

5.0 ADMINISTERING THE FCAT

After the test has been designed, items have been field-tested and approved, and test forms have been printed, the next step is to administer the test to students. More than four million test booklets are distributed to more than 3,000 schools, whose staff must then give the test to the students and return those booklets for scoring—all within a three-week window (a one-week window for



FCAT Writing+). Not only must this process be completed in a timely manner, it must also be conducted in such a way to ensure comparable testing conditions in every school. In addition, secure handling of all test documents must be maintained at all times. It is only through a standardized and secure administration process that the FCAT can provide an accurate representation of student achievement. It is this standardization that makes comparisons across schools and years possible. Because Florida educators have first-hand experience with test administration, their input and feedback is sought throughout this process so that test administration can be improved each year.



In the fall, the DOE convenes the **Annual Statewide Meeting for Florida District Coordinators of Assessment** to provide them with information about assessment and accountability issues for the upcoming school year. Agenda topics usually include information about test development, administration, scoring, and interpretive materials. In addition to the annual meeting, the DOE often solicits feedback from this group about specific issues via formal and informal surveys, focus groups, or ad hoc meetings.



After each spring's test administration, another meeting, the **Annual Debrief on the Assessment**, is held with a representative group of District Coordinators of Assessment to discuss issues related to the recent test administration. During this meeting, these district representatives provide the DOE and the FCAT contractors with information about aspects of the test administration that went well and areas that need improvement. The DOE is able to consider and act on this input in planning the next FCAT administration.

The DOE also solicits information about the test administration from educators in the classroom and at the school-level via comment forms. Each test administrator is given the opportunity to provide input on specific survey questions as well as communicate his or her own opinions about the test administration process. The DOE compiles and reviews all of these surveys and comments in time to plan for the next test administration. In the past, the DOE has acted on these suggestions and comments, e.g., the length of individual test sessions has been changed based on the comments received from those who administered the test at the classroom level. While this is not a formal FCAT committee, the input from Florida educators at this level is a critical part of the process.

Quality Assurance Measures—Detailed information relating to test administration is provided in the *FCAT Test Administration Manuals*. The manuals provide all the administration requirements for teachers who administer the test, School Coordinators who organize the administration in their schools, and District Coordinators of Assessment who coordinate the FCAT program for their districts.



5.1 Administration Process and Personnel

The DOE prints, ships, and retrieves FCAT materials with the assistance of a contractor. The contractor prints, distributes, and assists with scoring the FCAT test materials. FCAT test materials include the test books and answer documents, forms, training materials, comment sheets for the various district and school personnel, and preprinted labels with student names and other information to be affixed on individual answer documents. After testing, the contractor serves as the point of return for all materials.

Test materials follow a three-level chain of distribution (district, school, and testing session) as described below.

District level—The district designates one of its employees as the *District Coordinator of Assessment* to act as the point of contact between the DOE, the contractor, and the schools.

School level—The school designates an employee, typically a school administrator or guidance counselor, as the *School Coordinator of Assessment* to act as the point of contact between the district and the school.

Testing session—*Test Administrators* supervise testing sessions. Test Administrators must be employees of the school district and are usually classroom teachers. They must remain in the testing room at all times. Test Administrators may be assisted by *proctors*. Proctors are recommended at all times, but are required when the number of students in the testing room exceeds 29. School personnel may be involved in the handling of secure documents; non-school personnel or students may not serve in this capacity.

The District and School Coordinators of Assessment are responsible for receiving and verifying materials and sending them to the next person in the distribution chain. District Coordinators provide training to School Coordinators regarding administration procedures and are available during testing to answer questions. School Coordinators have similar responsibilities in relation to Test Administrators and proctors. All District and School Coordinators as well as Test Administrators receive a copy of the *FCAT Test Administration Manual* prior to each test administration.

Quality Assurance Measures—Each year following the spring administration, a debriefing meeting is held with DOE staff and a representative group of District Coordinators. This meeting provides the districts an opportunity to give the DOE feedback related to the administration of the test—what worked well and what



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FCAT Committee Experience: Technical Advisory Committee; Bias Review Committee; Science Content Advisory; Science Performance Review; FCAT RFP Committee (DOE); Mathematics Content Advisory; Mathematics Item Review

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“My involvement with the FCAT since 1998 has convinced me of the thorough and comprehensive approach taken in its design and development. I have served on most sub-committees, ranging from the item review to the technical review committee, and have found the FCAT to be a valid test based upon high standards.”

did not. The DOE works closely with District Coordinators to ensure that each FCAT administration runs as smoothly as possible.

5.2 Students Tested

In general, all students enrolled in the tested grade levels (3–11) should participate and must take the test appropriate for the grade level in which they are enrolled. *Limited English Proficient (LEP)* students are required to participate unless the student has received services in an LEP program operated in accordance with an approved district LEP Plan for one year or less, AND a majority of the student's LEP committee determines that an exemption is appropriate. An Exceptional Student Education (ESE) student may be exempted from the FCAT if he or she has a current *Individual Educational Plan (IEP)* and meets the following criteria according to Rule 6A-6.0331, Florida's Administrative Code (FAC):

- the student's cognitive ability prevents the student from completing required coursework and achieving the *Sunshine State Standards*, even with appropriate and allowable course modifications; and
- the student requires extensive direct instruction to accomplish the application and transfer of skills and competencies needed for domestic community living, leisure, and vocational activities.

