

# It's time to dump the FCAT exam!

Back in the early 1980's my mother and grandmother were fortunate enough to send me to private high school which enabled me to receive my high school diploma. During that same time period the public schools weren't as great but it provided a meaningful education. You learned the subject (such as English, Biology, Chemistry, General Mathematics, Algebra, and so on) and you passed an end of course examination based on your mastery of the subject.

Moreover, if you graduated from a public high school in the early 1980's in Florida you had to take an exam called the State Student Assessment Test, also known back then as the Functional Literacy Test. Yes there was some controversy there but no overzealous emphasis was placed on that test. You concentrated on your schoolwork and made the good grades and got your high school credits.

Let's fast forward twenty years.

Public education in the state of Florida slowly went from a meaningful education to nothing more than drill, practice and repetition. Students aren't given the recognition for what they do like it used to be. Overemphasis on discipline and zero tolerance (we'll save that for another topic). Your child coming home with much less homework. You begin to think what's going on in school.

Welcome to the world of the Florida FCAT test!

## What is the FCAT test?

The initials FCAT stand for the **F**lorida **C**omprehensive **A**ssessment **T**est. Started in 1988, this test is *de rigueur* for public school students in Florida from Grades 3 through 11. Passage of the FCAT test in the 10th Grade is required for a student to graduate with a high school diploma in Florida. Reading and mathematics skills are among the items that basically make up the FCAT.

Students in the 4th, 8th and 10th Grades also have a writing component where one is given a topic to write on utilizing basic writing skills learned in Language Arts and English classes. In the 11th Grade a science test part of the FCAT is given; however, performance on this part does not make or break a student's graduation chances.

Scores are reported to the student and his or her parents right around the end of the school year.

## Edward Ringwald's take on the FCAT test

***In all reality, the FCAT test needs to be scrapped and replaced with meaningful end of course exams.***

*The FCAT takes instructional time away from teachers. A public school teacher cannot teach a meaningful class so that students can excel and get ahead for the future. Everything and anything has to be planned around the FCAT test and that includes taking away the essential elements of a class and replacing it with something a student needs to practice for the FCAT.*

*Too much over emphasis is placed on an overall school's performance.* Schools receive a grade from A to F based on the overall performance of their students on the FCAT. This translates into plenty of green for a well performing school or very minimal green for a non-performing school. School administrators place too much over emphasis on the FCAT which results in students learning less.

*Extended school years.* In the years that FCAT has been administered, school districts wanted their students to perform well on the FCAT. This was done at the expense of disrupting families' summer vacations by starting the school year in early August or late July. At least one group in south Florida put an end to this FCAT hodgepodge by mandating, by Florida law, that school cannot begin no earlier than two weeks prior to Labor Day.

*Drill and practice.* A public school education in Florida, especially a public high school education, is meaningless. Everything taught in a Florida public school has to relate to a set of educational standards called the Sunshine State Standards, which measures what is taught in relation to the FCAT test. Nothing more than the "teach the test" philosophy here.

*Increased test anxiety.* Granted, there are a lot of students out there that excel well in required classes such as English or Algebra. Sadly, at the same time these bright students who excel academically don't do well on the FCAT. If your child does not pass any facet of the FCAT exam then your child will end up spending the next semester in remedial classes, which are intensified versions of drill and practice for the FCAT test.

*Did I say test anxiety? If it's proved that there is really test anxiety going on with your child, your child's guidance counselor will more than likely send your child to the school psychologist for evaluation. Ha-ha! We found an issue that is affecting your child's learning and we strongly recommend that your child see a psychiatrist! Step on board the Ritalin express! And, before you know it, your child will switch trains at the FCAT station for a one way passage on the Baker Act Express!*

*The United States federal government being involved.* Bring on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. While it re-authorized certain provisions of a predecessor 1965 federal law on public schools, at the same time it put plenty of teeth into your child's educational progress.

1. All states that want to receive federal money for public schools must have in place a standardized achievement test like the FCAT in Florida, for example.

*Remember back to the early 1970's and the federally mandated 55 mph speed limit? In that law's last days several states raised speed limits on its interstates to as high as 80 mph; once the feds found out money to the states was threatened to be cut unless the speed limits were reverted to 55 mph. Same thing with No Child Left Behind: Federally mandated testing or lose your federal money to the states.*

2. Schools are required to furnish student names (especially high school students) to military recruiters for the purpose of talking our children into enlisting into the military.

*Did I say military recruiters? Enlist and get shipped off to Iraq right after high school. You can thank our Star-Spangled War Loving President for this! Ask yourself as a parent: Do you want your child to become a military "yes sir" zombie? (Yes, the military transforms ordinary people into "sir" zombies the moment you enter boot camp!) On a personal note, I myself pondered about joining the service right after I graduated from high school in 1983 but I am thankful my mother and grandmother talked me out of joining the service and instead sent me to college.*

3. No Child Left Behind also added another unnecessary layer of testing in addition to the Florida FCAT: The National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the NAEP. This test is given in select schools around December, a couple of months before the FCAT.

*Are we over testing our children here? This testing craze is getting out of control in the name of Annual Yearly Progress! Just like a vehicle with malfunctioning brakes approaching an opening drawbridge!*

4. Interference with states' rights is what No Child Left Behind is all about. The federal government has no right in the business of educating your children; this should really be the responsibility of the fifty states. Moreover, I feel the U.S. Department of Education - created in 1980 - needs to be abolished and absorbed into the Department of Health and Human Services and renamed accordingly. After all, the business of education should be the responsibility of the states and not the federal government.

So, all of the federal government's meddling with states' rights should be stopped with one quick fix: A complete and total repeal of No Child Left Behind. Another fix as mentioned earlier would be the abolishment of the U.S. Department of Education and its activities absorbed into the Department of Health and Human Services and renamed as such. After all, the feds don't mess around in matters like family relations - that's left to the states.

*Back in the 1970's the federal government's role in education was concentrated in one department: The Department of Health, Education and Welfare. In 1980 the responsibilities were divvied up and education got its own department while health and welfare were rolled into a repackaged federal department, the Department of Health and Human Services as we know today.*

*Having to graduate from high school out of state.* Here are students who excel well academically. In fact, some students take Advanced Placement classes so that they can get a jump start on college by receiving both high school and college credit at the same time and take the Advanced Placement exam. Sounds tough for both high school and college credits?

For those students who excel well academically, there is one arbitrarily placed exam barrier: The FCAT test. Whether your child excels well in school or not, your child

still has to take the FCAT no matter what. Now let's say your child is in the 12th grade of high school and excels well in classes; yet the last sitting of FCAT comes around and your child did not pass. Well, your child will pass his or her classes but your child will walk out of high school graduation not with a high school diploma, but a certificate of completion.

You have two choices: Take the GED test in Florida and get a GED diploma. Or, transfer your child out of state and graduate with a high school diploma. At least there is one [private high school in Maine](#) that will let your child transfer his or her high school credits and get a high school diploma. There are creative ways parents can avoid the FCAT test for their children, especially if children do well academically yet can't do well on the FCAT; one parent from what I understand sent her children to live with relatives in Georgia in order to avoid the FCAT.

### **Edward Ringwald's Final Verdict on the FCAT test**

**As I said before, we need to send the FCAT packing as it has no value in our children's education. End of course exams truly measure how your child has done on a particular subject.**

**The FCAT ruins our children's way of life as far as education in Florida is concerned.**

**Our children in Florida no longer get a meaningful school education - and you, dear Florida homeowner, are paying for it in the form of *your* property taxes!**

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