FCAT EXPLORER

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES
FOR WORKING WITH 11TH & 12TH GRADE STUDENTS

Make Full Use of the FCAT Explorer

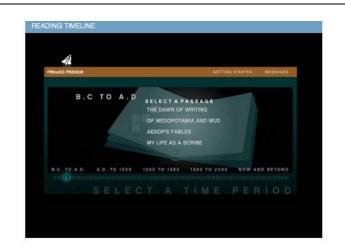The *FCAT Explorer Best Practice Guidelines for Working with 11th & 12th Grade Students* is specifically intended to support your remediation efforts with 11th and 12th grade students who have not yet passed the 10th grade Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). These guidelines target issues unique to using the FCAT Explorer practice programs as part of your instructional plan for helping high school students prepare to re-take — and pass — the FCAT.

For a full set of general tips for using the FCAT Explorer effectively with all of your students, refer to the comprehensive *FCAT Explorer Best Practice Guidelines*.

To access the comprehensive *FCAT Explorer Best Practice Guidelines*, visit www.fcatexplorer.com and click Educator Resources on the home page, or sign in to your Teacher's Desk and click Resource Center.

Use FCAT Explorer to Support Your Classroom Instruction

The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) designs all FCAT Explorer practice programs to support — but not *replace* — your classroom instruction.

The design of *Math Timeline: 10th Grade Benchmarks* and *Reading Timeline: 10th Grade Benchmarks* is specifically intended to help students practice for the 10th grade FCAT. Both of these programs reinforce your classroom instruction on FCAT-tested skills by following every answer choice with in-depth Learning Guidance in the form of hints, instructional feedback, and correct answer explanations.

In addition to practice with Learning Guidance, *Reading Timeline* also offers a Skill Seminar with self-instructional lessons. The lessons allow students to independently review the eight critical reading comprehension skills that reviewers have identified as most challenging to high school students based on FCAT scores and teacher input.

However, although every FCAT Explorer practice program offers strong instructional support, none of the programs are intended to replace your introduction of the skills through direct, classroom instruction.

Make Use of
Math Timeline's
Unique Features

The 10th grade mathematics practice program offers some useful and interesting features to enrich practice and hold students' attention, including the ability to focus on specific Strands. With over 140 FCAT-like practice items, *Math Timeline* provides comprehensive practice with all of the mathematics benchmarks tested on the 10th grade FCAT.

Make Use of
Reading Timeline's
Unique Features

The 10th grade reading practice program also offers useful and interesting features. Perhaps most noteworthy is the Skill Seminar, in which students receive remedial instruction on eight foundational reading comprehension skills. *Reading Timeline* delivers comprehensive practice on all of the reading benchmarks tested on the 10th grade FCAT through 23 passages and over 200 FCAT-like practice items.

Placement pre-test. When students enter *Reading Timeline*, they complete a pre-test. The pre-test consists of 40 items that cover each of the nine benchmarks tested on the 10th grade FCAT. Based on pre-test performance, students are seamlessly moved to either the core *Reading Timeline* practice program or the Skill Seminar.

The placement decision is based on a composite pre-test score. You may view your students' individual pre-test scores from the Run Reports function on your Teacher's Desk. However, because the pre-test contains limited items per skill, the pre-test is not an appropriate instrument for making diagnostic decisions on a single skill. Therefore, student performance is only provided as a composite score.

Core practice program. Students with pre-test results above the cut score are routed to the core *Reading Timeline* practice materials. Core practice materials span the full range of difficulty levels that a student may encounter the official FCAT, with the exception that passages are loosely sequenced from easiest to most challenging. Students receive answer-specific Learning Guidance for every answer choice. While working in the core practice program, a student may elect to enter the Skill Seminar at any time.

