

# Just for Parents

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## Supporting a Brighter Future for Florida's Students

As April showers bring May flowers, we continue to work to help children in the Sunshine State. The many changes Florida has implemented during the past few years to improve student outcomes can sometimes seem extensive.



Last week, we announced that the American Institutes for Research (AIR) was selected to develop Florida's [new statewide assessments](#) for the next school year. I chose AIR because I believe that it is the best option for Florida's students.

I've met with countless Florida educators who have asked that our new tests provide a more authentic assessment of our students' grasp of the Florida Standards. This test will

replace the FCAT. Just as teachers are employing interactive activities to boost student learning in the classrooms, I believe we need an assessment that allows students to write and respond in non-traditional methods.

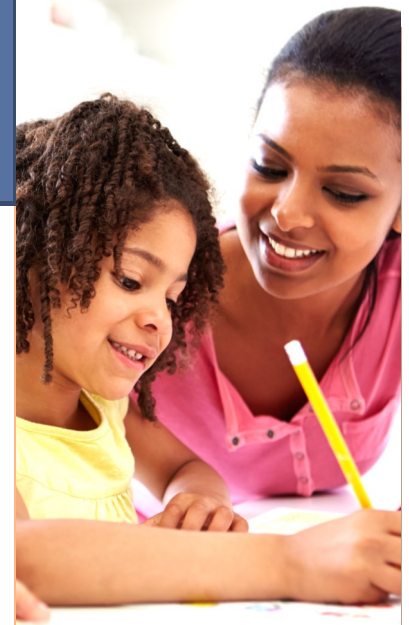
This test will focus less on finding the right answer and more on demonstrating higher order thinking skills. You have my commitment that students, parents and educators will be able to preview samples of new question types by taking practice tests that will be made available for anyone interested in reviewing them.

We have already received several questions from parents regarding specific aspects of the assessment and I encourage you to continue to email us your questions. You are the best advocate for your children and I am grateful for your tremendous efforts to prepare your students.

Thank you for all you do!

Sincerely,

Pam Stewart  
Commissioner of Education



### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Education Buzzword .....	2
FCAT Prep .....	2
Promoting Youth Sports Safety .....	3
Upcoming Events .....	3
Celebrate FCS Month.....	4

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COMMUNITY OUTREACH  
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#### Parent Involvement

#### Faith & Community Outreach

#### Safe Schools

#### Dropout Prevention

#### Volunteer Recognition

#### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners

#### Mentoring/Student Assistance



# Education Buzzword: School Improvement

This month, we feature the term “school improvement,” which is closely connected to student achievement. School improvement places all schools on the path to increased student success.

In Florida, public schools are required to create, revise and carry out a school improvement plan each year. Schools that have major differences in student achievement among various student groups, have not lowered the percent of students scoring below grade level on state assessments or have significantly low graduation rates are required to include strategies to improve those results.

The duty of improving schools belongs to all of Florida’s families, communities, schools and school districts. The best way for parents to become involved in school improvement planning is to join the school’s advisory



council or SAC. The specific duty of each school advisory council is to assist in the preparation and evaluation of the school improvement plan. For more information about participation in your school’s council, contact the school or the school district administration.

## Help Your Child Prepare for FCAT Testing

With the end of the school year quickly approaching, schools are preparing for [FCAT 2.0](#) testing. The FCAT 2.0 Writing exam was administered in late February and FCAT 2.0 Reading, Mathematics and Science will be administered by school districts beginning April 14. To view scheduled statewide testing dates, visit [2013-14 Assessment Schedule](#). Parents are encouraged to contact schools to confirm specific scheduling details.

The Department of Education encourages parents to learn more about Florida’s FCAT 2.0 assessment. The following documents are provided to help parents understand the purpose of the FCAT 2.0: [FCAT 2.0 Fact Sheet](#), [FCAT 2.0 Frequently Asked Questions](#), [FCAT 2.0 Sample Questions and Answer Keys](#).

**The following testing policies are in effect to ensure security and validity of results:**

**Electronic Devices**—If your child is found with *any* electronic devices, including but not limited to cell phones

and smart phones, during testing, including bathroom breaks, his or her test will be invalidated. Students should either leave devices at home or in their lockers on the day of testing.

**Testing Rules Acknowledgment**—Prior to testing, test administrators read testing rules to students and students must acknowledge they understand the rules by signing the Testing Rules Acknowledgment statement.

**Test Invalidations**—Students are responsible for working on their own during the test and for protecting their answers. If students are caught cheating during testing, their tests will be invalidated. Additionally, the department employs a test security company, Caveon Test Security, to analyze student test results to detect unusually similar answer patterns.

