

2003 Guide to Calculating School Grades Technical Assistance Paper

I. Overview

Introduction

The purpose of this technical assistance paper is to provide a description of the procedures used to determine School Performance Grades for the 2003 school year. In 2003, just as in 2002, the school grades include three measures of student achievement and three measures of student learning gains. Florida's School Accountability System is now being implemented as envisioned by the A+ Plan, passed by the 1999 Florida Legislature. Florida is one of the few states that can track student demographic information from year to year and the first to track annual student learning gains based on the state's academic standards.

School grades have been issued since 1999; however, it wasn't until 2002 that significant improvements were made in how school grades were calculated. The most noteworthy improvement was the inclusion of student learning gains. Additionally, a measure was added to determine whether the lowest performing students are making annual improvements in reading. Now, Florida's accountability system allows the improvement of individual students to be tracked from one year to the next based on FCAT developmental scores in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 10. In previous years the school grades were based only on yearly status comparisons.

This paper contains two sections: the Overview (Section I) and the Process for Calculating School Grades (Section II). These sections describe a series of procedures for determining a school's final performance grade and are intended for knowledgeable audiences who are interested in the details of determining the school performance grades. A more general and concise description of the school grading system is found on the school grading "guide sheet," *Grading Florida Public Schools 2002-2003*, included as Attachment A and also available on the Department of Education website at <http://www.firn.edu/doe/schoolgrades/guide03.htm>.

Specific Authority

This section of the technical assistance paper identifies specific sections of the Florida Statute and State Board of Education Rule that govern the school accountability program and provides a general description of their contents. It is not the intent of this section to provide a detailed description of the specific contents of the state law and rule. Readers interested in the additional legal information should consult the source documents.

This technical assistance paper was prepared by staff of the Office of Assessment and School Performance, Division of Accountability, Research, and Measurement, Florida Department of Education. Questions may be directed to Dr. Cornelia Orr or other staff members from that office at 850/245-0700.

Florida Statutes - Section 1008.34 F.S.

This section of Florida law requires the Commissioner of Education to prepare annual reports of student performance for each school and district in the state. The law specifies the grade categories, the timeframes, and the types of information to be included in the calculations. Further, the law directs the State Board of Education to adopt appropriate criteria for each school performance grade category, and requires that added weight be given to student achievement in reading.

State Board Rule 6A-1.09981

This Rule describes the implementation requirements for Florida's System of School Improvement and Accountability. It provides policy information as well as procedural guidance for implementing the program. The rule also specifies which schools are included in the system and the criteria for designating the school performance grades. In addition, the rule describes the rewards and recognition for schools, and the assistance and intervention provisions for low performing schools (D and F).

Summary of the School Performance Grading Criteria

School performance grades are determined by the accumulation of percentage points for six measures of achievement. In addition to the six measures, schools also must meet other conditions for each grade, in particular, testing 90-95% of the enrolled students. At a minimum, schools must accumulate the total points shown in Table 1 for each grade.

Grade	Total points
A	410 and above
B	380-409
C	320-379
D	280-319
F	Less than 280

Section 6A-1.09981(6)(a)-(f) of the State Board Rule describes the six performance measures included in the overall performance grade for a school. Each of the measures represents the percent of students attaining the criterion:

1. The percent of students meeting high² standards in reading,
2. The percent of students meeting high² standards in mathematics,
3. The percent of students meeting high² standards in writing,

¹ Three additional conditions, defined in this paper, must also be evaluated prior to the final assignment of school grades. A description of how percentage points are combined with the additional conditions is found in Section 7.

² High standards are defined as FCAT scores in achievement levels 3, 4, or 5 in reading and mathematics, and a combination of scores 3 and above and 3.5 and above for FCAT writing.

4. The percent of students making learning gains³ in reading,
5. The percent of students making learning gains³ in mathematics, and
6. The percent of the lowest performing students making learning gains³ in reading.

In addition to the accumulation of percentage points for each of the six performance measures, schools are also evaluated on the basis of three other conditions. The three conditions are described in the following sections.

Percent Tested: Schools earning enough total points to receive a grade of A must also test 95% of their eligible students. All other letter grade designations are based on a minimum of 90% tested. If any school tests fewer than 90% of their students, the school will receive an "I" (incomplete) until the percent tested is resolved. After a thorough investigation, the Commissioner's determination of a school's performance grade shall be final. Schools with less than 90% tested receive a grade at least one letter grade lower than indicated by the total points accumulated.

Adequate Progress of the Lowest 25%: Adequate progress is defined as half (50%) of the lowest performing students in a school showing a year's worth of learning gains.³ Schools earning enough total points to receive an A must also demonstrate adequate progress for the lowest 25% of the students each year. Schools earning enough total points to receive a B or C must meet the adequate progress criterion in either of two adjacent years. If, after two years, a school that would otherwise be graded B or C does not demonstrate adequate progress of the lowest 25%, the final grade will be reduced one letter grade.

