

2010 Guide to Calculating Alternative School Improvement Ratings Technical Assistance Paper



Florida Department of Education
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Overview

Introduction

The purpose of this technical assistance paper is to provide a description of the procedures used to determine school improvement ratings for alternative schools for the most recently completed school year. Alternative school ratings, first implemented in 2008, are part of Florida's school accountability system which originated with the Florida Legislature's passage of Assistance Plus (A+) legislation in 1999. Florida is one of the few states that can track student demographic information from year to year and is the first to track annual student learning gains based on the state's academic standards.

Alternative school ratings are calculated as defined in Florida Administrative Code Rule 6A-1.099822, under the authority of s. 1008.341, Florida Statutes. Based on statutory criteria, alternative schools are identified by the Florida Department of Education with input from Florida's school districts. Once alternative schools are identified for the reporting year, the administration of each school is provided the opportunity to choose, for an annual accountability rating, either a regular school grade (using criteria applicable to traditional schools receiving school grades) or a school improvement rating for alternative schools (using criteria applicable to alternative school ratings as described in Rule 6A-1.099822) for the applicable reporting year. If the administration of an alternative school does not choose either option, the school will by default be assigned a school improvement rating. Schools that elect a school improvement rating in lieu of a school grade will have the rating based on a comparison of current-year and prior-year learning gains for eligible students in reading and mathematics. Florida's accountability system allows for measuring annual student learning gains based on Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) developmental scores in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 10.

This paper contains two sections: I. Overview, and II. Process for Calculating School Improvement Ratings for Alternative Schools. These sections describe procedures for determining a school's final rating and are intended for knowledgeable audiences who are interested in the details of determining school improvement ratings for alternative schools.

Specific Authority

The authority for Florida's system of school accountability is detailed in Florida Statutes and Florida Administrative Code Rules. 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.

Florida Statutes - [Section 1008.34](#)

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 grade category. The law also provides an exception to school grading for alternative schools that receive a school improvement rating pursuant to s. 1008.341. At the same time, under provision of s. 1008.34 (3), an alternative school may choose to receive a school grade in lieu of a school improvement rating.

Florida Statutes – [Section 1008.341](#)

This section of Florida law provides for school improvement ratings for alternative schools. Alternative schools that provide dropout prevention and academic intervention services pursuant to s. [1003.53](#) may elect to receive a school improvement rating in lieu of a grade. The school improvement rating shall identify schools as having one of the following ratings defined according to rules of the State Board of Education:

- "Improving" means schools with students making more academic progress than when the students were served in their home schools.
- "Maintaining" means schools with students making progress equivalent to the progress made when the students were served in their home schools.
- "Declining" means schools with students making less academic progress than when the students were served in their home schools.

Specific provisions of this statute are implemented by FAC Rule 6A-1.099822, which was passed by the State Board of Education on February 19, 2008.

Florida Administrative Code Rule [6A-1.099822](#)

This rule implements provisions of the alternative school rating system mandated by s. 1008.341, Florida Statutes. In cases where an alternative school elects to receive a school improvement rating in lieu of a grade, the FCAT results of students at the alternative school will be credited back to the students' home school(s) for inclusion in the performance grade of the home school.¹ This provision thereby affects identification of students to be included in the school grading calculations. For more information, see the School Grades Technical Assistance Paper (available via a link provided online at <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org>), p. 6, Step 2.4— *Identify students who attended alternative schools and whose FCAT results will be credited back to home schools.*

Summary of the Alternative School Improvement Rating Provisions

- **Definition of “alternative school” and “home school”:** An alternative school is defined as any school that provides dropout prevention and academic intervention services pursuant to Section 1003.53, Florida Statutes, and has students who would be attending another school (home school) if not enrolled in the alternative school. The definition of “home school” was revised by the 2008 Florida Legislature (s. 1008.34[3][c]3, F.S.) to mean the school to which the student would be assigned if he/she were not enrolled in the alternative school.

