

PENSACOLA EDUCATION REPORT

— 2015 —

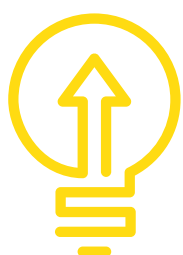
Springtime in Florida means one thing — FCAT. But this year, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test — the test used to measure students' learning gains and to evaluate teacher performance — is not the test it used to be.

The official state standardized test is now the Florida Standards Assessment. The new test replaces the previous versions of the state standardized test and will measure students' performance based on a curriculum Florida schools have been using in recent years that is similar to the nationally mandated Common Core standards.

As Florida schools turn to the new test, administrators will be left with 16 years of data accumulated in the FCAT era, which was a centerpiece of former Gov. Jeb Bush's push to reform public schools.

The Studer Community Institute launched this series of stories to look at how Pensacola metro-area schools had fared under that reform effort, the bright spots that were unveiled and the work that remains ahead to help our students, our schools and our community improve.

This is the first of a three-part look at what we found.



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CITIZEN-POWERED CHANGE



Students in Tim Larick's math class use smart boards to answer questions at Bellview Middle School. Larick is preparing his class for the Florida Standards Assessment, the new state standardized test that replaces the FCAT in April. The new test is expected to be more rigorous, slightly longer and mostly online.

From troubled FCAT to an untested replacement

By Reggie Dogan
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Photos by Michael Spooner

In 1977, Florida became the first state in the U.S. to use a standardized test for high school graduation.

Two decades later, the FCAT was introduced in 1998, the year before Gov. Jeb Bush was elected. Education reform based on standardized tests was at the forefront of Bush's tenure as governor.

The Florida Legislature in 1999 adopted Bush's A-plus Plan for Education, a blueprint for school reform with accountability as its primary focus. And the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test was front and center in that plan.

The stakes went up — for everyone.

Schools were rated A to F. The attention focused on two grades: third and 10th. Schools that earned an F would see their students be eligible for taxpayer-funded vouchers, which parents could use to send their children to private schools with public money.

Schools that received an A got bonus funding; F schools were penalized, a practice that critics said rewarded schools that were already doing well and punished schools that needed more resources.

None of the previous standardized tests had the strong accountability measures like the kind ushered in with the high-stakes FCAT, says Malcolm Thomas, superintendent of Escambia County schools.

"It was a game-changer for education," says Thomas. "We're better in Florida because of it."

It's hard to find anyone, from educators to parents to lawmakers, who questions the need to have a way to measure how well students are performing in school. But for some, the FCAT went beyond the scope of providing a blueprint of student proficiency.

Critics say its high-stakes nature contributed to "teaching to the test" and preventing teachers from getting to valuable subject matter that wasn't tested by the state assessment.

A good thing about the FCAT is that it gave teachers, schools and districts a sense of commonality and accountability, said Anne Copenhagen, who has math, reading and gifted students at various schools in Escambia County.

She is in her fourth year helping first-year teachers in the Successful Teachers Assisting Rising Teachers (START) program.

"If I am teaching something in Pensacola, sixth-graders in Jacksonville are teaching the same thing," Copenhagen said.

However, the FCAT's negative impact labeled students and made them feel inferior, Copenhagen said.

"Then, we started saying, 'This is a 1, and this is a 2,' labeling students," she said. "My students used to say you had to make at least a 3 or you're going to be in a 'bump' class. I asked, 'What does that mean?' They said it one of those stupid classes."

Now the FCAT has been replaced.

The Florida Standards Assessment is the new blueprint, the state-sanctioned standardized test that will be used to measure student progress, gauge teacher effectiveness and rate public schools.

FCAT era ends

For 16 years, the FCAT gauged general knowledge and understanding for Florida's students.

The test weighed heavily on school funding, class placement, third-grade promotion, high-school graduation, teacher pay and evaluations — and whether a public school would stay open.

As the test expanded, Florida became a national leader in the reform movement that used student standardized test scores to grade individual public schools, students and eventually teachers.

Assailed by complaints about its content, effectiveness and high stakes, the FCAT's support began to wane in 2010 when the Florida Legislature adopted the Common Core State Standards, selected to replace the state standards tested by FCAT.

Santa Rosa schools superintendent Tim Wyrosdick said he viewed the FCAT initially as a "systemic manner" to raise expectations for students.