Similar Reading Learning Gains: Schools earning enough total points to receive an A must show similar learning gains in reading for the lowest performing students compared to the learning gains in reading for all eligible students. That is, the lowest 25% compared to 100% of eligible students. The learning gains for the lowest 25% of the students must not be more than 10 percentage points lower than the gains for all students. In the example provided in Table 2, the percentage of students making reading learning gains is 66 and the percent of the lowest 25% of students making learning gains is 50. Therefore, the school did not meet the criterion established for this condition. This condition is applied only if the learning gains of the lowest 25% are less than those of all students.

Table 2 illustrates, for a hypothetical middle school, the way percentage points are assigned for the six elements of the system and accumulated into total points for the school. The areas of the chart that result in the school receiving a grade of B instead of an A are shaded.

³ Learning gains are defined three ways: ① an improvement in the FCAT achievement level, e.g., from 1→2, 2→3, 3→4, 4→5; ② maintaining a high FCAT achievement level of 3, 4 or 5; ③ staying in FCAT achievement levels 1 or 2, but demonstrating more than one year's growth (defined later in this paper).

Table 2				
Sunshine Middle School – Example				
Performance Measures	Percentage Points Earned (Percent of Students)			
	Reading (Grades 6, 7, & 8)	Math	Writing (Grade 8)	Total Points
Meeting High Standards	73	79	84	236
Making Learning Gains	66	68		134
Making Gains Among the Lowest 25 percent	50			50
Total Points				420
Percent Tested				94%
School Grade				B

Shading in the table indicates areas that result in a final grade of B, even though the total points is greater than the number required for an A.

II. Process for Calculating School Performance Grades

This section of the paper describes the complex processes involved in evaluating the performance of each school and determining a school grade. These processes are described, as much as possible, in the order in which each step is implemented.

1. Identify the Schools to be Graded

Not all schools are graded. Three requirements must be met. A school must

1. Be a school primarily serving standard curriculum students;
2. Have at least thirty eligible students with FCAT scores in reading and math; and
3. Have been in the school accountability system the previous year.

All “regular” elementary, middle, high, and combination schools are graded. Special purpose schools (e.g., Alternative, Vocational, Juvenile Justice, etc.) are not graded. Charter schools are considered “regular” schools and receive a school grade. District personnel determine each school’s initial eligibility for school grades; however, a school’s final inclusion in school grading depends on having at least 30 eligible students to be graded. Although this might seem straightforward, computations for each of the six components of the grading system, including the learning gains component, must be based on at least 30 eligible students. Therefore, in order for a school’s learning gains to be computed, there must be 30 eligible students who have FCAT reading and mathematics scores for two consecutive years. If a school does not reach this minimum, the learning gains components cannot be computed and the school is not graded. This means that schools that do not have at least 30 eligible students in Grade 4 or above cannot be assigned a grade.

New schools and those not in the school accountability data system in 1999-2000 are not issued grades in their first year; they are, however, entered into the accountability data system and their component scores are posted on the web and receive school grades in the second year. An “old” school can be given “new” status if there is a significant change in the school circumstances, e.g., a change of school purpose or attendance boundaries. Occasionally, school districts will request and be granted a waiver from the requirement to be in the system for a year before being graded.

2. Identify the Students to be Included

All students who are being taught the standard curriculum based on the Sunshine State Standards are included in the calculation of school grades. The following three factors are used to determine which students are eligible to be included:

1. Exceptional Student Education (ESE) status,
2. Limited English Proficient (LEP) status, and
3. Enrollment in the same school for a full academic year.

The electronic record of each student in a school to be graded must be reviewed in order to determine his/her eligibility. A description of the eligibility criteria for each factor is provided below.

Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Status: The electronic record for each student contains up to 10 possible classifications of ESE status, as well as the student's entry date into the ESE program. Students are included in the school grade calculations when their ESE status is gifted, hospital/homebound, or speech impaired. Students with any other disability are not included, even if they are also gifted. In addition, if the date a student enters an ESE program is after the date of the test, the student is included.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) Status: LEP students are included in the school grading system when they have been in a program for more than two years.

Enrollment in the Same School for a Full Academic Year: Students are included in the school grading system if they have been enrolled in the same school for a full academic year. Students are considered continuously enrolled for a full academic year if they were present in the same school during the October and February FTE (full-time equivalent) counts. The Department of Education collects data from school districts via a series of electronically submitted data files called surveys. The October FTE data are submitted via Survey 2 and the February FTE data are submitted via Survey 3. These terms, Survey 2 and Survey 3, are used in this document as part of the description of the process for determining student eligibility.

3. Determine the Eligible Students

Determining exactly which students are included in the school grading process is a complex data analysis task. The following steps briefly describe the process:

Step 3.1 – Determine student status as described on Survey 3: A copy of the Survey 3 data submitted by the school districts is obtained from the Department of Education data center. The ESE and LEP status of each student on the file is determined and the student is identified as "included" or "excluded."

Step 3.2 – Identify the grade 10 students who have previously passed the FCAT: The grade 10 students who have previously passed the grade 10 FCAT reading and/or mathematics are identified. These students are deleted from the group of students who are included in school grades. This process is completed separately for reading and for mathematics. Because there is no passing score for FCAT Writing, all enrolled tenth grade students must take the writing test, even if they have already passed the reading and mathematics tests.