¹ Applied to the learning gains components for reading and math.

- **Provisions:**

- **Alternative schools are identified (for accountability reporting purposes) by the Department of Education with input from school districts.** In February of each year, the DOE provides a preliminary file of alternative schools for each district to review. The procedure calls for districts to be given at least 30 days to review the list and to request changes (contingent on supporting documentation) before the alternative school file is finalized.
- **Alternative schools have the option of receiving a school grade or an alternative school improvement rating.** After the alternative school list is finalized, a letter is sent by the DOE to the principal of each alternative school requesting a decision about which option to apply. Accountability coordinators are also notified of this process by e-mail. If the administration of an alternative school does not choose either option, the school will by default be assigned a school improvement rating.
- **Minimum student-count requirements are criteria for receiving an alternative school improvement rating.** For each applicable subject (reading and math), a school must have at least 10 eligible students with valid FCAT scores for the current year and the previous two years for a rating to be assigned.
- **The alternative school rating will include scores for students assigned to and enrolled in the October and February counts.** Note: students do not need to be enrolled for both surveys to be included in the alternative school rating.
- **Scores for certain categories of students in alternative schools are NOT included.** As defined in s. 1008.34(3)(b)(3), scores for students who are enrolled in alternative schools are not included in the accountability rating if these students are reported as enrolled in alternative-to-expulsion programs or dropout retrieval programs. (In addition, students in DJJ programs are not included in the school grading or rating process.) These students are identified via data reported by districts on the Dropout Prevention/Juvenile Justice Programs data element on the Federal/State Indicator Status records. For students enrolled in these programs at alternative schools, their FCAT results will not be used either in the calculation of an alternative school rating or in the calculation of a school grade.
- **Scores for students who are enrolled in an alternative school that elects to receive a school improvement rating instead of a grade will be credited back to the home school for inclusion in the home school's school grade calculation.** Home schools are identified on Student Demographic Information records by the data elements "School Number, Zoned School" and "District Number, Zoned School," as reported by districts to the department's student information database. (In situations where there is no home school for a student, zeroes are coded in the applicable fields on the student records.)

The definition of "home school" was revised by the 2008 Florida Legislature to mean the school to which the student would be assigned if he/she were not enrolled in the alternative school.

The crediting back of scores will be limited by grade configurations of schools. For example, if a student was referred to an alternative school serving grades 9-12 after

completing the previous year at a middle school in which the highest grade taught was grade 8, the student's grade 9 scores would not be credited back to the middle school.

- **The alternative school improvement rating will be based on learning gains comparisons between the current and prior year.** The percentage of students making learning gains at the alternative school will be compared to the percentage of students (from the same population) making learning gains in the prior year.
- **The school improvement rating will consist of one of the following ratings: “improving,” “maintaining,” “declining.”** For each subject in which learning gains are evaluated (reading, math), the following criteria apply:

“Improving” means at least a 5% increase in the percent making gains.

“Maintaining” means less than a 5% increase or decrease in the percent making gains.

“Declining” means at least a 5% decrease in the percent making gains.

A school's rating can be no higher than the status of its lowest performing subject.

- a. In order for a school to earn an **“improving”** designation, the percent of students making learning gains in both reading and in math in the current year must be at least five percentage points higher than the percent of the same students making learning gains in reading and in math in the prior year.
 - b. In order for a school to earn a **“maintaining”** designation, the percent of students making learning gains in reading and math in the current year must be less than five percentage points above or below the percent of the same students making learning gains in the prior year. A school's rating can be no higher than the status of the learning gains comparison for its lowest performing subject, so if a school is assigned a “maintaining” status for one subject but a “declining” status for the other subject, the school's overall status would be “declining.”
 - c. In order for a school to earn a **“declining”** designation, the percent of students making learning gains in either reading or math (or both) in the current year must be at least five percentage points lower than the percent of the same students making learning gains in the prior year.
- **Alternative schools that improve one level in the overall rating or maintain an “improving” level are eligible for school recognition award money.**
 - **Alternative schools are included in Florida's [Differentiated Accountability](http://flbsi.org/DA/index.htm) system (except the “Intervene” category).** See also <http://flbsi.org/DA/index.htm>.
 - **Alternative schools must test at least 90% of their students in order to avoid an initial rating of “I” (incomplete) with a final rating determined by the Commissioner of Education.**
 - **Procedures for appeal of an assigned rating mirror those that are applicable to the issuance of school grades.** See also section 10, page 24, of the School Grades Technical Assistance Paper, for which a link is provided online at <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/>.