If an ESE student is exempted, the IEP must document why the assessment is not appropriate and what alternative assessment will be used.

Some students outside the public school system and outside Grades 3–11 may also take the FCAT, such as students seeking a high school diploma, who have not yet passed the Grade 10 FCAT Reading and/or Grade 10 FCAT Mathematics; students enrolled in an adult high school credit program; and home-educated students. Private school students receiving an Opportunity Scholarship must take the test and McKay Scholarship recipients may choose to take the test.

5.3 Testing Conditions and Special Accommodations

Generally, ESE or LEP students who receive special accommodations in their classroom instruction are entitled to similar accommodations on the FCAT as long as the validity or reliability of the test is not compromised. Accommodations enable all students to demonstrate their level of achievement without altering the knowledge or skill being tested by providing students a test format or situation that addresses the nature of their disability.

The IEP or 504 (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) plan indicates which accommodations students should receive on the FCAT, and the school reports to the district the names of students who received such accommodations. Accommodations fall into five categories: presentation, response, scheduling, setting, and assistive devices. On the next page are examples of some of the accommodations that might be granted in these categories. For more information, refer to the *FCAT Test Administration Manual* distributed to districts and schools prior to each test administration.

- **Presentation:** Students may be administered sessions of the test through the use of large print or braille versions of the test; devices to magnify the test; or signed or oral presentation of the test directions, writing prompts, and mathematics items (but not reading passages or reading test questions).
- **Response:** All responses must be in English. Students may respond to test questions orally, by signing, by typing, by using a machine to write in braille, or by writing in the test book or on separate paper.
- **Scheduling:** Students may be allowed flexible scheduling of their testing through the division of normal testing sessions into two or more smaller sessions with breaks in between, and through extended time for any session on the test.
- **Setting:** Students may be administered the test individually or in small groups with a Test Administrator or proctor, or in a specially designed classroom to accommodate special lighting or equipment needs with a test administrator or proctor present. LEP students may be offered the opportunity to be tested in a separate room with the ESOL or heritage language teacher acting as test administrator.
- **Assistive Devices:** Students may use assistive devices that are typically used in classroom instruction (such as auditory amplification devices) and technology for writing assessments or extended-response items without accessing spelling or grammar-checking applications.

Quality Assurance Measures—The *FCAT Test Administration Manuals* (Chapter 9.0) provide very specific guidelines related to the assessment of special populations. School-level staff may refer to the information in the manual in order to provide the appropriate and allowable testing accommodations to these students.

5.4 Security Measures

The Florida Test Security Statute (Section 1008.24), enacted by the Florida State Board of Education, established security guidelines that must be followed and prohibits activities that could threaten the integrity of the test. Examples of prohibited activities include:

- giving examinees access to test questions prior to testing;
- copying, reproducing, or using in any manner inconsistent with test security rules all or any portion of any secure test book;
- coaching examinees during testing or altering or interfering with examinees' responses in any way;
- making answer keys available to students;
- failing to follow security rules for distribution and return of secure test materials as directed, or failing to account for all secure test materials before, during, and after testing;

- failing to follow test administration directions specified in the *Test Administration Manual*; or
- participating in, directing, aiding, counseling, or encouraging any of the acts prohibited in this list.

The requirements also necessitate that all materials be kept in secure, locked storage prior to and after administration of any test and between testing sessions. They also prohibit anyone, including District or School Coordinators, from opening test books before the designated testing times. To enforce this rule, test books are sealed, and the seals must only be broken by the students at the beginning of the test session as directed in the scripts for administering the test. FCAT security measures also prohibit anyone from unsealing and reviewing unused test books after testing is completed. After students complete all testing sessions in a subject and return their testing materials to the Test Administrators, their test books are not opened until they reach the scoring site.

The DOE encourages districts to ask any person who handles test materials (including District and School Coordinators of Assessment, Test Administrators, proctors, and test assistants) to sign a security agreement (included as Appendix B) stating that he or she was made aware of these regulations and procedures and that he or she agrees to follow them.

The State Board of Education Rule also requires that each secure test book or answer document has a unique security number. These numbers appear on the front or back of test books and answer documents. Each time test books and answer documents pass between people in the chain of administration (e.g., from the test administrator to the students), the numbers must be checked to make sure that all material is appropriately accounted for. Any missing documents or other potential breaches of security are reported to the DOE via the School and District Coordinators of Assessment. If a School Coordinator cannot find the documents or if a security breach is suspected, the District Coordinator is notified immediately. The District Coordinator notifies the Office of Assessment and School Performance at the DOE.

The Board of Education Rule also authorizes officials from the DOE to conduct unannounced observations of any test administration site to ensure the testing procedures are being correctly followed. The statute requires local districts to cooperate in the investigation of a security breach or testing irregularity.

Quality Assurance Measures—The DOE routinely conducts analyses of FCAT data prior to their release in order to ensure that the results accurately reflect student performance. When anomalies are identified in the data, districts are required to conduct security investigations in order to determine the validity of the scores. In addition, a missing materials report is produced after each administration that identifies any secure test document that was not returned by the district. Districts are then required to conduct investigations to locate any missing materials and report their findings to the DOE.