Step 3.3 – Determine full academic year status: This determination is made by matching Survey 3 to Survey 2. The matching process involves a series of complicated matching

programs. Please note that all matches are completed within a district/school combination, not across the state as a whole.

- a. From Survey 3, the “Student Number Identifier, Florida” is used as the primary student identifier and the “Student Number Identifier-Alias, Florida” as the secondary one when the match to Survey 2 is conducted.
- b. All matching of data is completed within a district-school combination using Survey 3 as the base group for all matches.
- c. The order of matching is as follows: Florida ID-Survey 3 is matched to Florida ID-Survey 2, then, Alias ID-Survey 3 is matched to Alias ID-Survey 2.

Students matched after these two steps are included in the school grading process. Unfortunately, neither Survey 3 nor Survey 2 is submitted to the Department without error; therefore, during March and April, the Office of Assessment and School Performance seeks to resolve as many of these discrepancies as possible. Each school district is asked to review the matched and unmatched records and to make corrections as described in step 3.4 below.

Note: This step must be completed prior to the calculation of school grades and the receipt of scores on FCAT. Although schools may appeal the school grade, the appeal must be regarding the handling of a student previously identified, not a change in the eligibility status of the student. (See Step 8.)

Step 3.4 – Obtain corrections from the school districts: Lists of students to be included or excluded in school grades are identified by the Department and shared with the school districts in electronic form. The school districts can correct some of the errors by re-submitting Survey 3 files. For other corrections and updates, information is submitted directly to the DOE Office of Assessment and School Performance. Each year the staff of this office provides directions to districts regarding how and by when corrections should be made (April 30 in 2003). A general description of the correction processes is provided below.

- a. Mismatched Identification Numbers – If there are students who should be included but the IDs on Survey 3 do not match the IDs on Survey 2, districts must determine which ID is in error. The district must re-submit a new survey file with the corrected ID. Districts are not permitted to change other program eligibility information about students in the survey because the information is a snapshot of students at that specific point in time.
- b. Non-public school students taking courses at public schools: Home-schooled and private-school students who receive services from a public school are excluded if N998 (Home Education) or N999 (Private School) is shown as the school number, in the “Current Enrollment” field of Survey 3. This field is one that can be updated by correcting and resubmitting Survey 3.
- c. LEP status during FCAT is different from Survey 3: All students who are enrolled in a program for more than 2 years at the time of testing (February 7 in 2003) are

included in the process of grading schools. Updated information must be provided for students who enroll in a program after February 7 but before March 3.

- d. ESE status during FCAT is different from Survey 3: All students who are enrolled in designated ESE programs (exemptions are noted earlier) prior to testing are not included. Updated information must be provided for students who are enrolled in a program between two dates specified annually (after February 7 but before March 3 in 2003).
- e. Withdrawal status during FCAT is different from Survey 3: All students who were withdrawn from school after Survey 3 and prior to FCAT must be identified so they will not be included. Updated information must be provided for students who withdraw from a school after February 7 but before March 3.

Step 3.5 – Repeat steps 3.1-3.3: Using a corrected Survey 3 file and the corrections provided by school districts, the steps above are repeated to identify the students to be included in the school grading process.

4. Obtain the FCAT Scores for Students

The Assessment and School Performance staff works closely with the K-12 Assessment staff to obtain accurate FCAT data on all students. The matching process is similar to that described for the matching of Surveys 2 and 3. The steps are briefly summarized below.

Step 4.1 – Match Survey 3 files to FCAT files: The Florida ID-Survey 3 is matched to the Florida ID-FCAT. All matches are completed within a district/school combination, not across the state as a whole. Any FCAT record that does not contain the correct district/school designation will not match. This step is completed separately for writing, reading, and mathematics.

Step 4.2 – Obtain corrections from the school districts: The student identification numbers used on FCAT that do not match the Florida ID on Survey 3 are documented by staff of the Office of Assessment and School Performance and shared with school districts. Using a process similar to that described in section 3.4, school districts must return updated and corrected information for each student. The extent to which this step is completed correctly by school districts affects the Department's ability to include the maximum number of eligible students in the school grading process.

Note: This process is completed for all students tested not just those to be included in the school grading process. This is important for two reasons. First, scores for these students might be needed for determining learning gains the following year if the students become eligible for inclusion, e.g., students in limited English programs for more than two years. Secondly, the Department is preparing to calculate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for each school as required by the No Child Left Behind Act. Because all students are included in determining AYP, it is necessary to correct all IDs.

Step 4.3 – Repeat step 4.1. Using the corrections provided by school districts, step 4.1 is repeated to identify the FCAT scores for students to be included in the school grading process.

5. Compute the Percentage Points for Each Performance Measure

The six performance measures evaluated as part of determining school grades can be grouped into three categories:

1. The percent of students achieving high standards (steps 5.1-5.3),
2. The percent of student making learning gains (steps 5.4-5.5), and
3. The percent of the lowest performing students who make learning gains (step 5.6).

Although the computations are similar within each category, the computations for each performance measure are described separately in the following sections.