II. Process for Calculating School Improvement Ratings for Alternative Schools

This section of the paper describes in sequential order the processes involved in identifying alternative schools and applying processes for evaluating school performance and calculating school improvement ratings for alternative schools.

1. Identify Alternative Schools that Will Receive a School Improvement Rating

- An alternative school is defined in Rule [6A-1.099822](#) as any school that provides dropout prevention and academic intervention services pursuant to Section 1003.53, Florida Statutes, and has students referred to the school by another school (the home school).
- Alternative schools are identified (for accountability reporting purposes) by the Department of Education with input from school districts. Districts are given at least 30 days beginning in late-February to review a preliminary list of alternative schools and to request changes (contingent on supporting documentation) before the alternative school file is finalized. Schools on the list are then given the choice of electing to receive a regular school grade or a school improvement rating for the applicable reporting year. An alternative school that does not choose between receiving a school grade and a school improvement rating will receive the school improvement rating by default.
- A school must have at least 10 students with FCAT scores in applicable subjects (reading and math) for the current year and the previous two years for a rating to be assigned.
- Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) schools are not included as alternative schools and do not receive a school improvement rating (or a school grade).
- Districts may request that certain types of schools that are not DJJ schools but that could be considered “second chance” schools be excluded from the list of alternative schools because of one or more of the following reasons:
 - The school serves 100% dropout retrievals.
 - The school serves 100% alternative-to-expulsion students.
 - The school is actually a jail or an adjudicated youth facility and does not get referrals from home schools as described in the applicable rule.

However, while it is true that schools of the type described in this section could be removed from or omitted from the alternative school list, the department is providing districts with the flexibility to include these schools on the alternative school list for the following reasons:

- FCAT scores for certain classifications of students *who attend alternative schools* are to be excluded from alternative school ratings and school grades, but only if the students in these classifications are confirmed as enrolled at alternative

schools. The students in these classifications include those who are enrolled in dropout retrieval programs and those who are enrolled in alternative-to-expulsion programs.

- Schools other than DJJ centers that serve at-risk students but are not on the alternative school list will still be subject to school grading and will not have the opportunity to elect whether to receive a school grade in lieu of an alternative school rating.

2. Identify the Students To Be Included

Once the list of alternative schools is finalized and schools that elect to receive a school grade in lieu of a rating are also identified, the next step is to identify students to be included in the alternative school ratings.

The following criteria for inclusion apply to students in relation to each subject (reading, math) for which FCAT scores will be applied in the school improvement rating.

- The student was enrolled in either Survey 2 or Survey 3, or both.
- The student was tested in FCAT in the applicable subject at the alternative school.
- The student has FCAT scores for the current year and the previous two years in the applicable subject.
- The student is not reported in a dropout retrieval or alternative-to-expulsion program (see Step 3.1 below).
- The student is not a 10th grader who has previously passed the FCAT in the applicable subject area (see Step 3.2 below).

Keep in mind that for each subject area (reading and math), a school must have at least 10 eligible students with valid FCAT scores for the current year and the previous two years for a rating to be assigned.

3. Identify Students Whose Scores Are To Be Excluded

Step 3.1 – Identify students reported in dropout retrieval programs and alternative-to-expulsion programs. Section 1008.34, F.S., excludes certain classifications of students in alternative schools from alternative school ratings and school grading:

- Students subject to district school board policies for expulsion for repeated and/or serious offenses, and
- Students who are in dropout-retrieval programs who have officially been designated as dropouts.

