

Let's Get Real About Educating Our Children

(May 18, 2012) This week's fiasco over the FCAT Writing scores has left many shaking their heads in disbelief. Questions remain: Did our school districts receive fair notice of the grading changes? Were our teachers prepared? Were parents and students informed of the aggressive changes to the state's standards? Was there a phase-in process for students? Did our Governor, Legislators and Board of Education, think, or care, about the roller coaster of emotions our children are now experiencing? Who is to blame? Florida PTA is not looking to place blame on any one in particular. We believe the entire system needs to be readjusted and appropriate steps need to be made to provide our state's students a first-class, high quality public education.

Our students did not become bad writers overnight. We know parents are at a loss for words explaining to their children to not consider themselves "failures" even though the 4's, 5's, and 6's they received on last year's Writing Assessment tests have this year dropped to below passing scores. Or did they?

One day after the dismal scores were released, the State Board of Education held an emergency meeting resulting in reducing the passing score on this year's test. They changed their minds. As Commissioner of Education, Gerald Robinson, stated, "Changing the test's passing score to a 3 from a 4 corrected the process". We simply do not agree.

Florida PTA, together with National PTA, stand by our position opposing the use of a mandated, standardized test as the sole criteria for measuring a student's or a school's progress. An assessment system should evaluate higher-order skills, including a student's ability to use technology, conduct research, engage in scientific investigation, and solve problems.

Student assessments should be used for the purpose of informing and improving instruction and learning; to help parents and teachers determine the specific academic needs of students; and to increase opportunities for students. They should not be used for high-stakes determinations such as grade promotion or graduation.

Adding insult to injury, public schools are "graded" by the state with money tied to their success or failure based on FCAT scores. In addition, starting this year, teacher salaries are being linked to student scores. We ask, "are our public schools being set up to fail, therefore creating the choice for parents to remove their children from our public school system and place them in private, for-profit institutions...using taxpayer dollars?" Is this a coincidence or a plan?

Florida PTA supports the adoption and implementation of Common Core Standards. We encourage more rigorous academics to achieve internationally benchmarked standards that will help ensure that our children are college and career ready. We believe that students need to be assessed so educators can measure student progress against these standards. Yet, it is important to note that students are not data points and personalization is needed for success.

Florida PTA is closely monitoring the implementation of the latest set of testing standards for how a student's progress is measured in Florida. It is imperative that test scores are not used punitively against students or schools. Instead, test scores should be used to promote quality instruction and improved outcomes for all children.

Upon the release of the remaining FCAT scores, Florida PTA will prepare informational talking points for our membership.

Florida PTA is the state's largest and oldest volunteer association, dedicated to advocating for every child with one voice. Education and other children's services are scandalously under-funded in Florida. Florida PTA, made up of approximately 300,000 members in over 1400 local PTA units, represents the organization's advocacy for education and children's services.

Mr. Charles Derexson,
President of Florida PTA
407-855-7604
FAX 407-240-9577
president@floridapta.org
www.floridapta.org