Step 5.1 – Calculate Reading Performance: This component focuses on the extent to which eligible students scored sufficiently high¹ on the reading portion of the FCAT to be considered “on grade level.” Schools accumulate one point for each percent of eligible students scoring in FCAT Achievement Levels 3, 4, and 5 in reading. The number of eligible students scoring in levels 3-5 is divided by the total number of eligible students who took the FCAT reading test.

Step 5.2 – Calculate Mathematics Performance: This component focuses on the extent to which eligible students score sufficiently high¹ on the mathematics portion of the FCAT to be considered “on grade level.” Schools accumulate one point for each percent of eligible students scoring in FCAT Achievement Levels 3, 4, and 5 in mathematics. The number of eligible students scoring in levels 3-5 is divided by the total number of eligible students who took the FCAT mathematics test.

Step 5.3 – Calculate Writing Performance: In years prior to 2002, the percent of eligible scoring 3 or above on the 0-6 point rubric was used for evaluating this component. Beginning in 2002, this component was redefined to stimulate higher performance in writing, while at the same time recognize the traditional objective that students be able to write a composition that meets at least minimal requirements. The percentage points earned take into account both the percent of students scoring 3 and above and the percent of students scoring 3.5 and above.

Table 3 includes an illustration for a hypothetical school, Sunshine Middle School, to help clarify this procedure. In this hypothetical school there were 131 eligible students who took FCAT Writing. Ninety-four students scored 3.0 and above, and 64 scored 3.5 and above. Table 4 shows the method used for determining the final percent meeting high standards on FCAT Writing. Therefore, the percent meeting high standards in writing at Sunshine Middle School is 60%.

Note: If fewer than 30 students were tested in writing, the percent of eligible students scoring in FCAT Achievement Levels 3 and above in reading is substituted for writing.

Writing Scores	Number of Students	Percent of Students	Cumulative Number	Cumulative Percent
6.0	5	4%	5	4%
5.5	3	3%	8	6%
5.0	10	7%	18	14%
4.5	10	2%	28	21%
4.0	20	10%	48	37%
3.5	16	6%	64	49%
3.0	30	30%	94	72%
2.5	16	16%	110	84%
2.0	9	9%	119	91%
1.5	6	6%	125	95%
1.0	4	4%	129	98%
0.0	2	2%	131	100%
Total Students	131			

	Number of Students	Total tested	Percent	Compute Final*	Final Percent
3.5 and above	64	131	49%	158/232	60%
3 and Above	94	131	72%		

* The number of students scoring 3 and above is added to the number of students scoring 3.5 and above, then divided by twice the number of students who took the writing test.

Note: There are several mathematically equivalent methods that can be used to determine the final combined percent for the school in addition to the one shown, for example: $[\frac{(x + y)}{2}/n]$, or $[\frac{1}{2}(x + y)/n]$.

Step 5.4 – Calculate Reading Gains: Including learning gains as a performance measure for determining school grades was initiated in 2002. It emphasizes the importance of individual student learning gains. Learning gains are determined by comparing each student's prior year test score to the current year test score using three different methods. Students who make learning gains by any one of the three methods described below will be counted in the computation of the percentage points. Students can

- a. Improve one or more achievement levels, e.g., from 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, or 4-5; or
- b. Maintain high standards, i.e., achievement levels of 3, 4, or 5; or

- c. Demonstrate more than one year's growth⁴ when their score is in achievement level 1 or 2 for both years. Under this alternative, one year's growth is defined in terms of the difference between a student's current year and prior year FCAT developmental score. Non-retained students who remain in levels 1 or 2 are credited with learning gains for reading if they improve more than the cut-off scores shown in Table 5.

Note: Retained students are included in methods a and b above, but not in method c because the definition of one year's growth is based on taking FCAT at the next higher grade. Also, when achievement level scores drop, e.g., 4→3, they are not included in the calculation of learning gains, even if the lower score is on or above grade level.

Table 5						
One Year's Growth Definition for FCAT Reading Developmental Scores						
Grade 4*	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
230	166	133	110	92	77	77

* Learning gains are not determined for grade 3 students because there is no grade 2 test.

Step 5.5 – Calculate Mathematics Gains: This component was initiated for school grades in 2002. It is parallel to the reading procedure described in step 5.6. Learning gains are determined by comparing each student's prior year test score to the current year test score using one of the three different methods. Students who make learning gains by any one of the three methods described are counted in computing the percentage points.

Note: Retained students are included in the first and second alternatives for determining learning gains, but not the third, just as described for reading in Step 5.4. Non-retained students who remain in levels 1 or 2 are credited with learning gains if they improve more than the cut-off scores shown in Table 6 for mathematics.

Table 6						
One Year's Growth Definition for FCAT Mathematics Developmental Scores						
Grade 4*	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
162	119	95	78	64	54	48

* Learning gains are not determined for grade 3 students because there is no grade 2 test.

Step 5.6 – Calculate reading gains for the lowest 25%: This component was also initiated in 2002. It focuses on reading gains for the lowest 25% of students in each graded school. The students included in the calculations for this component are identified as follows:

⁴ A more complete description of how the definition of "one year's growth" in the A+ accountability system was determined is included as Attachment B.

