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MEMORANDUM

TO: District School Superintendents

FROM: Dr. Frances Haithcock
Chancellor
Public Schools

DATE OF E-MAIL: September 15, 2010

SUBJECT: **FCAT 2.0 and Florida End-of-Course Assessments Standard-Setting Committees**

This year marks the beginning of the transition to FCAT 2.0 Reading and Mathematics, as well as our change to end-of-course testing at the secondary level. While we have completed the development of the new assessments that will be administered for the first time this spring, there are several key steps that must occur prior to finalizing the transition. The purpose of this memorandum is to describe one of the critical steps, the standard-setting process, and to seek your nominations for the standard-setting committees that will convene over the next few years.

Consistent with our current reporting system, as well as the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 4 passed by the 2010 Legislature, Florida will need to identify new cut scores, or standards, that will define the new achievement levels for each grade and subject. (Note: Cut-scores are also referred to as standards because they serve as the minimum "standard" a student must reach to be classified in each level.) At a minimum, these cut scores must result in achievement levels that satisfy the following requirements.

- Achievement levels shall range from 1 through 5, with level 1 being the lowest achievement level, level 5 being the highest achievement level, and level 3 indicating satisfactory performance on an assessment.
- A score shall be designated for each subject area tested, below which score a student's performance is deemed inadequate. The State Board of Education shall, by rule, designate a passing score for each part of the grade 10 assessment test and end-of-course assessments. In addition to designating a passing score, the State Board of

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Education shall also designate, by rule, a score for each statewide, standardized end-of-course assessment which indicates that a student is high achieving and has the potential to meet college-readiness standards by the time the student graduates from high school.

In addition to the SB 4 requirements, there are also specific requirements included in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation that must be met. NCLB requires the new achievement levels to:

- Include descriptions of the content-based competencies associated with each level, commonly referred to as “performance-level” or “achievement-level” descriptions;
- Be established through a process that involves both expert judgments and consideration of assessment results. These cut scores should have logical connections across grades;
- Be aligned with the State's academic content standards in that they capture the full range and depth of knowledge and skills defined in the State's challenging, coherent, and rigorous academic content standards.

In previous years, Florida has used a variety of methods to identify the achievement-level cut scores and passing scores. To determine if these methods remain viable for our new assessments, the Department contracted with a national expert on standard setting. Dr. Mark Reckase conducted a study of best practices for standard setting and provided specific recommendations for FCAT 2.0 based on this study (see his full report attached). The Department plans to use this report to guide the standard-setting plans.

While the specifics of the standard-setting process vary by the chosen method, all methods have several key steps in common, as described fully in the attached report. In brief, the key steps are:

- Step 1. Develop a policy definition for each achievement level. These policy definitions usually do not contain any detailed information about what a student should have learned. Instead they give a general statement of policy goals. *A draft of the new FCAT 2.0/EOC Assessment Policy Definitions is attached for your review.*
- Step 2. Develop achievement-level descriptions. The next step in a standard-setting process is typically to translate the “Step 1” policy definitions into more detailed descriptions of the knowledge and skills that a student needs to meet the requirements of the intended policy. These descriptions are subject matter specific. *Achievement-level descriptions will be a new addition to the FCAT 2.0 standard-setting process and will be written in September 2010.*
- Step 3. Convene a standard-setting panel. Almost all standard setting methods use a panel of experts to convert the policy definition and achievement-level descriptions to the points on the reporting score scale that will serve as the cut scores. This panel needs to be large enough to yield stable estimates of the points on the scale, the members need to be knowledgeable about the content of the tests and the achievement-level descriptions, and they need to have experience with the examinee population. The members also need to be willing to engage in the standard-setting tasks in a serious way rather than try to force an estimate of performance based on preconceived ideas about what the level of performance should be. Their task is to

translate policy and the achievement-level descriptions to the points on the reporting score scale; it is not to make policy.