(In addition, test scores for students who are in programs operated or contracted by the Department of Juvenile Justice are excluded from school grading, as required in statute.)

Students belonging to these classifications are reported by districts to the Department of Education's automated student database via the Federal/State Indicator Status reporting format (http://www.fl DOE.org/eias/dataweb/database_0910/0910fsis.asp), using specific codes reported on the Dropout Prevention/Juvenile Justice Programs data element (http://www.fl DOE.org/eias/dataweb/database_0910/st91_1.pdf). The following codes will be used to identify students in alternative schools whose FCAT scores will not be included in school improvement rating or school grading calculations: R (for students in dropout retrieval programs), and E (for students in "alternative to expulsion" programs). A code of D can be reported for students in Department of Juvenile Justice programs; however, DJJ centers are already excluded from the grading process based on reported school type ("10") on the department's Master School Identification (MSID) file. Codes for students in dropout-retrieval and alternative-to-expulsion programs are reported in Survey 3.

Step 3.2 – Identify the grade 10 students who have previously passed the FCAT: Grade 10 students who have previously passed the grade 10 FCAT reading and/or mathematics will not be included in the alternative school rating calculations. The identification process is completed separately for reading and for mathematics.

4. Obtain Corrections and Updates from the School Districts

Student classifications and membership status are identified by the Department and shared with the school districts in electronic form. Districts may submit corrections to these records via student database reporting up to a cutoff point for use in accountability reporting (usually by the end of the first week in March). Districts and schools are then given the opportunity to submit updates directly to the Bureau of Research and Evaluation (Evaluation and Reporting section) via a secure Web-based application for students whose status changed after the end of the Survey 3 reporting period and before testing. These updates may be submitted daily over a multi-week period during which district and school updates are processed nightly. Any errors that remain after the close of this period cannot be updated during the appeals process. A general description of the update process is provided below.

- a. Unmatched Identification Numbers: If there are students who were present for a full academic year but the student ID on Survey 2 does not match the student ID on Survey 3, this results in unmatched records. Districts are required to resolve these discrepancies by correcting the student ID on submitted records so that the Survey 2 and Survey 3 records can be matched. This step is applicable primarily to school grades and AYP, since alternative school ratings can include scores for students who were not enrolled in both Survey 2 and Survey 3. However, student IDs must still be accurate for both surveys in order to calculate the alternative school improvement rating correctly.
- b. Inaccuracies in the data reported in Survey 3: Districts are given an opportunity to correct inaccuracies in data used for the school accountability calculations and reported in Survey 3.

- c. Non-public school students taking courses at public schools: Home schooled and private school students who receive services from a public school are excluded from calculations if N998 (Home Education) or N999 (Private School) is reported as the primary school number in the “Current Enrollment” field of Survey 3. For students whose primary instructional school has been misidentified, districts must report the correct primary school number to the Office of Evaluation and Reporting.
- d. ELL status during FCAT is different from Survey 3: Only ELL students who were enrolled in an ESOL program for more than 2 years at the time of testing are included in the four proficiency components for school grading. Updated information must be provided for students who enroll in an ESOL program after Survey 3 but before testing. [Applicable to school grading and AYP calculations.]
- e. SWD status during FCAT is different from Survey 3: All students who are enrolled in designated SWD programs prior to testing are not included in the four proficiency components of school grade calculations (exemptions noted above). Updated information must be provided for students who are enrolled in a program after Survey 3 but before testing. [Applicable to school grading and AYP calculations.]
- f. Withdrawal status prior to testing: All students who were withdrawn after Survey 3 and prior to FCAT testing must be identified for exclusion from the school grade calculation.
- g. 10th grade FCAT graduation requirements met prior to testing: All 10th grade retained students who have passed the reading and/or math FCAT prior to testing are not included in the school grade calculation. Districts must ensure that these students are appropriately identified.

