most practical efforts for supporting our students, families and schools.

What the community is saying

In January, at the Jacksonville Public Education Fund’s annual ONE by ONE Convention with 400 citizens, it was evident that testing is a major local concern. Members of the Jacksonville community overwhelmingly shared that one of the challenges they feel the school district is facing is “too much testing.”

IN THIS REPORT

- Analysis of the FLDOE investigation on testing
- What parents, teachers and citizens are saying
- State proposals and impacts

Learn more at www.jaxpef.org or call (904) 356-7757.

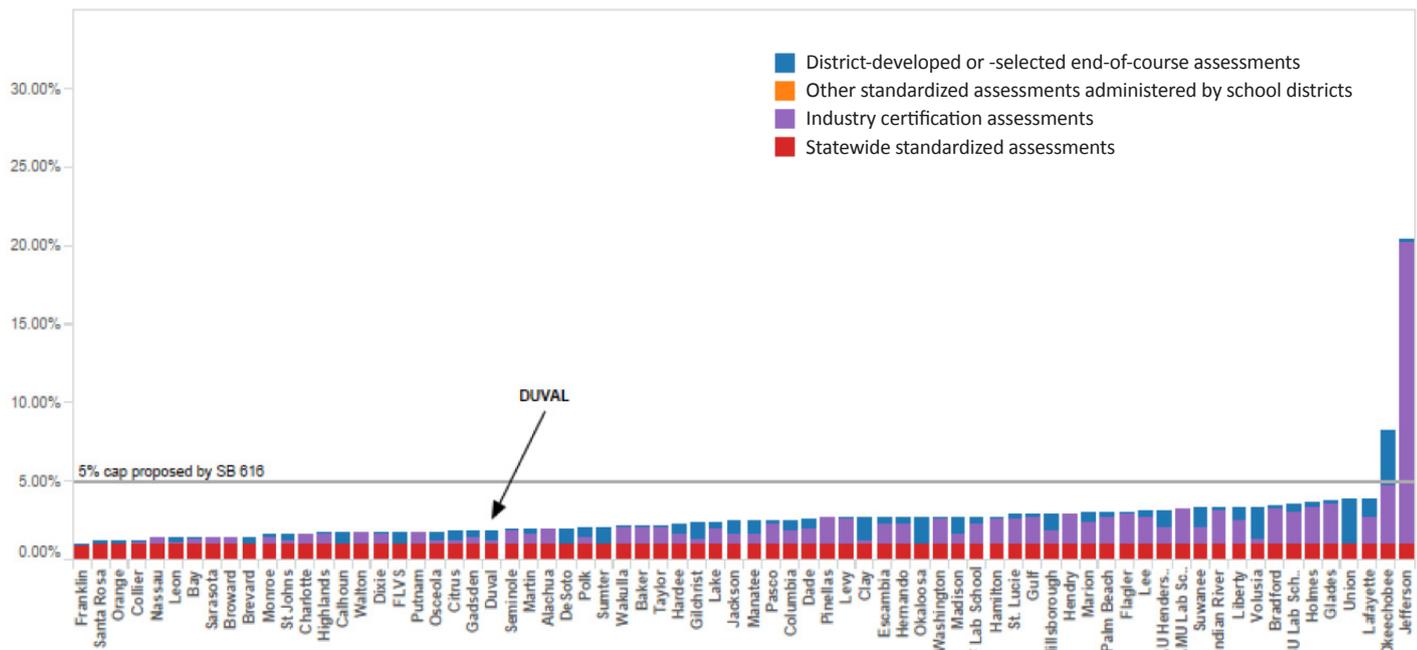
As one attendee described, often times when starting school “the first entry point for young kids is a test.” Listening to these community comments prompted us to take a closer look into how much testing is truly going on in our schools, and how much is locally controlled versus state-mandated.