- Step 4. Conduct the standard-setting process. The standard-setting process is the methodology used to collect information from the members of the panel that can be used to estimate the point on the reporting score scale that corresponds to policy and the achievement-level descriptions. The process usually contains a number of elements, which are described below.
- a. *Exposure to the tests.* Panelists are often asked to take the tests under the same conditions as the examinees in order to get a concrete sense of what that experience is like.
 - b. *Training.* The standard-setting process is usually not a familiar activity for the members of the panels. Therefore, training is given with the goal of making them competent in the required tasks, such as estimating probabilities.
 - c. *Judgment process.* Most standard-setting procedures ask panelists to make judgments about how well examinees will perform on the items on the test. Alternatively, they might be asked to classify examinees into levels of performance. The results of the judgment process are used to estimate the points on the reporting score scale.
 - d. *Estimation of performance standard.* A statistical or psychometric method is used to convert the ratings from the members of the panels to points on the reporting score scale. This is the only place that formal statistics or psychometrics enters into the process.
 - e. *Cycles in the standard-setting process.* Making the judgments that are used for estimating points on the reporting score scale is a very challenging activity. Therefore, standard-setting panelists are often given multiple opportunities to make the judgments, with feedback between opportunities. The purpose of the feedback is to help members of the panels understand their task and to give an opportunity for a consensus to emerge for the location of the cut score, or standard. This feedback often includes student impact data.
 - f. *Endorsement of the performance level.* Standard-setting procedures often require members of the panel to indicate their level of support for the final result of the process. This is usually some indication of whether results are consistent with their judgments.
 - g. *Evaluation of the process.* Most standard-setting procedures include an evaluation of the process. Members of the panels are asked if they understood the process, if they felt unduly influenced by the team facilitating the panels, whether the feedback they received was of use to them, if they had enough time to do the tasks, etc.
- Step 5. Obtain approval of results. Generally, standards of performance are set by a policy board rather than the group of persons on standard-setting panels. The panels are advisory to the board. Therefore, when all of the work of the standard-setting process is complete, the results are presented to the board that called for the standard in order to determine if the results are consistent with their expectations and, in some cases, the board may make adjustments to the results from the panels based on other information. *Florida's standards will be approved by the State Board of Education.*

As is illustrated in the standard-setting steps, school districts, the Department, and the State Board of Education all have important roles to fulfill in the process. While the Department is ultimately responsible for selecting the standard-setting method(s) that will be used, it is critical that the standard-setting panels consist of individuals who are able to make expert judgments about content-based expectations. To insure that this occurs, the Department is relying on each superintendent to carefully consider and then nominate the individuals who would best be suited to this effort. It is important to understand that every district may not be represented on the final panels; however, the Department will ensure that each panel is reflective of Florida's student population. As you consider potential nominees, please consider the following timeline that will guide the process:

Month/Year	Task
September 2010	Request Nominations to Standard-Setting Committees
September 2010	Draft Achievement-Level Definitions and Descriptions
January 2011	Finalize Standard-Setting Methodology
Spring 2011	Administer FCAT 2.0 Reading and Mathematics, Algebra 1 EOC Baseline Assessments (Phase 1)
April 2011	Finalize Standard-Setting Committee Membership (Phase 1)
August 2011	Advertise Intent to Revise FCAT Rule (Phase 1)
September/November 2011	Conduct Standard-Setting Meetings (Phase 1)
November 2011	Conduct Rule-Development Workshops and Advertise Proposed State Board of Education FCAT Rule (Phase 1)
January 2012	State Board of Education Rule Adoption – New Achievement Levels for FCAT 2.0 Reading, Mathematics, and Algebra 1 EOC Assessment (Phase 1)
Spring 2012	Administer FCAT 2.0 Science, Geometry EOC, and Biology 1 EOC Baseline Assessments (Phase 2)
April 2012	Finalize Standard-Setting Committee Membership (Phase 2)
August 2012	Advertise Intent to Revise FCAT Rule (Phase 2)
September/November 2012	Conduct Standard-Setting Meetings (Phase 2)
November 2012	Conduct Rule-Development Workshops and Advertise Proposed State Board of Education FCAT Rule (Phase 2)
January 2013	State Board of Education Rule Adoption – New Achievement Levels for FCAT 2.0 Science, Geometry EOC and Biology 1 EOC Assessments (Phase 2)

The nomination form template is attached for your use in nominating individuals. Please note that each nomination must be supported with your signature prior to submission. While the meetings will occur over a period of one to two months to complete all subjects, each nominee should expect to attend one week-long meeting within the given timeframe. All nominations must be submitted by **February 1, 2011**, to the Department's Office of Assessment, as follows:

Dr. Sharon Koon
 Office of Assessment
 325 W. Gaines Street, Suite 414
 Tallahassee, Florida 32399

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Please feel free to contact Dr. Koon if you have any questions about standard setting in general, or about the nomination process. She may be reached at Sharon.Koon@fldoe.org or (850) 245-0513.

Sincerely,
Frances Haithcock

FH/sk/jtk

Attachment (posted at <http://www.fldoe.org/asp/k12memo/k12memo-fcat.asp>)