1. **What is the FCAT?**

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is part of Florida’s overall plan to increase student achievement by implementing higher standards. The FCAT, administered to students in Grades 3-10, contains two basic components: criterion-referenced tests (CRT) measuring selected benchmarks in Mathematics, Reading, Science, and Writing from the Sunshine State Standards (SSS) and norm-referenced tests (NRT) in Reading and Mathematics measuring individual student performance against national norms.

2. **Why do students take the FCAT?**

The FCAT is given to measure achievement of the Sunshine State Standards. The skills and competencies outlined in the Standards are also embedded in the material of the student’s core classes. The best understanding of a student’s academic achievement comes from looking at multiple pieces of evidence (including FCAT scores) collected over time.

3. **What is the legislative authority for the FCAT?**

In the early 1970’s, the statewide assessment of students in selected grades was authorized. In 1976, the Florida Legislature approved assessments in Grades 3, 5, 8, and 11, including the nation’s first high school graduation test. Since then, the Legislature has continuously supported assessment and evaluation activities in the state’s public school system. The purpose and design of the statewide assessment program is articulated in Section 1008.22, F.S., and the pupil progression plan is in Section 1008.25, F.S.

4. **How does the FCAT fit into the A+ Plan for education in Florida?**

Accountability for student learning is the key focus of Florida’s system of school improvement. Results from the statewide assessment program are the basis of Florida’s system of school improvement and accountability. Student achievement data from the FCAT are used to report educational status and annual progress for individual students, schools, districts, and the State. The A+ school grades are based on the percent of students meeting high standards and the percent of students who make learning gains.

5. **Who takes the FCAT?**

Approximately 1.6 million public school students in Grades 3-10 participated in the 2003 administration of the FCAT. These students, including limited English proficiency students (LEP) and exceptional education students (ESE) with disabilities, are all working toward a regular high school diploma. Opportunity and McKay Scholarship students also take the FCAT and, at the request of their parents, home-schooled students may take the FCAT. Beginning in 2004, Florida Virtual School students also take the FCAT.

6. **What does the FCAT cost to administer, score, and report results?**

The current cost of FCAT is $16.57 per student. This includes the costs for developing test questions, holding review meetings with Florida educators, field testing, production and printing of tests, shipping and return of test materials, scoring, and reporting scores to parents, schools, districts, and the State. The cost of testing at all grades is less than one-third of one percent of the state’s K-12 educational budget.
7. **How many times has the FCAT been administered?**

   The FCAT has been administered annually since 1998. FCAT Writing has been administered twelve times to Grade 4 students. The 2004 administration was the seventh test administration at some grade levels, but only the third at others (Grades 3, 6, 7, and 9). The tenth-grade FCAT has been administered three times per year since the 2001-2002 school year.

8. **When is the FCAT administered?**

   The tests are administered during two separate time periods. Students take the FCAT Writing assessment in February and take the Reading, Mathematics, and Science FCAT in March. Students needing to retake the Grade 10 FCAT have that opportunity in October, March, and June.

9. **How much time does it take to administer the FCAT to a student?**

   The total amount of time required to administer the FCAT depends on the grade level. In general, students spend approximately ten hours over a two-week period taking different parts of the FCAT.

10. **What subject areas are measured by the FCAT?**

    The FCAT presently includes Reading, Writing, Mathematics, and Science. In 2003, Science was added for students in Grades 5, 8, and 10.

11. **What is the passing score for the FCAT?**

    FCAT scores affect students in Grade 3 Reading (for promotion and retention purposes) and Grade 10 Reading and Mathematics (for high school graduation). Some districts also have required achievement on FCAT as part of their local pupil progression plan adopted by their local School Boards. Students in Grade 10 must earn a scale score of 300 to pass the FCAT Reading and Mathematics. The equivalent developmental scale scores are 1926 on FCAT Reading and 1889 on FCAT Mathematics. Students in Grade 3 must score in Level 2 or higher on FCAT Reading to be promoted. There are also alternate assessments and good cause exemptions that apply to Grade 3 students.

12. **How are the FCAT results reported?**

    The FCAT results provide data for each student, school, and district, and for the State. At the school, district, and state levels, the program produces average scores and reports showing the percentage of students performing at the five achievement levels. For each student, achievement levels, scale scores, and developmental scale scores are reported, as well as performance on specific content strands; each student’s norm-referenced scores indicate the student’s ranking against national norms.

13. **How are achievement levels and scale scores different from developmental scale scores (DSS)?**

    Reading and Mathematics FCAT student scores are reported in three ways, that is, by achievement level, by scale score, and by developmental scale score. The scale scores, which range from 100 to 500 for each subject area and grade level, are divided into five categories, from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), called achievement levels.

    The developmental scale score was introduced to track student progress over time and across grade levels. New student “growth” reports (started in 2002) include student scores reported as an achievement level, a scale score of 100 to 500, and as developmental scale scores. The FCAT developmental scores range from 0 to 3000 across Grades 3-10. By using FCAT developmental scores, parents can monitor their student’s academic progress from one grade to the next.
14. **What are some considerations when using developmental scale scores?**

When using developmental scale scores to determine and interpret student “learning gains” across grade levels, subject areas, and school years, it is important to be aware of the following:

- Developmental scores are available only for FCAT Reading and Mathematics.
- Learning gains can be determined only for students in Grades 4-10 who have two years of FCAT data.
- Developmental score scales typically show larger increases (more student growth) at the lower grade levels and less (student growth) at the higher levels.
- Annual “growth” information should be considered within the total context of the student’s annual academic record of achievement.
- Some students may show no “learning gains” based on two years of FCAT scores.
- Learning gains and achievement level scores across two years are not always concordant because of the different scaling methodologies from which they are derived.