What the state is proposing

Currently there are several bills in the Florida Legislature intended to make changes to Florida’s K-12 system of assessments and accountability. One specifically that has received a lot of attention recently

Figure 1

Percent of School Time Spent on Testing in K-5th Grade (District Reported)



is Senate Bill 616, which proposes to limit the amount of time a student may spend in testing to no more than 5 percent of the school year for any student. Based on a 180-day school year, this would mean both state and locally required testing would have to be limited to no more than the equivalent of 9 days total throughout the year.¹

At the request of the Legislature, the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) conducted a survey of Florida's school districts to gather information about the standardized assessments they are using this academic year.

Questions on the survey included:

- What district-level, standardized assessments are given?
- What decisions are made based on assessment results?
- Which students are required to take the assessment?
- How much time (minutes and days) is required to take the assessment?
- How many times a year is the test given?
- What format is the assessment given in to the student?

Survey shows most districts comply with 5% proposal

Based on the results of that FLDOE survey, as well as

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general information available about Florida's statewide-standardized assessments, Figures 1 (previous page), 2 (current page) and 3 (following page) offer some potentially surprising information around the concerns raised by the community and Legislature.

A full, interactive dashboard including all of these graphics and more is available online at www.jaxpef.org/schoolfactsjax.

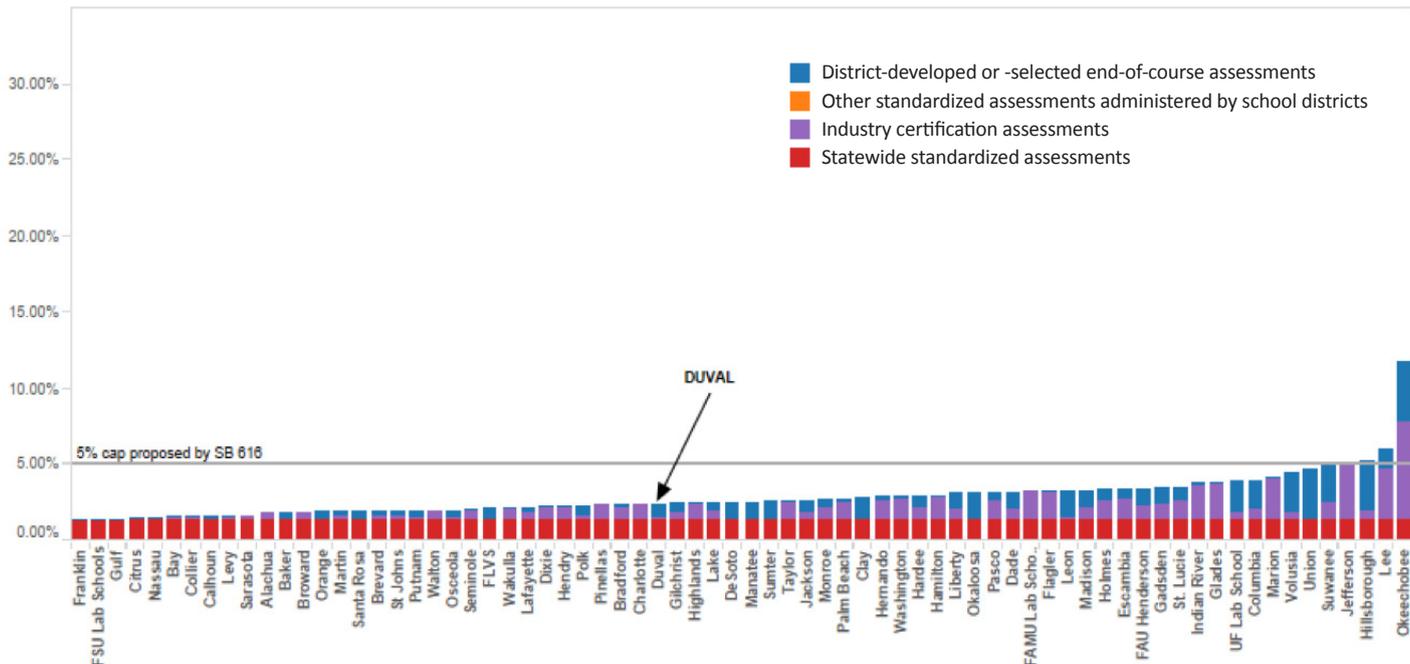
Using an average school year estimate of 5 hours/day and 180 days/year (54,000 total minutes per year) for all districts, we see in these figures that nearly all grade levels in all districts are already below the proposed 5 percent time limit for mandatory testing.²

