Springtime in Florida means one thing — FCAT. But this year, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test — the test used to measure students’ learning gains and to evaluate teacher performance — is not the test it used to be.

The official state standardized test is now the Florida Standards Assessment. The new test replaces the previous versions of the state standardized test and will measure students’ performance based on a curriculum Florida schools have been using in recent years that is similar to the nationally mandated Common Core standards.

As Florida schools turn to the new test, administrators will be left with 16 years of data accumulated in the FCAT era, which was a centerpiece of former Gov. Jeb Bush’s push to reform public schools.

The Studer Community Institute launched this series of stories to look at how Pensacola metro-area schools had fared under that reform effort, the bright spots that were unveiled and the work that remains ahead to help our students, our schools and our community improve.

This is the first of a three-part look at what we found.
From troubled FCA1 to an untested replacement

By Regina Dogan
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T he 1997 Florida became the first state in the U.S. to use a standardized test for high school graduation. But in the years since, the FCAT was introduced in 1998, the year before Gov. Jeb Bush was elected. Education reform based on standardized tests was at the forefront of Bush’s tenure as governor. The Florida Legislature in 1999 adopted Bush’s A-plus Plan for Educa-
tion, a blueprint for school reform with accountability as its primary focus. And the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test was front and center in that plan.

The stakes went up — for everyone. Schools were graded A to F. The atten-
tion focused on two grades: third and 10th. Schools that earned an F would see.

However, the FCAT’s negative impact labeled students and made them feel inferior, Copenhaver said.

“This was the test that’s first and foremost in all of our minds,” said Anne Copenhaver, who has spent years with some of them, learning to measure year-to-year progress and proficiency. Thomas said state officials initially were careful about the reliability and the validity of the FCAT. But almost every year, new and more demanding educational standards were added to the test.

“If we think we have gotten careless in our haste to move this thing forward,” he said. “We’ve violated some of the rules.”

The FCAT’s support began to wane in 2010 when the Florida Legislature adopted the Common Core State Standards, selected to replace the state standards tested by FCAT.

“Because the train of thought was that we’ve got to go that right,” said Janet Pennewell, has spent 35 years teaching in Escambia County schools. She said her fourth year helping first-year teachers in the Successful Teach-

CITIZEN-POWERED CHANGE

A group of Florida school superintendents, including Santa Rosa School Board president Pam Stewart recently to discuss the new blueprint, the state-sanctioned Florida Standards Assessment starting in April.

Other superintendents said they need the results now to determine which third- to 10th-graders do not pass the test.

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Eighth-grader Tony Payne reads in history class at Bellview Middle School.
The miseducation of the FCAT generation

Continued from page 2

How students coped under FCAT

Jeanne Corcoran started teaching in Escambia County schools in 1995. With a daughter in middle school, she still teaches at Escambia High School. She remembers the impact of FCAT from both sides of the table.

Corcoran sees the benefits of using data, but she believes the FCAT standards are not realistic.

“I don’t think that data is our answer to what we need to do,” said Corcoran, who teaches honors and AP history at Escambia High School. “When we place all our weight on statistical data, it’s damaging to a lot of students.”

Corcoran’s outcomes echo complaints that have dogged the FCAT — and all standardized testing — for years. Critics say it makes too much emphasis on the test and not enough emphasis on teaching students how to make it in the real world.

Tate High School junior Patrick Smith, 16, said he felt the pressure of the FCAT for two years until his third grade. He passed it on graduation, but he said that the pressure was too much.

“Pressure and making things harder solves nothing, it only makes matters worse. Teachers are stressed out, and so are students.”

The test would be scored.

“Everyone of these layers that you add to the process, you really change the validity and reliability of the assessment measures you’re getting,” said Escambia Superintendent Thomas. “But we have found other ways to do the same thing as last year to compare. That’s where I would say, parents and educators are saying, ‘Well, we’re testing. Isn’t this valid and reliable?’”

Nady Dixon, a Weedwood Middle School eighth-grader, said the high-stakes test created stress and anxiety because teachers and principals put so much pressure on them “all day, every day.”

“They pressure teachers too hard and they do the same to us,” Dixon said. “Pressuring and making things harder solves nothing, it only makes matters worse. Teachers are stressed out, and so are students.”

Moving the bar

The state’s attempts to respond to those concerns have had mixed results.

In 2010, Florida updated its standards, called the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. In that revision, teachers who taught subjects not covered by the FCAT faced having half their scores come from a test in subjects they had no influence over.

