

Assessment Archive: High School Competency Test (HSCT)

This assessment is no longer actively administered in Florida. For further information, please consult [State Board of Education Rule 6A-1.09421](#).

Archived HSCT Information

One priority of the Florida public education system is to help all students acquire and apply the skills necessary to perform basic communications and mathematics functions. The Educational Accountability Act of 1976 outlined a system for defining and measuring the attainment of educational objectives and competencies in these content areas. The 1990 Legislature reaffirmed the importance of establishing minimum student performance skills for high school graduation.

Minimum student performance skills were initially approved by the State Board of Education in 1977. These skills were based upon minimum objectives developed cooperatively by the staff of the Division of Public Schools, Florida Department of Education; faculty of the state universities and community colleges; school district teachers, curriculum and testing supervisors and administrators; and laypersons. These performance skills were effective through the 1984-85 school year. A revised version of the skills was approved by the State Board of Education in May 1979, became effective with the 1985-86 school year, and remained in effect through the 1993-94 school year.

In 1989 and 1990, the State Board of Education approved minimum performance skills, which were effective for school years 1994-95 through 1998-99. The early adoption of these minimum performance skills permitted time for advance notification to educators, creation of test question specifications, and field testing of the questions. October 1994 was the first administration of the High School Competency Test (HSCT) in which these revised skills were assessed.

Teaching the use of calculators was required in relation to these performance skills in mathematics. Calculators were permitted for the first time during the October 1994 administration of the HSCT.

Passing both the communications and mathematics sections of the HSCT was a requirement for high school graduation. Eleventh-grade students who did not pass the HSCT on the first administration have additional opportunities to take the test.

Population of Students

In October 1995, the **HSCT** was administered to 11th-grade and adult high school students. The HSCT Report Page presents the results of 102,455 11th-grade students who took the communications section of the test and 104,091 11th-grade students who took the mathematics section of the test.

With certain exceptions, all Florida students enrolled in public schools are tested on the **HSCT**. Any child with an active individual educational plan (IEP) and classified as Educable Mentally Handicapped, Trainable Mentally Handicapped, Hearing Impaired, Specific Learning Disabled, Emotionally Handicapped, Profoundly Handicapped, or Physically Impaired may be exempted from testing. However, students classified in some of these categories who participate in 12 hours or less per week of special education programs are encouraged to take the test in order to qualify for a

regular high school diploma. Test administration modifications are permitted for exceptional education students. The results of the assessment of these exceptional education students are excluded from the report.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) students may be exempted from **HSCT** testing during the first two years they are receiving services in an approved English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. Test administration modifications are also permitted for LEP students who take the **HSCT**.

Minimum Student Performance Skills

The communications and mathematics sections of the **HSCT** are composed of grade 11 basic skills that represent the minimum expectations for graduation from high school. The test questions are constructed to measure student achievement of these skills.

Although not included in the **HSCT** Web page, there are reports that include information on the average number of questions answered correctly for each skill tested. When considering these data, one must first consider the total number of questions used to measure each skill. The number of questions varies from as few as three questions to as many as 11 questions. These data do not permit precise comparisons of a student's performance on one of these skills with others in the school, district, or state.

Criteria for Passing

To pass the **HSCT**, a student must attain a passing score on both the communications section and the mathematics section. Results on each section of the **HSCT** are reported using an equated scale score. A student's total number of correct answers is converted to a score on a scale that ranges from approximately 525 to 800. The passing score for each section, communications and mathematics, is 700. Rules for establishing a passing score of 700 are specified by 1994 State Board of Education Rule 6A-1.09421, FAC.

Use of Communications Results

The **HSCT** communications section measures students' competence in 11 reading skills. Students have to obtain information, identify facts and opinions, and draw conclusions from a variety of reading selections. These reading passages were carefully designed to ensure that the subject matter is interesting and appropriate for 11th-grade students. The passages reflect writing that students might encounter in school and everyday life, such as a newspaper article on rollerblading, an excerpt from an electronic game manual, information from an encyclopedia describing an Asian country, a selection from a history text, or an excerpt from a biography of Lech Walesa.

Statewide, 89% of the 11th grade students passed the communications section, which is the same percentage of students who passed the communications section in the October 1994 administration of the **HSCT**. Performance on each of the eleven skills that comprise the communications section was generally high. The number of questions used to measure each skill in the communications section ranges from 4 to 11, and, on average, students selected the wrong answer for one question for each of the skills. The most difficult skill for students was skill 6, which requires students to select answers that represent appropriate conclusions or generalizations for a paragraph. On average, students did not answer correctly approximately two of the eight questions used to measure this skill.

Use of Mathematics Results

The **HSCT** mathematics section measures students' competence in 10 mathematics skills. Students have to demonstrate an understanding of fundamental mathematics concepts in problem solving using various arithmetic operations, basic algebraic and geometric principles, and basic probability. Students were provided calculators to use on the test. However, the numbers in the mathematics problems were chosen so that the problems could be worked easily without a calculator.

The mathematics section is more difficult than the communications section for most students to pass. Statewide, 77% of the 11th grade students passed on the mathematics section, one percent fewer than in October 1994. Performance on each of the ten skills that comprise the mathematics section was, on average, lower than for the communications section, with students missing between one and two questions for each of the skills. The most difficult skills were skills 1, 4, and 10, which involve solving problems using a variety of strategies, measurements, and ratios and proportions.

Limitations and Considerations

The school districts in the state differ on a variety of characteristics. To judge the educational effectiveness of a district based solely on these results would be a misuse of the data. Several factors should be considered in interpreting the assessment results.

1. The October 1995 assessment did not measure all goals of education. Only a portion of the skills taught in communications and mathematics was assessed. Thus, conclusions should be limited to the specific content areas and skills tested rather than to the entire curriculum.
2. The skills tested in the assessment are the minimum skills that each student should attain. Achievement of these basic skills reflects only a beginning step on the instructional ladder. They provide the basis for more advanced learning experiences in a variety of subject areas and performance levels.
3. The **HSCT** administered in October 1995 assessed a revised version of the performance skills. Therefore, although these scores are related to scores obtained on the previous version of the **HSCT**, they are not directly comparable.
4. Performance on individual skills was not statistically equated; only performance on the entire test form was equated. For subsequent forms of the **HSCT**, the test questions selected for each skill may be slightly harder or slightly easier, and the number of questions used to test each skill may vary somewhat. This means that caution must be used when comparing performance on skills for different administrations of the **HSCT**.

When considering these limitations on the interpretation of the data, examination of the results can identify both curricular strengths and weaknesses. From such an examination, the need for remedial programs or different allocations of resources may become apparent. The purpose of the Statewide Assessment Program is to provide data to help decision makers at all levels of instruction.