- a. Students who meet all criteria for inclusion in school grade calculations for the current year,
- b. Students who have both a prior year score and a current year score on FCAT reading, and
- c. Students who are ranked among the lowest 25% based on their prior year's FCAT reading scores.

If the total number of students in the lowest 25% is 30 or more, the percent making learning gains is calculated as described in Step 5.4. That is, students are credited with learning gains if they improved their achievement level, maintained a 3, 4, or 5, or exceeded the reading growth cut-off scores for their particular grade level.

Note: If the total number of students in the lowest 25% is less than 30, then the percent of all students making learning gains in reading is substituted for the lowest 25%.

The examples in Table 7 illustrate how this component is evaluated.

Table 7		
Example of Learning Gains for the Lowest 25% in Reading		
	Chinquapin Elementary School	Sunshine Middle School
Number of eligible students included in the current year school grade	125	1050
Number of eligible students with the prior year's FCAT reading scores	100	1000
Students in the lowest 25% of students based on the prior year's FCAT reading score	25	250
Is the number less than 30?	Yes	No
Number showing learning gains	*	150
Percent showing learning gains	Use Reading Learning Gains	60% (150/250)

* Because the number of students is less than 30, the number making learning gains is not determined and the percentage of all eligible students making learning gains in reading is substituted for this component.

6. Determine the Percent Tested

The procedure for estimating a school's percent tested was developed long before school grades were first calculated. Starting in 1995, the estimating procedure was developed in cooperation with district testing directors and has been modified only slightly over the years. It has always been a straightforward approximation.

The estimate of the percent tested is calculated by dividing the total number of eligible students tested by the number of eligible students in membership (from Survey 3). The actual calculation is complicated by the fact that all students are expected to take all available tests; however, not all subject areas are tested at all grade levels. For example, in high schools, students in grades 9 and 10 take reading and mathematics tests, but only grade 10 students take the writing test. Therefore, the membership component (the denominator) of the percent-tested calculation must take this into account. As shown in the example below, grade 9 membership would be doubled to account for reading and mathematics and grade 10 membership would be tripled to account for reading, mathematics and writing.

The example in Table 8 shows how the percent tested for a hypothetical high school is calculated.

	Number Tested	Eligible Membership	Percent Tested
Grade 9			
Reading	300	330	91%
Mathematics	310	330	94%
Grade 10			
Reading	320	350	91%
Mathematics	330	350	94%
Writing	340	350	97%
Totals	1600	1710	94%

An adjustment of the membership is included to take into account that some students in the membership have actually taken FCAT, but those scores never show up because the students may have answered too few items to generate a score or their test was invalidated due to a testing irregularity. Another adjustment is included for retained grade 10 students who have previously taken and passed the FCAT. These adjustments are accomplished by either adjusting the number tested (the numerator) or the number in membership (the denominator) as appropriate.

7. Determine the Total Points and the Final School Grade

This step is very straightforward.

1. All percentage points are accumulated for each performance measure and added together to obtain the total points.

2. The status of each of the additional conditions is reviewed to determine if the school has met or exceeded the criterion level. These conditions – percent tested, adequate progress of the lowest 25% in reading, and the difference in reading learning gains for the lowest 25% and all students – are described in the overview on pages 2-3.
3. Using the results of 1 and 2 above, the school grade is determined as described in the guide sheet, *Grading Florida Public Schools 2002-2003*, included as Attachment A and also available on the Department of Education website at <http://www.firn.edu/doe/schoolgrades/guide03.htm>. These guidelines are briefly summarized in Table 9.

Table 9	
Summary of School Grading Criteria	
Grade	Grading Criteria
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 410 points or more • 95% tested • Make adequate progress (50%) with the lowest performing students • Similar learning gains for the lowest performing students and all students (within 10 percentage points unless lowest gains are greater)
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 380 points or more • 90% tested • Make adequate progress (50%) with the lowest performing students within 2 years
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 320 points or more • 90% tested • Make adequate progress (50%) with the lowest performing students within 2 years
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 280 points or more • 90% tested
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer than 280 points • 90% tested
I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 90% tested (Schools initially receive a grade of “incomplete” while the status is investigated.)
N	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not previously included

The reader may wish to return to the example of Sunshine Middle School on Page 3, which illustrates how this information is accumulated.

8. Review of School Grades

State Board Rule 6A-1.09981 part (8) requires each district to have an accountability contact person to verify that each school is appropriately classified, that students have

been correctly identified and properly included for school grading, and that each school grade was calculated as specified in the Rule. The Rule also permits a 30-day period of time for districts to review the grade assigned. Therefore, the Florida Department of Education has instituted an appeals process described in this section. Requests for grade changes related to the specific requirements of the statute or rule cannot be granted and should not be submitted.