15. **Is a passing score on the FCAT Writing assessment a graduation requirement?**

At the present time, FCAT Writing is not being used to determine eligibility for a high school diploma.

16. **Do students have to pass both the Reading and Math sections of the Grade 10 FCAT before they graduate?**

Yes, but students need to retake only the section they did not pass. Students will have multiple opportunities to retake the FCAT until they earn passing scores. Students may retake the FCAT in June, October, and March during their eleventh- and twelfth-grade years.

17. **Is performance on the FCAT required for grade-to-grade promotion?**

Local school boards establish their own rules for promotion or retention of public school students. Florida statutes specifically mention retention for students who do not read well at the end of Grade 3. Each school board has certain latitude in how it implements this requirement; however, school personnel must change the educational plans of all students who score in level 1. The district Pupil Progression Plan (available at local schools and school board offices) specifically outlines the grade-level requirements.

18. **What can you tell me about the new science assessment?**

In 2003, FCAT Science was given for the first time to all students in Grades 5, 8, and 10. The Science assessment includes life science, physical and chemical science, earth and space science, and scientific critical thinking questions. It is similar in format to the Reading and Mathematics FCAT.

19. **Who writes the questions for the FCAT?**

Professional item writers employed by the DOE’s test-development contractors prepare the first draft of all test questions. Committees of Florida classroom teachers and curriculum supervisors, working with DOE staff, review and revise each test item. Before a test question appears on the FCAT, it is reviewed for community sensitivity and possible bias. From 300 to 400 Florida teachers, administrators, and citizens participate in the FCAT development process annually.
20. What are the FCAT questions like?

Most of the test questions are multiple choice, but some of the mathematics questions require students to “bubble in” their answers on a grid. Other reading, mathematics and science questions ask for a short, written answer, and a few ask for a more detailed or extended answer.

In some parts of the test, students write answers in response to an article or story, to assess how well they understand what they have read. The table below shows the various item formats on FCAT by the subject and grade level assessed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Format</th>
<th>SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS</th>
<th>NRT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple-Choice</td>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>3-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gridded-Response</td>
<td></td>
<td>5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-Response</td>
<td>4, 8, 10</td>
<td>5, 8, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended-Response</td>
<td>4, 8, 10</td>
<td>5, 8, 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reading and mathematics questions are drawn from different subject areas such as Social Studies, Science, Mathematics, Reading, Health/Physical Education, the arts, and the workplace. Many questions include graphics and illustrations to help students decide on the correct answer. The FCAT questions and performance tasks incorporate thinking and problem-solving skills that match the complexity of the Standard being assessed.

21. When are FCAT results returned to districts?

The results of Writing, administered in February, and Reading, Mathematics, and Science, administered in March, are usually sent to the districts by early May. Results for students in Grades 3 and 12 are prioritized and returned first.

22. Are the FCAT scores for schools adjusted for the socioeconomic status of students?

Schools are responsible for teaching all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status. All students are capable of making adequate learning progress, and all schools are held to equally challenging performance standards.

23. How are the FCAT scores used for school accountability?

The A+ school accountability program is designed to offer financial incentives to all Florida schools and to encourage students and teachers to attain higher standards. Providing financial resources is part of the task, of course, but sometimes student learning does not improve even though more money has been spent on education. This is why Florida has
the A+ Plan and why the federal government has enacted the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Students, teachers, and school administrators can improve their performance if they have a clear understanding that their first obligation is academic achievement.

24. **What is the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Report?**

The No Child Left Behind legislation requires all states to report student achievement based on results of reading, mathematics, and writing statewide assessments and, also, high school graduation rates for all schools, districts, and the State. The AYP Report provides a breakdown of achievement test results for major racial groups, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency. All groups must reach the annual proficiency target for their schools to make Adequate Yearly Progress.

25. **Do students with disabilities receive accommodations on the FCAT?**

Yes, every effort is made to provide a level playing field for students with disabilities taking the FCAT and seeking a standard high school diploma. Section 1007.02 (2), F.S., permits testing accommodations for a student who:

- has been assigned to a special program, according to State Board Rule 6A-6.0331, FAC, and
- has a current Individual Educational Plan (IEP).

Federal law (the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997) requires the inclusion of ESE students in regular assessment programs. The school, district, and state FCAT score averages represent all students taking the test, including students with disabilities. Exemption from the graduation test requirement for students with disabilities seeking a high school diploma is described in Section 1003.43 (11) (b), F.S.

26. **Do students with limited English proficiency (LEP) take the FCAT?**

LEP students are expected to take the FCAT. State Board Rule 6A-6.09091, FAC, exempts some LEP students from participating in the statewide assessment program:

- if the student has been receiving services in an approved district LEP plan for one year or less, and
- if the student’s LEP committee determines that the FCAT is not appropriate.

LEP students may take the FCAT using accommodations appropriate for the particular need of the student. It is the responsibility of local school educators to work with students and parents to identify the allowable testing accommodations.

27. **What are the legal issues surrounding the FCAT?**

There are at least three clear legal issues regarding high-stakes tests like the FCAT:

1. Students must have advance notification of the testing requirement.
2. Students must have opportunities to retake the test if they initially earn a failing score.
3. Students must be provided opportunities to learn the skills being tested; therefore, schools must be able to demonstrate that the skills being tested are being taught, using evidence such as lesson plans, texts, and curricular offerings.

28. **Are the FCAT scores available on the Internet?**

Yes. State, district, and school reports are available on the Internet. The website address is: http://www.frrn.edu/doe/sas/sasshome.htm.