Step 4.1 – Creation of the Membership File: Upon completion of both rounds of error corrections, a final file is created and referred to as the Membership File. The Membership File is used for all accountability calculations (school grades, AYP, alternative school improvement ratings).

5. Obtain Student FCAT Scores

The Evaluation and Reporting Office works closely with the K-12 Assessment staff to obtain accurate FCAT data on all students. The matching process is similar to that used for the matching of Survey 2 and 3 in determining full-year status for school grades and AYP. After the initial matching process is complete, districts are provided a list of unmatched and mismatched students. School districts must return updated and corrected information for each student. The extent to which this step is completed correctly by the school districts affects the Department’s ability to include the maximum number of eligible students in the school grading process. The matching and corrections processes are briefly summarized as follows.

Step 5.1 – Identify FCAT records with blank or duplicate student IDs: For records with a blank or duplicate FCAT Student ID, districts must provide the matching student ID from the Membership File for inclusion of student results.

Step 5.2 – Match membership file records to FCAT file records by district, school, and student ID: The Membership File is matched to FCAT files using district, school, and student ID. Unmatched records are flagged and districts must provide the matching fields from the Membership File for inclusion of student results.

Step 5.3 – Identify FCAT records that have missing prior year FCAT data: Any record that does not contain prior year test results will be flagged. Districts must report correct prior year print after scan numbers that are associated with the missing data for Reading and Mathematics.

Step 5.4 – Update FCAT records with district corrections: Upon completion of error corrections, student results in the FCAT file should be closely matched to the students enrolled in the Membership File.

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, because all students are included in determining Adequate Yearly Progress under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, it is necessary to correct all Student IDs. The process is also important for the alternative school rating system implemented in 2008.

6. Compute Current and Prior Year Learning Gains for Reading and for Math

After students with requisite FCAT scores are identified for inclusion in the alternative rating calculation for each subject and exclusions have been processed, the next step is to calculate learning gains for those students for the current school year and the prior school year in reading and in math.

Step 6.1 – Calculate reading learning gains for the current year: Individual student learning gains are determined by comparing each student's prior year test score to the current year test score using three different methods. Students make learning gains by any one of the three methods described below.

Students make learning gains if they

- a. improve one or more FCAT achievement levels; e.g., from 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, or 4-5;
- b. maintain their achievement levels within levels 3, 4, or 5; or
- c. demonstrate more than one year's growth when remaining 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 scale score (DSS). Students who remain in levels 1 or 2 are credited with learning gains for reading if they improve more than the cut-off scores (point differentials between prior and current year developmental scores) shown in Table 1.

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 the FCAT at the next higher grade. Also, when achievement level scores drop (e.g., from level 4 to level 3), they are not counted as indicating learning gains, even if the lower score is on or above grade level.

The percentage of eligible students making learning gains in the current year will be compared to the percentage of the same students making learning gains in the prior year in order to determine the school's improvement rating status in reading.

**Table 1:
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

Step 6.2 – Calculate reading learning gains for the prior year: Using the same group of students for which learning gains are calculated in Step 6.1 and the same procedures for determining learning gains as described in Step 6.1, the department calculates prior-year learning gains for each student by comparing the student's FCAT reading performance for the prior year and for the year before the prior year.

Step 6.3 – Calculate math learning gains for the current year: This component is parallel to the reading procedure described in step 6.1. Individual student learning gains are determined by comparing each student's prior year test score to the current year test score using the three different methods described in Step 6.1. The differentials between year-to-year FCAT Math developmental scale scores that establish one year's growth for use in the learning gains calculation are shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2:
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

The percentage of eligible students making learning gains in the current year will be compared to the percentage of the same students making learning gains in the prior year in order to determine the school's improvement rating status in math.

Step 6.4 – Calculate math learning gains for the prior year: Using the same group of students for which learning gains are calculated in Step 6.3 and the same procedures for determining learning gains as described above, the department calculates prior-year learning gains for each student by comparing the student's FCAT math performance for the prior year and for the year before the prior year.