If a school district identifies a data miscalculation or circumstances that might result in the assignment of a different grade, the district can participate in the school grade review process by proceeding in the following manner:

- The DOE Office of Assessment and School Performance must receive a written request for review, including all backup documentation, within thirty (30) days from the date of the school grades release. These requests should be submitted by the school district accountability contact rather than by individual schools.
- The request for review should be in the form of a letter, explaining the reason for the appeal, specific information on the situation being appealed, and a description of the circumstances that caused the need for the appeal. Note: Changes in students to be included are not permitted at this stage; however, a review can be conducted of the students who were the basis for the calculations. In addition, the request must be based on the premise that making changes would result in a different grade assignment; rather than simply improving the total number of points or the percent tested.
- Documentation, as required for Departmental review of the case, should accompany the appeal letter and be labeled, highlighted or marked for the individual school being appealed.
- Following the thirty (30) day appeal window, the Department of Education will:
 - Review the appeals and documentation,
 - Present recommendations to an appeals committee for their review and recommendations, and
 - Make recommendations to the Commissioner of Education.
- The Department will notify each district Superintendent and accountability contact of the final school grade after the final decision of the Commissioner. Local district officials, as designated by the Superintendent, are responsible for notifying individual schools.


GRADING FLORIDA PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2002-2003
 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, JIM HORNE, COMMISSIONER, www.fldoe.org

School grades for 2002-03 utilize a point system. Schools are awarded one point for each percent of students who score *high on the FCAT and/or make annual learning gains.*

Scoring High on the FCAT

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is the primary measure of students' achievement of the Sunshine State Standards. Student scores are classified into five achievement levels, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.

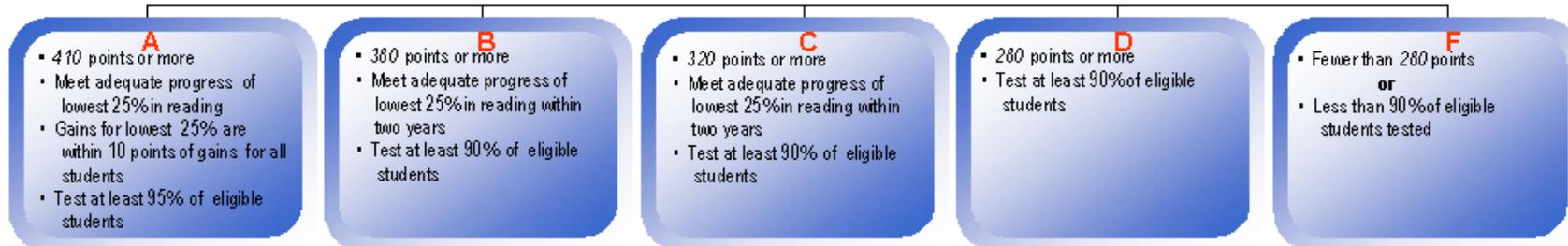
- ⇒ Schools earn one point for each percent of students who score in achievement levels 3, 4, or 5 in **reading** and one point for each percent of students who score 3, 4, or 5 in **math**.
- ⇒ The **writing** exam is scored by at least two readers on a scale of 1 to 6. The percent of students scoring "3" and above is averaged with the percent scoring "3.5" and above to yield the percent meeting minimum and higher standards. Schools earn one point for each percent of students on the combined measure.

Making Annual Learning Gains

Since FCAT **reading and math** exams are given in grades 3 – 10, it is now possible to monitor how much students learn from one year to the next.

- ⇒ Schools earn one point for each percent of students who make learning gains in reading and one point for each percent of students who make learning gains in math. Students can demonstrate learning gains in any one of three ways:
 - (1) Improve achievement levels from 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, or 4-5; **or**
 - (2) Maintain within the relatively high levels of 3, 4, or 5; **or**
 - (3) Demonstrate more than one year's growth within achievement levels 1 or 2.
- ⇒ Special attention is given to the reading gains of students in the lowest 25% in levels 1, 2, or 3 in each school. Schools earn one point for each percent of the lowest performing readers who make learning gains from the previous year. It takes at least 50% to make "adequate progress" for this group.

