

Maintaining Higher Standards Supports Transition to Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Q – Why maintain higher standards during the transition to Common Core State Standards?

A – Softening standards in pursuit of higher letter grades would be a disservice to students in schools that need the most assistance in preparing for the higher goals in Common Core State Standards. Keeping the bar raised is the best way to ensure a smooth transition to Common Core.

Q – Why keep the continuation of the provision that no individual school's grade will drop more than one letter grade in one year (i.e. the transition safety net)?

A – Districts and schools have successfully incorporated a number of changes in recent years and are diligently preparing for the implementation of Common Core State Standards. This provision provides a transitional tool that will maintain high standards while keeping the focus on the 2014-15 school year when CCSS will take effect.

Q – What other changes in school grades are taking effect this year?

A – These changes were approved by the Board in 2012 but were scheduled for implementation in 2013:

– The FCAT 2.0 Writing standard used in the school grade calculation was changed to 3.5, up from 3.0 last year. A temporary one-year reduction to a 3.0 in the school grade calculation allowed students more time to adjust to higher writing standards.

– Schools must show that the lowest performing students are making progress in both reading and math.

– Schools that have fewer than 25 percent of their students scoring at grade level or higher in reading will see a one letter grade reduction in their school grade.

– New achievement levels were set for FCAT 2.0 Science and End-of-Course exams in Biology 1 and Geometry. These will be used to calculate school grades for middle and high schools.

– Middle schools that have students who take Biology 1 or Geometry exams or earn industry certification will have those results included in their school grade.

– Students who attend alternative schools that choose to get a school improvement rating will have their test performance and learning gains included in the grade of their home school.

– Assessment scores of some students attending Exceptional Student Education (ESE) center schools will not be applied to the student's "home" school for the purpose of

school grade calculations. This provision applies to students who have never previously enrolled in a non-ESE center school within the district and who score at the emergent level on the Florida Alternative Assessment.

– The high school five-year graduation rate will not include special diploma recipients as graduates.

Q – Does the drop in scores mean the overall education quality of Florida schools has decreased?

A – Florida remains a national leader in dozens of educational studies including graduation rates, teacher quality, top public high schools and many other areas. These scores reflect higher standards for schools that were arrived at with the support and input from district school superintendents.

Q – How is it possible education quality has improved, but school grades are down?

A – Higher standards and expectations yield higher results and outcomes with an overall result of students better prepared for success in careers and college. By focusing now on schools most in need of assistance, students and teachers will be in a better position to succeed when more rigorous Common Core State Standards are implemented in 2014-15.

Q – Will the drop in scores impact schools and school districts in any manner?

A – Schools that have consistently scored D's or F's will receive assistance from the state to help them serve students.

Q – Do the decreases mean that schools that decreased will get less state funding?

A – Beyond school recognition funds, funding is not affected by school grades. However, the 100 elementary schools that are the lowest performing in reading results will receive assistance to implement additional help for students.

Q – What is the history of school grades in Florida?

A – Since 1999, Florida has issued letter grades to more clearly communicate the quality of schools to parents and the public. As performance improved, changes were made to the way grades were calculated to ensure students continued making academic progress.

The State Board of Education approved a number of changes in 2012 that were not scheduled for implementation until 2013. Responding to concerns from school superintendents and others, last month the Board asked Florida Commissioner of Education Tony Bennett to convene a task force consisting of superintendents and other education leaders to review the school grading system with the goal of

maintaining high standards during the transition to Common Core State Standards in 2014-15.

The Commissioner's recommendation, approved by the Board, is detailed in the press release available here: http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2013_07_16/agenda.asp

Q – Do lower school grades mean student performance has dropped?

A – Not necessarily. Recently released FCAT scores showed performance in reading and math were generally flat while, there were increases in student writing scores and in End-of-Course exam scores. With the implementation of Common Core State Standards in 2014-15, students will be receiving deeper teaching that promotes critical thinking and better prepares them for college and careers.

Q – Do lower school grades mean teacher performance has dropped?

A – Teachers have led recent increases in Florida's student scores and in national rankings. Gov. Rick Scott's success in funding pay raises for teachers this year reflects the quality of teaching now and will help retain and attract the best teachers in the future. Tens of thousands of teachers have received training in Common Core State Standards and will have increased flexibility in designing their curriculum in meeting those standards.

Q – Will lower school grades in the short term affect the state's success in attracting high-paying jobs and businesses to Florida?

A – The impact of higher expectations for students and schools will be positive for Florida's future. Businesses seeking to relocate often cite education as their top priority. It is critical to maintain high standards and help schools now that need assistance with the arrival of more rigorous Common Core State Standards. The state's education leaders – from teachers to superintendents to lawmakers – are sending a clear signal that they are committed to preparing a world-class workforce and a clear signal that Florida is the best state in the nation to learn and to work and to live.

For more information about Florida's school grades, visit <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/>.