7. Calculate the School Improvement Rating

Alternative school improvement ratings are calculated to produce a final school rating that consists of one of the following designations:

- Improving
- Maintaining
- Declining

Step 7.1 – Determine the improvement rating status for reading and for math: Once the learning gains have been calculated for eligible students in each subject as described in section 6 (“Compute Current and Prior Year Learning Gains for Reading and for Math”), an improvement rating status is assigned to each subject area based on the following criteria:

- “Improving” indicates that current-year learning gains were at least 5 percentage points higher than prior-year learning gains.
- “Maintaining” indicates that learning gains for the current year varied by less than 5 percentage points (up or down) from learning gains for the prior year.
- “Declining” indicates that current-year learning gains were at least 5 percentage points lower than prior-year learning gains.

Step 7.2 – Determine the school’s overall improvement rating: After an improvement rating status is determined for each subject, calculating the school’s overall improvement rating becomes a simple operation. Essentially, a school’s improvement rating is determined by the improvement rating status of its lowest performing subject.

A school receives an overall rating of “Improving” only if the improvement rating status of both subjects is “Improving.”

A school receives an overall rating of “Maintaining” if the improvement rating status of its lowest performing subject is no lower than “Maintaining.” For example, if the improvement rating status of one subject is “Improving” and the improvement rating status of the other subject is “Maintaining,” then the school’s overall school improvement rating is “Maintaining.” If the improvement rating status of both subjects is “Maintaining,” the school’s overall school improvement rating is “Maintaining.”

A school receives an overall rating of “Declining” if the improvement rating status of one or both subjects is “Declining.”

8. Determine the Percent Tested

Recall that Rule 6A-1.099822 requires that an alternative school test at least 90% of eligible students for assignment of a school improvement rating, and that if the school

falls below the 90% mark, the Commissioner of Education is authorized to assign a rating of “I” (for “Incomplete”) or otherwise withhold the rating pending availability of data that “are determined to accurately represent the performance of the school.”

For alternative schools that receive a school improvement rating, the percent tested is calculated by dividing the total number of eligible students tested in each subject by the number of eligible students in membership who are expected to take each subject test. Students are eligible for inclusion in the school improvement rating calculation for participation (percent tested) if they are enrolled in Survey 3 (February reporting period) and have not been reported as withdrawing from (or transferring out of) the school prior to testing. All eligible students are included in the participation calculation (denominator) unless the student took an alternate assessment because the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test was not appropriate for the student due to a disability or limited English proficiency. Note that this is a different calculation and population from those used to determine percent tested for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measure or those used to determine percent tested for school grades.

The example in Table 3 shows how the percent tested for a hypothetical high school is calculated.

**Table 3:
Example for Estimating the Percent Tested**

Subject Area	Number Tested	Eligible Membership	Percent Tested (Total Only)
Reading	620	640	
Mathematics	640	650	
Totals	1,260	1,290	98%

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.

9. Review of (Appeal Procedures for) School Improvement Ratings

State Board Rule 6A.1.09981 establishes procedures for school districts to review information on assigned school grades and to participate in appeals on behalf of schools in the district for which appeals criteria are applicable (described below). Rule 6A.1-099822 establishes corresponding procedures for alternative schools that receive a school improvement rating: “After the initial issuance of the school improvement ratings, school districts shall have the opportunity to review and submit for state review any appeal of the calculation as outlined in paragraph 6A-1.09981(9)(c), F.A.C.”

State Board Rule 6A-1.09981(9) 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 school improvement ratings), that matching FCAT records and previous year FCAT records can be identified, and that each school grade (or rating, as applicable) was calculated as specified in the rule. The rule also permits a 30-day period of time for districts to review the grade assigned. To accommodate requested reviews, the Florida Department of Education has instituted an appeals process as 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 (and school rating) review process. Appropriate documentation of all elements and data to be reviewed by the Department must be submitted within thirty (30) days from the date of the school grades/ratings release. These requests must be submitted by the school district accountability contact rather than by individual schools. Appeals that do not comply with the detailed instructions from the Department will not be reviewed.