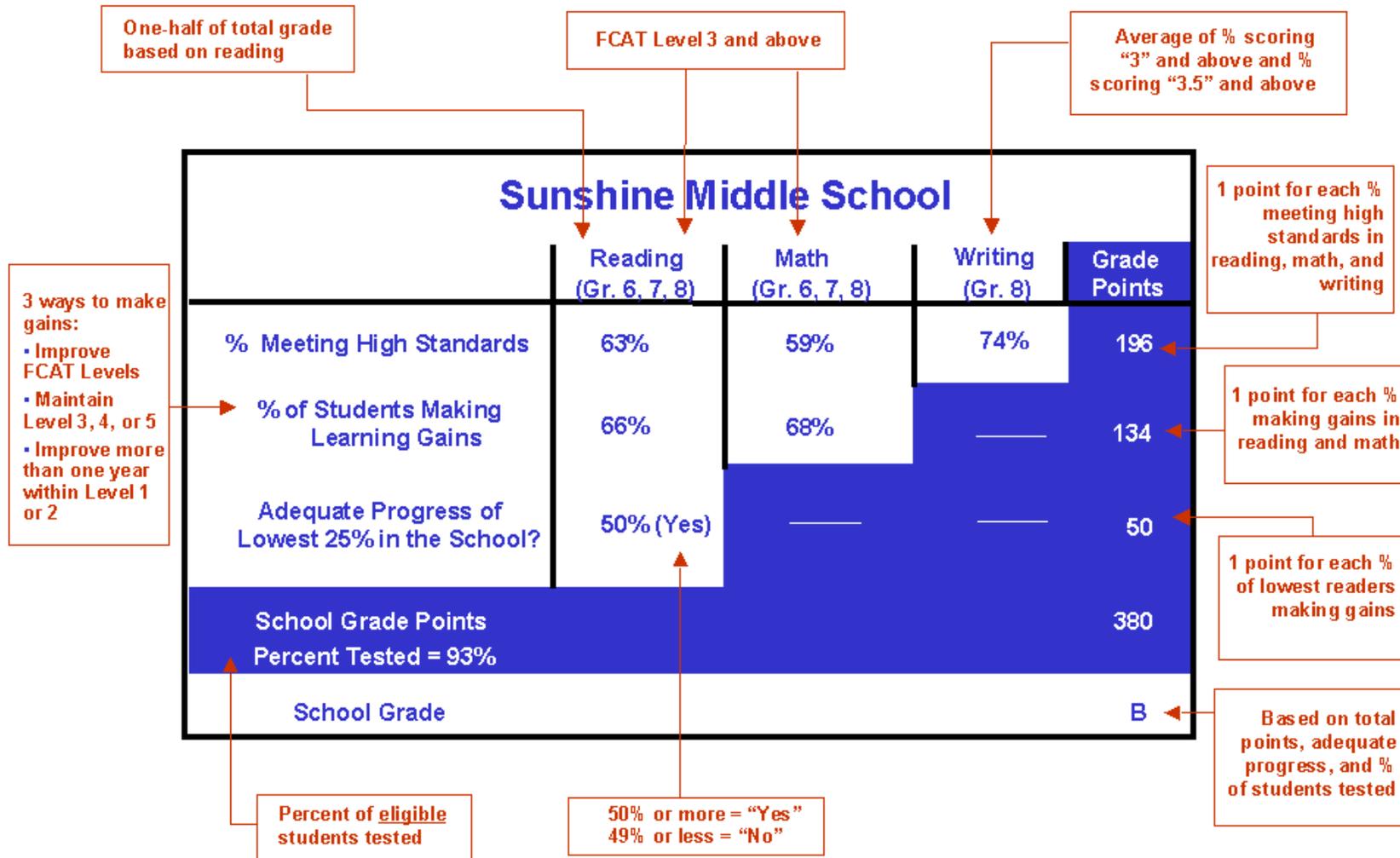
SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADING SCALE



Which students are included in school grade calculations? As in previous years, only standard curriculum students who were enrolled in the same school in both October and February are included. Speech impaired, gifted, hospital/homebound, and Limited English Proficient students with more than two years in an ESOL program are also included.

What happens if the lowest 25% of students in the school do not make "adequate progress" in reading? Schools that aspire to be graded "C" or above, but do not make adequate progress with their lowest 25% in reading, must develop a School Improvement Plan component that addresses this need. If a school, otherwise graded "C" or "B", does not demonstrate adequate progress for two years in a row, the final grade will be reduced by one letter grade.

Example Report for 2003



Attachment B

Definition of One Year's Growth in the A+ Accountability System

Florida's A+ school accountability system has three major components:

- Yearly achievement of high standards in reading, mathematics and writing,
- Annual learning gains in reading and mathematics, and
- Annual learning gains in reading for the lowest 25% of students in each school.

The definition of learning gains is spelled out in State Board of Education *Rule 6A-1.09981*. There are three ways that schools can be credited for the annual yearly progress of their students:

1. When students improve their FCAT achievement levels (1-2, 2-3, 3-4, 4-5); or
2. When students maintain a relatively high achievement level (3, 4 or 5); or
3. When students demonstrate more than one year's growth within Levels 1 or 2, as measured by an increase in their FCAT developmental scores from one year to the next.

The first two gain definitions are relatively straightforward because students' achievement level information is readily available from the FCAT student report and district test data files provided by the Department. The third definition is somewhat more complex since it is based on the amount of gain that represents one year's growth. Thus a definition of "one year's growth" in terms of FCAT developmental scale score gain is required.

The definition of "one year's growth" applied to the third gain option for calculating school grades is based on the numerical cut-scores for the FCAT achievement levels approved by the State Board of Education. The following steps were applied to the cut scores, separately, for each subject and each grade-level pair.

