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MEMORANDUM

TO: District School Superintendents

FROM: Kris Ellington, Deputy Commissioner ^{KE}
Accountability, Research and Measurement

DATE: July 5, 2011

RE: Changes to FCAT Writing

Since the early 1990s, the FCAT Writing assessment has been administered in grades 4, 8, and 10 and has provided valuable information regarding how Florida's students have increased their proficiency in writing. As we move toward the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments in English Language Arts beginning in 2014-15, we must begin to raise the expectations of our current writing assessment to prepare for the increased rigor our students will encounter with the implementation of the PARCC writing component. Students will be "writing to a source" on the PARCC assessments. They will read complex text and then be prompted to present a clear and coherent analysis in writing, demonstrating a command of English language conventions. With an awareness of these approaching requirements for writing proficiency, it is the Department's responsibility to maximize the quality of our state writing assessment so that we can gain useful information about student achievement in this critically important content area.

Rather than implementing all necessary changes to FCAT Writing in 2011-12, the Department will work with Florida educators who serve on the FCAT Writing Content Advisory Committee to implement the two-year approach detailed below.

FCAT Writing Scoring – Spring 2012

In addition to the elements of *focus*, *organization*, *support*, and *conventions* described in the rubrics, scoring decisions will include expanded expectations regarding the following:

- Scoring will include increased attention to the correct use of standard English conventions. The current rubrics, which will be used for scoring in 2012, include expectations regarding the basic conventions of standard English, yet the scoring of this element in the past has been applied with leniency. Responses will continue to be scored holistically as draft writing, but scoring will be more stringent. Responses earning scores of 4 or 5 must at least *generally* follow the conventions of sentence structure, mechanics, usage, punctuation, and spelling. To earn a score of 6, sentence structure is varied, and few, if any, errors occur in mechanics, usage, punctuation, and spelling. To review the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards expectations on the use of

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conventions for each grade level, go to floridastandards.org and select Reading/Language Arts for that grade level, followed by the Writing Process strand and Standard 4: Editing for Language Conventions.

- Scoring will include increased attention to the quality of details, requiring use of relevant, logical, and plausible support, rather than contrived statistical claims or unsubstantiated generalities. The quality of the support depends on word choice, specificity, depth, relevance, and thoroughness. Responses earning high scores must include specific and relevant supporting details that clarify the meaning, i.e., the point of the paragraph or the central theme of the response. Rote memorization or overuse of compositional techniques, such as rhetorical questions, implausible statistics, or pretentious language is not the expectation for quality writing at any grade level.

FCAT Writing Details – Spring 2013 and Beyond

- Specific scoring rubrics will be developed for each grade and writing purpose (mode). Grade 4 students will continue to write to either a narrative or an expository prompt, and students in grades 8 and 10 will continue to write to either a persuasive or an expository prompt; however, each rubric will be customized to evaluate the writer's skill in responding to the writing task, including the purpose and audience. For example, grade 10 persuasive responses will be scored using a unique rubric with scoring criteria that require the use of elements of persuasion.
- New Calibration Scoring Guides (Anchor Sets) will be developed for each grade and writing purpose. These calibration guides will provide examples of student responses that illustrate the quality of writing within each score point on the rubric; each response will be annotated to clarify its compositional strengths and weaknesses.

The Department recognizes its critical role in providing information to schools and districts. To clarify and illustrate the increased expectations for FCAT Writing scoring in 2011-12, a document addressing frequently asked questions (July 15) and examples of student responses (late July) will be available to districts via the external SharePoint site maintained by the Department's Test Development Center at <http://sharepoint.leon.k12.fl.us/tdc/external/default.aspx>. A committee of Florida educators will meet with the Department in early August to select student responses for the 2012 FCAT Writing Calibration Scoring Guides, which will be provided to districts in August. These scoring guides will provide a basis for developing a common understanding of the scoring standards.

By summer 2012, FCAT 2.0 Writing scoring rubrics and annotated calibration guides will also be posted to the Florida Department of Education website to illustrate increased expectations for 2012-13 and beyond. If you have questions about these changes, please contact Renn Edenfield, FCAT English Language Arts Coordinator, at (850) 922-2584, extension 230, or edenfieldr@leonschools.net.

Thank you for joining me in attentively supporting the parents and students in our state as we stress the need for continued excellence in Florida's schools.

KE/sk

cc: District Coordinators of Assessment
District English Language Arts Supervisors
Dr. Mike Grego
Dr. Sharon Koon
Teresa Sweet
Mary Jane Tappen