**Leaving Campus**—If your child leaves campus before completing the test (e.g., for an appointment), he or she **will not** be allowed to complete the test. If your child does not feel well on the day of testing, it may be best for him or her to wait and be tested on a make-up day. [Please be mindful not to schedule appointments on testing days.](#)

## Working Together to Promote Youth Sports Safety



Staying fit and healthy, learning about teamwork, making friends and developing a sense of personal satisfaction are just a few of the benefits children enjoy when they play sports.

Understanding how to prevent injuries is the best way to make sure your child enjoys all the benefits of physical activity. According to the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are some steps that families can take to reduce and/or prevent sports injuries:

- \* Enroll your child in organized sports through schools, community clubs, and recreation organizations that are properly maintained.
- \* Use the right protective gear for all activities.
- \* Make sure that sports protective equipment is in good condition and worn correctly at all times.
- \* Watch for signs of concussion or head-injury.
- \* Make warm-ups and cool-downs a part of the routine

before and after sports participation.

- \* Children should learn and practice skills using proper form for their activity.
- \* Make sure there is access to water or sports drink while playing.
- \* To prevent heat-related injuries or illness, allow time for them to gradually adjust to hot or humid weather. Also, remember to include sunscreen to reduce sunburn.
- \* Along with communicating a positive safety message, model safe behavior.

Athletic activities in Florida public schools are directed by the Florida High School Athletic Association. This organization is responsible for ensuring that all public school athletic coaches are well educated and trained in the area of sports safety. For more information, visit <http://www.fhsaa.org>. For more valuable information and resources about how to keep your child injury free, visit the [National Institutes of Health](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) websites.

## Upcoming Events and Designations

- **National Child Abuse Prevention Month** is a time to acknowledge the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse and neglect, and to promote the social and emotional well-being of children and families.
- **Autism Awareness Month** Did you know one in 68 American children are living with autism, according to the CDC?
- **National Volunteer Week (April 6-12)** encourages people to discover ways to volunteer and recognizes those who make a difference in their respective communities.
- **Children's Week (April 6-11)** is an annual celebration filled with joyful singing voices of young children, the colorful "hanging of hands" and dedication of thousands of child advocate volunteers. It captures the true spirit and commitment that Florida has made to our children and youth.
- **National Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day (April 24)** serves as a learning tool for your children to gain first-hand knowledge of what you do every day. Send us the photos of your children at work to [justforparents@fldoe.org](mailto:justforparents@fldoe.org) to be included in an upcoming issue.

# Celebrate Florida College System Month

**Randy Hanna**  
**Chancellor, Division of Florida Colleges**

April is national community college month and here in Florida, we're celebrating the impact the 28 institutions in the Florida College System have on students, families, communities and the state. I was a first generation college student from rural Gadsden County. The Florida College System was designed for students like me to be able to access high-quality education and job training at affordable prices.

I know first-hand the impact going to college can have on someone's life. And I'm proud to represent the nation's best college system. Our system is comprised of 28 colleges, community colleges and state colleges with locations all across the state. Colleges offer a variety of programs, including certificates, associate degrees and, in some cases, bachelor's degrees. They have an open-door admissions policy, meaning anyone with a high school diploma (or its equivalent) can enter. And our

2+2 system guarantees Associate in Arts graduates admission to upper-division at state universities or colleges offering bachelor's degree programs.

But it doesn't stop there. Our colleges are committed to ensuring that students succeed. Fifty-four percent of juniors and seniors in the State University System are Florida College System transfers. Almost 82 percent of our graduates are employed or continuing education within one year of graduation. The average starting salary is \$46,186. And 93 percent of our graduates remain in Florida to work, ready to fill the needs of local business and industry.

I believe the state has a responsibility to help Floridians succeed in college and careers. As we celebrate Florida College System Month throughout April, I encourage you to visit our [website](#) for more information about how our colleges are fulfilling their mission to improve lives through education.

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## App Keeps College Information at Your Fingertips

Have you heard about the Florida College System mobile app?

"We want students, their families and members of our communities to have quick and easy access to important information about the 28 colleges in our system," said FCS Chancellor Randy Hanna. "The mobile app is a great resource for anyone seeking information about our colleges, locations, program offerings and outcomes."

The FCS mobile app's features currently include:

- ⇒ Interactive Google maps of all main campuses, branch campuses and instructional sites;
- ⇒ Links to all 28 colleges;
- ⇒ Press releases, event information and news updates;
- ⇒ Connections to the system's social media tools;
- ⇒ College academic calendars; and
- ⇒ Fast facts and links to key publications.

The free FCS app is available now for Android devices through the Google Play Store and iPhone and iPad through the Apple App Store.