Skill Seminar. The Skill Seminar provides self-instructional lessons on the eight critical reading comprehension skills that are most challenging to high school students. These lessons were selected based on official FCAT results and the recommendations of classroom teachers and reading experts. The eight Skill Seminar lessons are:

1. Making Predictions
2. Finding Meaning in Context Clues
3. Using Word Parts to Find Meaning
4. Finding the Main Idea
5. Recognizing Methods of Organizing Text
6. Understanding the Author's Purpose
7. Identifying Valid, Reliable Information
8. Synthesizing Information from Multiple Sources

Each Skill Seminar lesson gives students clear, step-by-step instruction, practice, and Learning Guidance on an explicit, research-based strategy for applying the skill covered in the lesson:

- Each lesson begins by gaining the student's attention and establishing the relevance and benefits of becoming proficient with this skill.
- The lesson then provides a skill definition accompanied by examples and demonstrates how the skill is applied in a real-life context. These demonstrations begin with very simple content and build toward content that represents the level of complexity students will encounter on the official FCAT.
- Next, the lesson provides an explicit, research-based strategy for applying the skill.
- Instruction on applying the strategy is followed by practice opportunities ranging from simple to complex. Each answer choice is accompanied by answer-specific Learning Guidance.
- Each lesson culminates with a progress report.

Skill Seminar Post-Test. Students who entered the Skill Seminar as the result of a deficient pre-test score receive a Skill Seminar post-test. Skill Seminar post–test results are used to determine whether a student is ready to move into the core *Reading Timeline* practice program, or whether the student should be encouraged to practice in an FCAT Explorer practice program at a lower readability level.

***Reading Timeline* Post-Test**. When students finish all of the *Reading Timeline* practice items in the core practice program, they complete a comprehensive post-test. The *Reading Timeline* post-test is parallel to the pre-test and consists of 40 items that cover each of the nine benchmarks tested on the 10th grade FCAT.

Progress Reports. From your Teacher's Desk, you may customize detailed reports on individual students or groups of students. For the core *Reading Timeline* practice program, you may review student progress on strands, benchmarks, skills, or content. In addition, you may view student scores on the placement pre-test and on each of the post-tests, as well as their performance on each lesson in the Skill Seminar. You may also view a report of the items remaining on a student's Challenge List.

Make Use of 4th Grade Reading Skill Mini Lessons	The very first FCAT Explorer program, *Space and Safari Reader: 4th Grade Benchmarks,* provided instructional feedback for first incorrect answer choices by means of skill-specific mini lessons. Called "Tips" in that program, these animated, interactive mini lessons provided instruction and practice on 29 discrete reading comprehension skills. In 2004 new technology allowed implementation of an innovative "highlighted text review" feedback strategy, which then replaced the Tips. In this teacher requested, research-based strategy, when a student selects an incorrect answer to a text-based question, the program requires the student to return to the passage and review text highlights before getting a second chance to select the correct answer. Although teachers received the new "highlighted text review" feedback strategy with unanimous enthusiasm, many teachers at multiple grade levels expressed dismay that the Tips were no longer accessible. These teachers had come to rely on the Tips as an effective tool for defining and clarifying Skills; they reported using them during small-group instruction at all grade levels, in mentoring activities with beginning teachers, and during consultations with parents. Consequently, teachers once again have access to the Tips. You can access the Tips, now called Mini Lessons, from your Teacher's Desk by clicking Resource Center. The Mini Lessons are presented on that page under the General Resources heading. You will also find them under the program-specific resources for *Reading Odyssey – 4th Grade Benchmarks*.
Make Use of 5th Grade Math Instructional Games	Many middle school and high school students enjoy — and benefit from — the instructional games in *Math Station: 5th Grade Benchmark.* These games are *instructional* games that reinforce skills required for success on the FCAT. In addition, you can motivate students by awarding bonus game tokens, or decrease a struggling student's token accrual rate to provide a more reasonable challenge (see *Games* on your Teacher's Desk). On the other hand, if students appear to be spending too much time in the game arcade, you can increase their challenge by increasing their token accrual rate.
Make Use Of Open Response Materials	The FCAT Explorer provides "Open Response" materials for those grade levels that must write responses to performance tasks on the FCAT. You can print these materials from the Resource Center on your Teacher's Desk and use them for homework assignments, or for small group or whole class activities.