Then criticism reigns down when only 27 percent of fourth-graders got proficient scores — down from 31 percent the year before — on a new FCAT writing test, and students in other grades also performed poorly.

The result: Officials lowered the passing scores.

That same year state officials misclassified grades that were given out to hundreds of schools and were forced to change them.

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"We need to spend more time on learning what we're teaching". Scott said that a testing investigation he asked the Florida Department of Education to conduct should provide a more detailed measure of student performance.

"But there is growing concern that the new tests will be more challenging, leading to lower grades for schools and students."
Florida began issuing school grades based on test results from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in 1999. In the beginning, the FCAT evaluated students in grades four, eight, and ten. New students are tested in every grade from three through 10, including reading, math, writing, and science. Over time the test has changed significantly. This chart aims to highlight those changes, as well as track the grades that schools in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties have earned over the years.

Schools whose grades are highlighted in yellow have a poverty rate as measured by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch above 85 percent. Those schools typically earn lower grades.

Schools that are highlighted in blue have a poverty rate of 50 percent or below. They earn higher grades.

### POVERTY MATTERS

At schools with a free- and reduced-price lunch rate (which is used as a measure of poverty) above 85 percent, only three have C’s in 2014. The rest are D or F schools.

Schools with a poverty rate of 50 percent or below are A or B schools. One is a C.

### FCAT 2.0

2011 – 2014

Beginning in 2011, the test was revised to FCAT 2.0. That revision included the addition of new subject tests and data points, new calculations to determine what counts as passing, and standards for achieving proficiency at grade level. Here is a list of the changes to student scores and school grades.

1. New cut scores for passing (grades 3-10).
2. New cut scores for math (grades 3-8).
3. Algebra II End-of-Course cut scores.
4. Added geometry End-of-Course exam.
5. Added biology End-of-Course exam.
7. New learning gain calculation for reading (grades 3-10).
8. New learning gain calculation for math (grades 3-8).
9. Add special education students to proficiency for reading (grades 3-10).
10. Add special education students to proficiency for math (grades 3-8).
11. Add English-as-a-second-language students to proficiency at grade level. Here is a list of the changes in school grades.
12. Add special-education alternate assessment to proficiency for math (grades 3-8).
13. Add special-education alternate assessment to proficiency for reading (grades 3-10).
14. Add English-as-a-second-language students to proficiency for reading (grades 4, 8, 10).
15. Add technology End-of-Course exam.
16. New cut scores for passing (grades 3-10).
17. Add reading threshhold for passing grade (25 percent).
18. Add reading threshhold for passing grade (25 percent).
19. New cut scores for passing (grades 3-10).
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100. New cut scores for passing (grades 3-10).

### GLOSSARY

**ESE**: Exceptional Student Education, or special education.

**FCAT**: Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.

**FCAT 2.0**: The revised version of the FCAT, with changes to the test and grading system.

**FCAT expanded**: The expanded version of the FCAT, including additional subject tests.

**FCAT added to school grades**: The addition of FCAT results to school grades.

**Inclusion of ESE and ELL students**: The inclusion of ESE and ELL students in school grades.

**Learning gains added to school grades**: The addition of learning gains to school grades.

**Charters**: Charter schools, which are public schools that receive public tax revenue and operate more independently.

**Free- and reduced-price lunch rate**: The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

**Proficiency**: The minimum score that the state says a student must make in order to be considered proficient.

**Minority rate**: The percentage of the student population who are members of an ethnic minority.

**End-of-course exams**: Exams given at the end of each course, typically at the end of 12th grade.

**Quartiles**: Standardized test scores that are divided into four equal groups.

**EEL**: English Language Learners, or students for whom English is not their first language.
1998
The Florida Department of Education implements the FCAT statewide.

1999
Under Gov. Jeb Bush's A-plus plan, the FCAT expands to include grades three through 10.

2000
Letter grades are given to public schools based on student performance. FCAT results are used to determine a school's performance.

2003
Students are required to pass the FCAT to graduate from high school and receive a standard diploma. FCAT science was added for eighth- and 10th-graders.

2006
The FCAT Writing exam is expanded to include a multiple-choice section in addition to essay writing.

2008
The FCAT no longer is the main factor to determine high school grades. Lawmakers remove the state factor to determine high school grades but rather consolidated and replacement of aging, underutilized facilities.

2009
Budget cuts lead to the elimination of summer retakes and a portion of the science FCAT.

2010
FCAT math and science is phased out at the high school level and replaced with End-of-Course exams.

2011
FCAT 2.0 Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, delusions in a new, more rigorous test. New standards that require higher passing scores become effective with the spring 2012 FCAT.

