



1.0 INTRODUCTION

This *Handbook* provides information about the beginnings of the FCAT, the considerations governing item and test development, the mechanics of item and test scoring, and the meaning of the different FCAT scores. Such an understanding can be useful for helping students prepare for the FCAT and for explaining the test and the test results to students and their parents. Much of the information here has appeared in other publications and on the DOE web site, but this is the first time this information has been consolidated and presented in a single document.

The FCAT measures student achievement of the benchmarks contained in Florida's *Sunshine State Standards*, which were developed with the goal of providing all students with an education based on high expectations. The FCAT supports and provides an objective measure of the *Standards* as the foundation for curriculum and instruction. The FCAT also provides feedback and accountability indicators to Florida educators, policy makers, students, and other citizens.

Administered annually to all Florida public school students in Grades 3–11, the FCAT includes items with a varied range of difficulty and cognitive complexity. A score in Achievement Level 2 or higher on FCAT Reading is now a requirement for student promotion from Grade 3 to Grade 4. Achieving a passing score on Grade 10 FCAT Reading and Grade 10 FCAT Mathematics is a statewide graduation requirement. FCAT results serve as a major source of data for determining the school grades that the DOE assigns and reports annually.

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Because the FCAT serves so many high-stakes purposes, it is important that FCAT development is guided by the active involvement of Florida educators. The DOE maintains open communication with Florida educators regarding how the FCAT and the various associated processes and activities might be improved. The DOE also ensures that the test meets external quality standards for assessments, such as “Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing” (1999) by the American Educational Research Association (AERA). As an indication of quality, *Education Week* (2004)¹ awarded an “A” to Florida for its standards and accountability policies.

¹ Skinner, Ronald A. and Staresina, Lisa N., *Education Week Special Report*, “Quality Counts 2004: State of the States,” January 8, 2004. URL: <http://counts.edweek.org/sreports/qc04/> (free registration required).

First administered in 1998, the FCAT program has become an integral part of Florida’s public education system; however, the FCAT is only one component of Florida’s quest for higher standards. Other important components include classroom tests and grades, as well as the standards and measures established by individual teachers, schools, and districts. Because it was developed at the state level, the FCAT is the component for which local educators and administrators may need more information.

Key topics covered in this publication include:

- educators’ roles in the process of creating a large-scale assessment;
- background and history of Florida K–12 testing;
- test format and content;
- test development;
- test construction;
- test administration; and
- scoring and reporting results.

For more information on these and other topics, refer to the Guide to Related Resources found in Chapter 9.0.

Information about several important topics **not** covered in the *Handbook* can be found at the web sites listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1: GETTING MORE INFORMATION ON TOPICS NOT COVERED	
Topics Not Covered	Web Sites for More Information
Norm-referenced assessments in the FCAT program (NRT)	http://www.firn.edu/dae/sas/nrthome.htm
Results and trends over time	http://fcats.fldoe.org
Florida’s activities under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)	http://www.fldoe.org/NCLB
School grades and other accountability measures	http://www.firn.edu/dae/evaluation/home0018.htm

Although some of the information about the FCAT is technical, the *Handbook* is written for those without specialized knowledge of psychometrics. Technical information is presented at the conceptual level first, as well as in the context of its relevance to the test.

Note on Criterion-Referenced Tests and Norm-Referenced Tests

The FCAT consists of two types of tests: norm-referenced tests (NRT) in reading and mathematics, which compare the achievement of Florida students with that of their peers nationwide; and criterion-referenced tests (CRT) in reading, mathematics, science, and writing, which measure student progress toward meeting the *Sunshine State Standards* benchmarks. As illustrated in Table 2 below, both the FCAT SSS and the FCAT NRT are used to measure achievement and guide instruction of individual students.

FCAT SSS	FCAT NRT
Scores provided relate to Florida's <i>Sunshine State Standards</i> benchmarks.	Scores provided relate the performance of Florida students to that of other students nationwide.
Measures achievement in reading, mathematics, science, and writing.	Measures achievement in reading comprehension and mathematics problem-solving.
Grades assessed are 3–10 in reading and mathematics.	Grades assessed are 3–10 in reading and mathematics.
Grades assessed are 4, 8, and 10 in writing.	Writing is not assessed.
Grades assessed are 5, 8, and 11 in science.	Science is not assessed.
Includes multiple-choice, gridded-response, and performance task items.	Includes only multiple-choice items.
Mathematics portion measures a wide range of skills and problem-solving methods.	Mathematics portion measures a wide range of skills and problem-solving methods.
Reading portion measures vocabulary and literary elements, along with the <i>Sunshine State Standards</i> .	Reading portion measures vocabulary in context.
Calculators may be used for the mathematics assessment in Grades 7–10.	Calculators may be used for the mathematics problem solving test in Grades 7–10.
Rulers and other measuring devices are not used for the mathematics assessment.	Rulers are used for mathematics measurement items in the problem-solving test.
Mathematics reference sheets are provided for students in Grades 6–10.	Mathematics reference sheets are provided for students in Grades 7–10.

* This comparison is based on the FCAT NRT, which is the *Stanford Achievement Test, Tenth Edition (Stanford 10 or SAT 10)*, administered as of the date of this publication.

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FCAT Committee Experience: FCAT NRT Advisory;
Bias Review; FCAT RFP Committee (FDOE)

Related Experience: Florida Association of Test
Administrators (FATA)

“As a member of the FCAT NRT Advisory
Committee, I have seen how DOE staff and
contractors work diligently to incorporate
district and community needs into the
assessment program. Their responsiveness
motivates me to encourage schools and
community members to offer constructive
comments that will benefit all students.”

The FCAT NRT provides information to help ensure that Florida students are keeping pace with their peers nationally. Comparing Florida students to those around the nation requires that the NRT not be too closely aligned with the curriculum of any one state, so the NRT is not necessarily aligned with the *Sunshine State Standards*. From 2000–2004, the test used for the NRT was the *Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition*® (*Stanford 9* or *SAT 9*), published by Harcourt Assessment, Inc. Beginning in 2005, the *Stanford Achievement Test, Tenth Edition*® (*Stanford 10* or *SAT 10*) will be used for three to five years.

In the remainder of this *Handbook*, the term “FCAT” is used to refer only to the CRT portion, or the FCAT SSS. The FCAT SSS is based explicitly on the learning goals that Florida educators have identified in the *Sunshine State Standards* and is developed, administered, and scored with the active participation of hundreds of Florida educators and citizens.

For more information about the FCAT NRT, refer to the DOE web site,
www.firn.edu/doe/sas/nrthome.htm.