Following the thirty (30) day appeal window, the Department of Education will review the appeals documentation and present recommendations to an appeals committee for their review and recommendations. Final recommendations will be made to the Commissioner of Education, and the Commissioner's determination of a school's grade/rating shall be final. 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.

Appendix A

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, writing, and science;
- Annual learning gains in reading and mathematics; and
- Annual learning gains in reading and mathematics 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 learning gains of their students:

1. when students improve their FCAT achievement level from one year to the next;
2. when students maintain their achievement levels within 3, 4 or 5 from one year to the next; 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 student achievement level information is readily available from the FCAT student report and district test data files provided by the Department. The third definition is 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. 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-off scores 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:

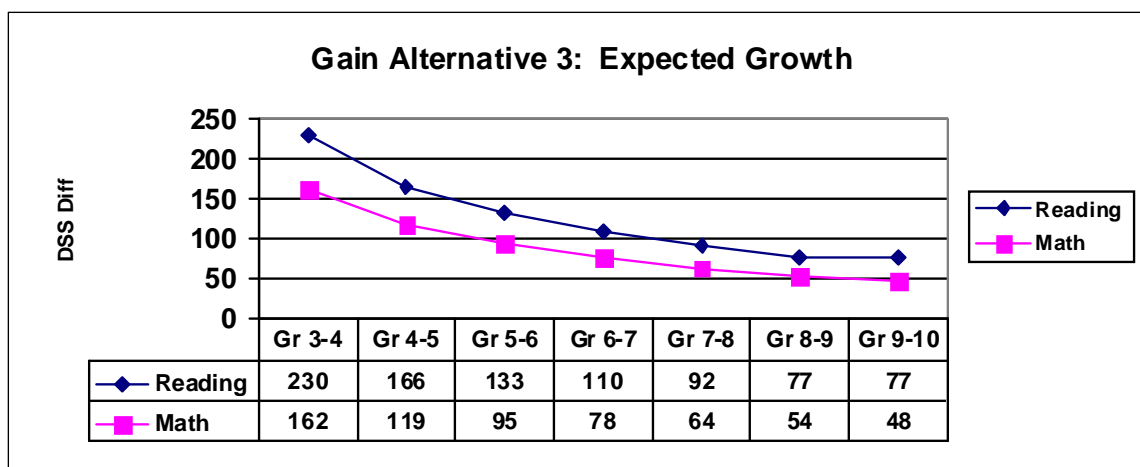
Grade 4 Example

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
3	Developmental score	1045	1197	1488	1865
4	FCAT scale score	274	298	338	385
4	Developmental Score	1314	1455	1689	1964
3 and 4	Difference in Developmental Scores at the cut points	269	258	201	99

Midpoint of differences at the cut points	230
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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 is 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 grades 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.

Additional Resources for Information about Florida’s School Grades, School Improvement Ratings, and AYP Results

School Accountability Reports Web Site

Florida’s School Accountability Reports Web site allows users to request the latest information on school grades, AYP results, school improvement ratings, Return on Investment (ROI) information, and School Report Card results. See <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/default.asp>.

Florida School Grades Home Page

The home page for Florida’s School Grades includes downloadable files for school grades, school ratings, and AYP, as well as press materials and links to additional resources. See <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/>.

Links to Florida Statutes and Florida Administrative Code Rules

Florida Statutes addressing the school grading system (s. 1008.34) and the school improvement rating system for alternative schools (s. 1008.341) are accessible at <http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm>.

For Florida Administrative Code Rules that implement requirements of these statutes (see 6A-1.09981 and 6A-1.099822), see <https://www.flrules.org/default.asp>.

Florida Department of Education



Dr. Eric J. Smith, Commissioner