2012
State Board of Education lowers the passing score on the FCAT writing test after the passing rate dropped after changes to FCAT writing in 2010.

2013
Florida's Comprehensive Assessment System (FCAT) is replaced by the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA).

2014
Common Core standards are phased out and replaced with the new Common Core State Standards.

2015
Students in April will take the Florida Standards Assessment, the state's new accountability test based on new Common Core Standards.

How schools have changed since FCAT

When the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test was used to grade public schools in 1999, the only schools in the state of Florida to earn an F were in Pensacola's inner city.

Spencer Bibbs Elementary School on North Sixth Avenue and A.A. Dixon Elementary School on North H Street gained national media attention in that first year—especially given the high profile then-Gov. Jeb Bush had on the political scene.

FCAT was a centerpiece of Bush's plan to increase accountability and focus public education in Florida. That plan included a voucher system that would give parents at "failing" schools tax dollars to spend at a private school of their choice for their child to attend.

Spencer Bibbs closed in 2011 as a public school, when it received a C. Its students were redistricted into other schools. The building now is being converted into a training space for district staff and teachers.

A.A. Dixon remained a public school until 2002. The building was used by other groups as a charter school, but none of those thrived. It reopened in 2011 as a charter school, A.A. Dixon Charter School of Excellence, when it received an F on state standardized tests. It is now a private school.

Many other schools have closed or been reconfigured in the FCAT era.

"It is important to reiterate that in every case except the charter conversions, each of the closures had all students placed in a superior, more modern, more technologically advanced facility," said Escambia Superintendent Malcolm Thomas. "These changes were not related to school grades but rather consolidation and replacement of aging, underutilized facilities."

In addition to Dixon and Bibbs, here's how the landscape has changed.

1. BARRINEAU PARK ELEMENTARY: Closed as a public school after the 2003 school year, when it earned an A. It was consolidated into Molino Park Elementary School, which earned a B in 2014. It was present- ed to the Barrineau Park Historical Society, which continues to use the building.

2. BRENTWOOD MIDDLE: Closed as a public school in 2007, when it earned a C. It is now the home of Brown-Barge Middle School.

3. BROWN-BARGE MIDDLE: Moved from its Fairfield Drive location, which was turned into an oversight service area for school buses. It was reopened in current location on Hanscom Lane.

4. BROWNSVILLE MIDDLE: Closed in 2007, when it earned a C. The building is vacant. The district is considering a purchase offer by GSI Recycling, which owns a scrapyard across the street. The same family also owns Scrap Inc., a car crushing facility just behind the scrapyard.

5. BRYNEVILLE ELEMENTARY: Closed as a public school in 2002, when it earned a D. It was reconstituted as a charter school. It earned an A last year.

6. CENTURY ELEMENTARY: Closed in 2002, when it earned an F. Reconstituted as Century-Canterbury K-8 School, combined with Canver Middle School in 2003. Canver-Century closed in 2009 with an F. The Can- ver Middle building is being leased to Pensacola State College to offer classes in Century.

7. EDGECOUNTY ELEMENTARY: Closed in 2009, when it earned a C. The building was sold to S.L. Jones, a private school.

8. HALLMARK ELEMENTARY: Closed in 2011, when it earned a D, along with Allie Yniste. The student populations were combined into Global Learning Academy, which earned a C in 2014. The Hallmark building on F Street was bought by developer Matt Pate in 2015.

9. ALLIE YNISTE: Closed in 2011, when it earned a C. Yniste's students were sent to the new Global Learning Academy, which earned a C in 2014. A plan last year to lease the school, on North Q and Jackson streets, to Remnant Church of De- livance Christian Academy Inc. fell through. It is vacant.

10. LINCOLN PARK ELEMENTARY: Earned a D in 2011. It was nearly closed because of low enrollment. The school was converted to a prima- ry school, serving students in grades K-2. It no longer receives a state grade. Third-, fourth- and fifth-graders were redistricted to various other schools.

11. MUNSON ELEMENTARY: Closed in 2003 when it earned an A. The students were redistricted to the new Molino Park Elementary School. The old building was sold to the county for use as a community center.

12. MOLINO ELEMENTARY: Closed in 2003 when it earned an A. The students were redistricted to the new Molino Park Elementary School. The old building was sold to the county for use as a community center.


16. WEDGEWOOD MIDDLE: Closed as a public school in 2007. It received a C in 2014. A plan last year to lease the school, on North Q and Jackson streets, to Remnant Church of De- livance Christian Academy Inc. fell through. It is vacant.