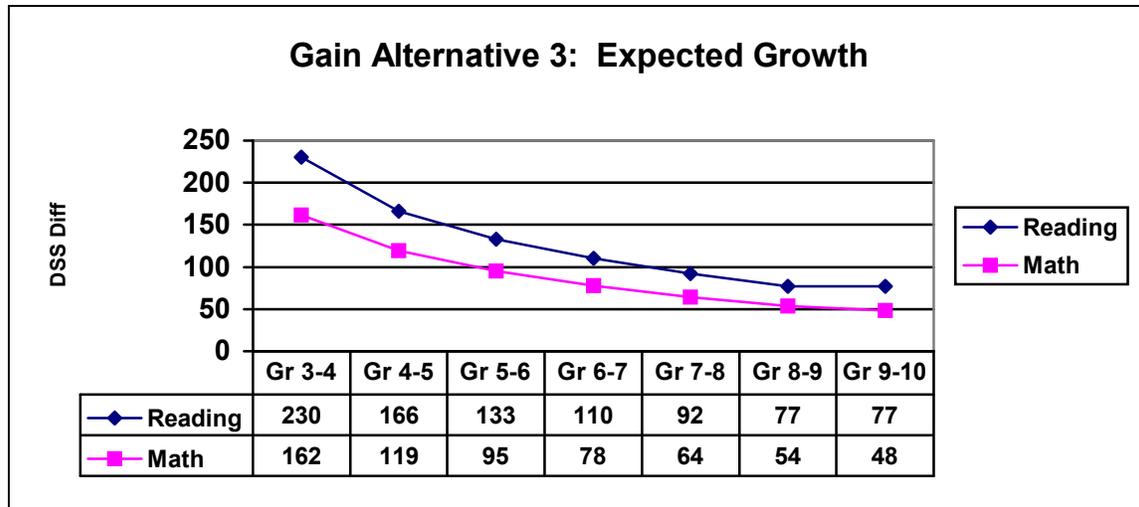
- In State Board Rule 6A-1.09422, there are four cut-off scores that separate FCAT scale scores into five achievement levels, with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 5 being the highest.
- At each of the four cut points between achievement levels, FCAT scale scores (100-500) were converted to FCAT developmental scores that range from 0-3000. This allows all of the cut scores to be placed on the same scale.
- The increase in FCAT developmental scores necessary to maintain the same relative standing within achievement levels from one grade to the next was calculated for each of the four cut points between the five achievement levels.

The following table provides an example of how the three preceding steps were applied to the reading cut points from grade three to grade four:

Grade 4 Example					
Grade	Measure	Level 1-2 Cut	Level 2-3 Cut	Level 3-4 Cut	Level 4-5 Cut
3	FCAT scale score	258	283	331	393
	Developmental score	1045	1197	1488	1865
4	FCAT scale score	274	298	338	385
	Developmental Score	1314	1455	1689	1964
3 – 4	Difference in Developmental Scores at the cut points	269	258	201	99
Midpoint of differences at the cut points			230		

The last line of the table shows the expected gain from one achievement level to the next is different, depending on the initial achievement level of the student. To produce a single value that represents the entire student population, the median value of the differences was calculated. The median of the four developmental scale score differences necessary for students to maintain the same relative standing within an FCAT achievement level in the example is 230. (The median was considered more appropriate than the average or maximum of the four values because the median is less sensitive to very high or low values.)

After median gain expectations were determined for each grade progression (3-4, 4-5, 5-6, 6-7, 7-8, 8-9, and 9-10), a best-fit curve (logarithmic trend line) was calculated, beginning at grades 3-4 and ending at 9-10. (Other curve fits were considered, including regression lines and polynomial transformations; however, the logarithmic trend line was adopted because it best described the theoretical expectation of greater gains in the early grade levels and lesser at the upper grade levels due to student maturation.) The expected gain values for reading and mathematics were obtained separately. The following chart provides the values used to define one year's growth.



It is important to note the following points:

- For purposes of school accountability calculations under the third gain alternative, 6A-1.09981 requires that students who remain within FCAT Achievement Levels 1 or 2 must demonstrate more than one year's growth on the FCAT developmental scale, as determined by the Department. Therefore, for students to be credited with learning gains under the third alternative, they must achieve at least one developmental scale score point more than the values listed above.
- The definition of "one year's growth" in terms of the FCAT developmental score applies to all students who are promoted from one grade level to the next. It cannot be ascertained for retained students who take the same level of the test in two consecutive years.

Other methods for defining one year's growth were also considered prior to the adoption of the procedures described herein. These alternative procedures are described briefly for historical purposes, but each of these options was determined to be less desirable than the one adopted. (1) Expected growth amounts could have been calculated using observed differences in students' developmental scale scores for two consecutive years; however, this approach would lock in expected growth values based on the first year of available gain data and might not reflect actual growth patterns in future years. (2) Expected growth could have been defined at some point in the future after tracking actual cohorts of students over multiple years and determining their average yearly gains; however, this would have delayed the use of learning gains in the accountability system for several more years. (3) The definition of "one year's growth" could have been done separately for students within each of the five achievement levels; however, this method would result in different standards for different students. (4) The definition of "one year's growth" could have been based on the values obtained from grades 3-10 without statistical smoothing; however, this would lead to widely fluctuating expectations from grade to grade.

In summary, the definition of “one year’s growth” applied to the calculating of learning gains was based firmly on the numerical cut-scores approved by the State Board of Education for the FCAT achievement levels. The numeric values of the learning gain expectations represent the average progress expected of students from grade to grade.