In fact, on average across all districts, students are currently spending:

- 1.1% of the school year on state-mandated testing in grades K-5
- 1.5% of the school year on state-mandated testing in grades 6-8
- 2.1% of the school year on state-mandated testing in grades 9-12

Figure 2

Percent of School Time Spent on Testing in 6-8th Grade (District Reported)



- 2.8% of the school year on combined state and locally mandated testing in grades K-5
- 2.9% of the school year on combined state and locally mandated testing in grades 6-8
- 3.7% of the school year on combined state and locally mandated testing in grades 9-12

What it means

Based on self-reported data, 64 out of 72 districts in Florida are already spending less than 5 percent of a student’s time during the academic year on mandatory testing at all grade levels — some of them well below that. In terms of what that means for current legislation, as well as moving the greater conversation around testing forward, these findings have some important impacts.

The currently proposed provision of SB616 designed to reduce testing by placing a maximum time limit of 5 percent of the academic year for any mandatory testing **will likely have no real impact for students or teachers**, as the vast majority are already spending less time than that in actual (required) testing time. For districts, it will also likely have little to no positive impact in terms of reducing time and resources spent administering tests, though it will create additional indicators districts will be required to track.

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Placing a maximum time limit of 5 percent will likely have no real impact for students or teachers. This data suggests that perhaps the very real “testing fatigue” that many students, parents, educators and others have expressed feeling may not be due to the amount of time spent in testing, as it has been attributed to, but something else.

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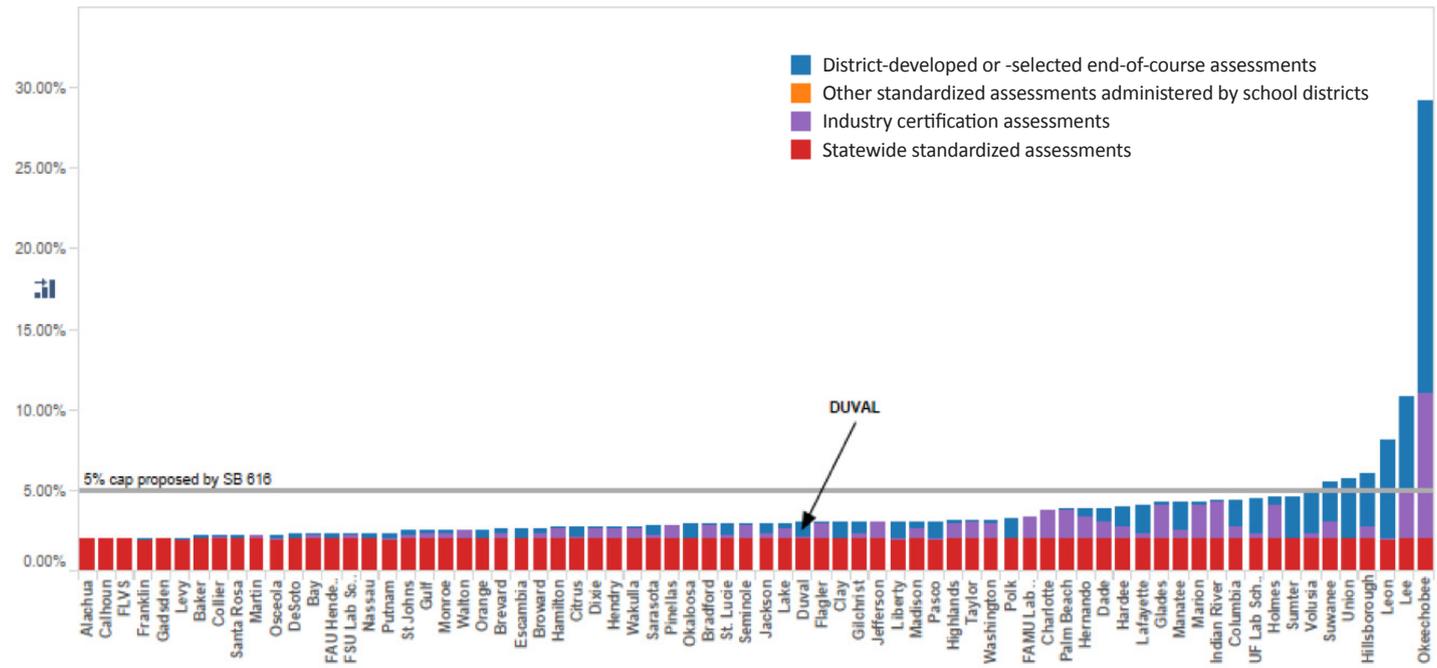
One possibility is that it’s not actually the amount of time spent on testing, but frustration with the high stakes attached to the tests.