19. MUNSON ELEMENTARY: Closed in 2009, when the school on Munson Highway in Milton earned an A. It is vacant and for sale. Part of it is a community park. Some of it is leased out for reunions, the Blackwater Heritage Festival, training of emergency personnel and other events, said Superintendent Tim Wyrosdick.
Parents find a way to help their children learn

The impact parents can have

When it comes to education, parental involvement continues to be a hot-button issue, locally and nationally.

Both President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act and President Obama’s Race to the Top trusted parental engagement as one remedy for persistent socioeconomic and racial achievement gaps.

Mathews’ three-month study showed, despite claims to the contrary, that even in low-income, disadvantaged neighborhoods, children who had strong, engaged and involved parents performed well in school.

While Mathews’ discoveries were not earth-shattering, the study highlighted the importance of parental involvement in their children’s education.

It also showed the importance of schools and communities stepping in to fill the gaps for students who lack support from parents, guardians or extended families.

“They did what they needed to do to get help,” says Mathews. “It’s not that they have all the resources; it’s that they figured out where these resources are, and they made sure that those kids got those resources.”

It was the ability to get the help they needed, coupled with committed, hard-working mostly African-American single mothers, that made a world of difference.

Parents, schools must work together

For Mathews, it was eye-opening to see parents in what was considered a dysfunctional, disadvantaged environment make education a priority with positive results.

Studies show that when parents and schools work together to form a network of support, children thrive.

In recent months, there has been increasing debate about the impact of parental involvement in schools and engagement in their children’s education.

In a recent article in The American Psychologist, sociologist Keith Robinson and Angel Harris argue that when parents attempt to help, they really have little impact, and may even harm their children’s grades and test scores.

But as Mathews’ study showed, family engagement practices that make a difference create collaborations among parents, teachers and students and share effective strategies for strengthening students’ academic skills.

Mathews says his research showed parents influence their children’s success in school through high expectations, talking to the children about school and generally working to create a positive attitude about learning and strong work habits.

“The big difference was that the parents of the kids who were succeeding had figured out how to get resources for their child, were engaged with their child, knew the teacher, the principal, the counselor if need be, they were engaged with that school,” Mathews says.

“Parents of the (students) who were very low-performing were totally disengaged,” he says.

The next research step

Research indicates that when parents and families are involved in their children’s schools, the children do better and have better feelings about going to school.

Parents of high-achieving students showed strong parental skills, set boundaries and maintained consistency in their children’s lives.

“They create an environment in which they can see that what they do, what they control, results in a positive outcome in a domain where they have never seen that before,” Mathews says.

Mathews says he came across parents who made sacrifices to put their children’s educational needs ahead of their wants, needs and desires.

“Parents who worked outside the home and returned home after the end of the school day adapted their lives to their academic needs of their children,” Mathews says. “We didn’t find a single, high-achieving kid who had parents who weren’t engaged in the school.”

Semi-retired, Mathews still dabbles in research, doing contract work at UWF.

“What he’d like to do is to get parents or guardians of high-achieving students together to share with other parents their secrets of success.

“How can you help these other folks make it work?” says Mathews. “That’s what I think will be a real interesting experience.”
Skills, not just degree levels, affect graduate wages

Wages aren’t everything — many people study what interests them most rather than what pays best. However, the report shows that wages vary substantially depending on the program of study.

Some of the lower-wage majors are necessary stepping stones to graduate degrees. This can be seen in some of 25 percent of University of Florida graduates were pursuing additional education rather than going directly into the job market. That figure was 19 percent statewide and 18 percent for University of Florida.

Those students who choose not to go to college or university might attend a district technical center to pursue a certificate, such as cosmetology, patient care technician, automotive service technology, firefighter, practical nursing or nursing assistant.

The average first-year earnings for a student completing these programs were $25,724. Locally, that number was $26,688 for Locsin Tech (Milton), $27,574 for Okaloosa Applied Technology Center (Fort Walton Beach) and $28,470 for George Stone Technical Center (Pensacola).

Some students begin preparing for the workforce during more traditional high schools. The legislature is putting increasing amounts of money behind these programs. Funding for courses that result in completion of an industry certification and articulation with a follow-on course at the college/university level in 800 more than for a standard course. This puts career funding on par with university prep programs such as International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement.

Industry certification program Data presented to the Florida Senate in January found that industry certification programs are associated with lower dropout rates, absences and disciplinary actions and higher GPAs across schools.

Power of industry certifications Wages aren’t everything — many people study what interests them most rather than what pays best. However, the report shows that wages vary substantially depending on the program of study.

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