**Understanding shifts in Florida’s standards and school accountability**

What you need to know, and how you can help your child

If you have a child in public school this year, you may be hearing a lot about new standards and new standardized tests. Maybe your child’s math homework looks a little different. What’s the deal? Read on to learn a little bit more about what’s happening in Florida’s public school landscape.

**What are the standards?**

The world that our children will inherit is very different than the one we grew up in — what they need to know and be able to do has changed a lot. In an effort to help students get ready, our state has adopted new standards — guidelines about what skills students should have by the end of each grade — called the Florida Standards. This shift is well under way for our local public schools, students and teachers, who are working with new ways to help students learn even more.

Think about baking for a moment. If you learn how to follow a recipe for making red velvet cake, you know how to make red velvet cake. But if you learn how that cake is made — the proportion of wet to dry ingredients, the amount of baking soda needed — you will have the skills needed to understand how to make many kinds of baked goods, not just follow a recipe. That’s what this shift is all about: teaching students not just what to do, but why and how. While it requires more of teachers and students, it will ensure the next generation is prepared with the tools and skills they need to be ready for future success.

**What about the test?**

New standards mean a new end of year test, so the FCAT is out and the FSA is in. The Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) is administered in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and end-of-course (EOC) subjects (Algebra 1, Algebra 2, and Geometry) to measure proficiency levels and gains among students.

During the 2014-2015 school year, the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) was administered for the first time in grades 3-10 but not without a few glitches. School districts across the state experienced technology issues such as students being unable to access the test. Lawmakers required an independent review of the test to make sure it was valid. In September, that review, conducted by Alpine Testing, deemed the results of the FSA to be valid. Consequently, public and charter schools in Florida will receive school grades for the 2014-2015 school year — likely released sometime in January or February 2016. This fall, the Florida Department of Education will be determining and releasing cut scores for the FSA. Cut scores will determine what constitutes a Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4 and Level 5. More information is available on the Florida Department of Education website, www.fldoe.org or www.fsassessments.org.

**What will be the impact?**

These new scores will likely mean that school grades and student achievement levels will be lower than what most parents and community members are used to. But it doesn’t mean that our schools are backsliding! What it does mean is that schools, teachers and students will need time and extra support to adjust to these changes.

**What can you do?**

Stay informed and get involved! Right now, our public school system is in the middle of a major renovation. We’re keeping what works and updating other parts that need to be upgraded. Just like when you remodel your house, it can be noisy and inconvenient at times. That’s why our schools need more support than ever! We all need to speak out about the need to do is give teachers and students time to adjust to these changes. Consider volunteering at a public school near you, or with one of the many great nonprofit organizations that work to support students with mentoring, after school programs and other services.

For parents, stay in tune with what your child is learning. Make sure you’re doing homework with them and helping them use Achieve and iReady on the computer on a regular basis at home. Make sure you have open and regular communication with your child’s teacher. Ask how your child is doing, and whether and how well they are meeting expectations.

Consider signing up for a Parent Academy class through Duval County Public Schools specifically designed to help parents understand the Florida Standards. To see a full schedule, which includes after-hours sessions, go to www.duvalschools.org/parentacademy and register online.