A separate or additional possibility is that it is not the amount of time spent in mandatory testing but the **amount of time spent in additional optional tests**, such as practice tests, curriculum or textbook-specific tests, school or classroom-based tests and quizzes, locally purchased diagnostic or tracking program assessments, etc. When combined with state and district mandated tests, these optional practice and other tests could be contributing greatly to this fatigue.

Based on the data reported above, it appears time to move the conversation from focusing just on the

Figure 3

Percent of School Time Spent on Testing in 9-12th Grade (District Reported)



amount of time spent on mandated testing to a deeper examination of the overall approach to testing at all levels, including:

- **What counts as a test?** FSAs? Textbook or software-based tests and quizzes? Teacher-created quizzes? We need to better define the totality of what is considered “testing” to get a better grasp of how much time is actually being taken away from instruction for it.
- **How are the tests being used?** Are the potential reward or punitive stakes attached to some tests so great they are causing teachers, parents or students to spend an inordinate amount of time preparing for them? Does preparing for those tests require a significant amount of additional time devoted to practice tests? Are there multiple tests serving the same diagnostic or tracking purposes that could be reduced?

Other considerations and horizon issues

The 5 percent time limit provision is just one of a number of important provisions to be considered in SB616 — which itself is one of many important education bills moving through the Legislature right now.

While this particular provision appears to be currently unnecessary based on this data, it may have other positive benefits not explored here, such as limiting the potential growth of future testing.

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The bill overall though has a number of proposed major changes that would have drastic impacts on the current accountability system in the upcoming year — including calling for a pause of mandatory retention for third and 10th grade, graduation, and school accountability triggers associated with the test until the test has been independently validated by an outside auditor.

Some of the other concerns and provisions raised in SB616 are ones we have raised previously about problems and opportunities in this critical transition year.

What you can do and how to get involved

Go to www.jaxpef.org for the latest updates about ongoing legislation on our blog, and sign up for email updates. To explore our previous research and suggestions on the transition to a new accountability system, go to www.jaxpef.org/SchoolGrades.

You can also take action now by using our advocacy tools to contact your representatives and share your opinion on testing, taking a pause in school grades and many other issues facing the Legislature in public education.

FOOTNOTES

1. Optional courses with assessments, such as Advanced Placement or Industry Certification exams, are not subject to this limit because they are not required for all students. See bill text for full details.
2. Times based on district self-reported survey results. Some variations between districts due to differences in categorizing or reporting tests individually for each course/grade level or combined totals. See the investigation for full source data at <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/12003/urlt/CommAssessmentInvestigationReport.pdf>.