

June 2016 | What's Happening with Standards and School Accountability?

Background

Our world is changing. We don't know what tomorrow's jobs will look like, but we do know that we want our children to be prepared for success in college and beyond. To help make that happen, schools across Florida started using the new Florida Standards in the 2014-2015 school year. The standards are consistent expectations that foster problem-solving skills all students need. As schools made the switch to the Florida Standards, there were logical changes to testing and accountability as well. As this school year, the second full year with the Florida Standards, comes to a close, here are some of the most frequently asked questions and answers about the shift.

What are the Florida Standards?

The Florida Standards are guidelines for what students should know and be able to do in math and English Language Arts at every grade level (K-12). **They are designed to ensure that when students graduate from high school, they are ready for college and the workforce.**

Think for a moment about baking. You know how to follow a recipe for red velvet cake and get a great result. But do you know why you put a certain proportion of baking soda, flour and eggs? That's what the Florida Standards aim to do — teach students not just what to do, but why and how. It means teaching a deeper, more applicable set of skills. **That way, students will learn how to bake a cake, not just how to memorize recipe after recipe.** When we give students the kinds of skills that can be applied in many different arenas, they will grow into adults who can successfully navigate our fast-paced world.

How does this shift change standardized testing?

With the new standards came a new test called the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA). Students took the FSA for the first time in spring of 2015, and for the second time in spring 2016. **Results from the 2016 FSA can be compared with results from the 2015 FSA. No FSA results should be compared to FCAT results.**

What's happening with school grades?

Florida's school grading system has also undergone recent changes, most of them made by the Legislature in early 2015. Still, the two main factors in school grades remain the same: They are based on student performance and student growth.

- **Performance tells us how many students at any given school were considered passing — i.e., how many students are on or above grade level.**
- **Growth tells us how well any given school performed — i.e., how much students at that school improved from one year to the next.**

But the cut scores for passing rates and the way growth is calculated both changed a lot in 2015. And 2015 school grades *didn't include any growth measurement* at all. As a result, it's important not to compare 2016 school grades with any prior years — it's an apples to oranges comparison.

Please feel free to use, adapt or share! For more information and helpful resources in talking about the Florida Standards, visit www.jaxpef.org/toolkit.