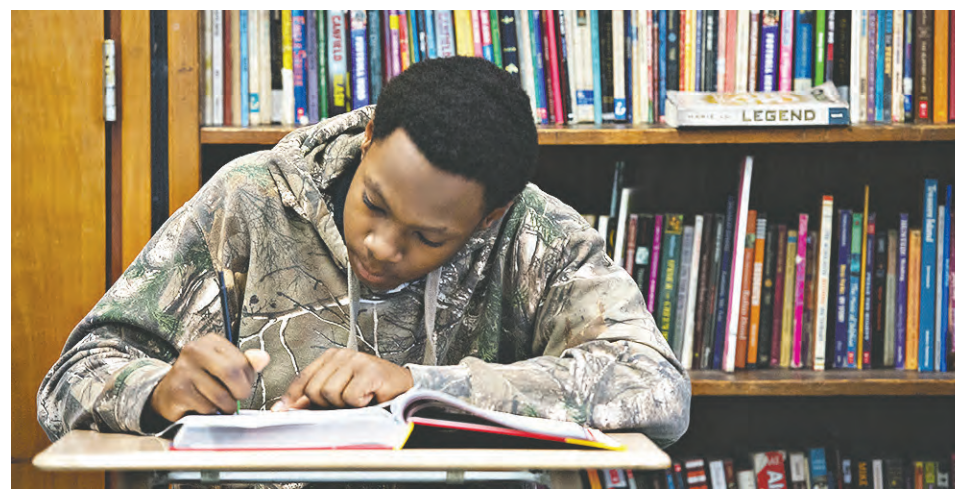
"The FCAT, in the beginning, was certainly a tool that increased accountability, increased expectations and, I believe, increased performance," Wyrosdick said. "Looking at it today, it is nothing like it was 16 years ago."

As new standards were adopted, the test changed, making it nearly impossible to accurately measure year-to-year progress and proficiency.

Thomas said state officials initially were careful about the reliability and the validity of the FCAT. But almost every year, new and more demanding educational standards were added to the test.

"I think we have gotten careless in our haste to move this thing forward," he said. "We've violated some of the rules."

This year students will take the Florida Standards Assessment, which is supposed to match the state's Common



Eighth-grader Tony Payne reads in history class at Bellview Middle School.

LOCAL IDEAS

A group of Florida school superintendents, including Santa Rosa's Tim Wyrosdick and Escambia's Malcolm Thomas, presented five recommendations to state officials to address concerns about the Florida Standards Assessment:

- Support the administration of the Florida Standards Assessments this year and use the results as a baseline for measuring progress. The state's accountability system relies on both learning gains as well as performance. In the first year of FSA administration, there will be no learning gains and therefore will compromise its ability to drive accountability.
- Freeze school grades through 2015-2016 to ensure two consecutive years of

reliable and valid data.

- Eliminate the requirement for the 11th-grade English and Language Arts Florida Standards Assessment and all new End-of-Course exams.

- Allow for the determination of teacher evaluations based on local data.

- Ensure adequate technology readiness for the statewide computer-based testing.

Core standards. But there are concerns about the FSA.

Thomas and Wyrosdick were among a group of superintendents who met with Gov. Rick Scott and Education Commissioner Pam Stewart recently to discuss those issues.

Among their concerns: The test is now computer based — no more No. 2 pencils and bubble forms. But some districts worry that they have the technological infrastructure to support having every third- to 10th-grader online at the same time taking the test.

If there is a glitch, there is a window of only a few days to resolve it and there is no real backup plan if it can't be fixed, Wyrosdick said.

"This year we are giving the Florida Standards Assessment starting in April, and we've never seen the test," Wyrosdick said. "To me that is an unfair bias in education. What's going to happen? I don't know."

Another big issue for superintendents: The FSA has never been field-tested in schools.

"We would have never thought about doing that in 1999," Thomas said.

"Because the train of thought was that we're going to get it right."

Janet Pennewell has spent 35 years teaching in Escambia County schools. For the past four years, Pennewell has been away from the classroom working with new teachers in the district's START program.

Pennewell believes that assessment should drive instruction. Instead it is used as a scarlet letter, highlighting failure rather than creating excellence.

"We use it to label students, teachers, schools and districts," Pennewell said. "We say, 'That's a C district, so you don't want your kid to go there.'"

Testing standards aren't just important for students. The results now determine whether teachers kept their jobs; 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation is based on the school's reading score.

"I'm completely against using one assessment to evaluate the value of a teacher," Wyrosdick said. "It's an insult to me as an educator, as a principal, as an assistant principal who might have spent years with some of them, learning about their nuances and then judging them."

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The miseducation of the FCAT generation

Call it the tale of the tape. Or rather the tale of the test. In researching this series of education-themed stories, my colleagues and I have been looking at what 16 years of state standardized testing in Florida has brought schools in Escambia and Santa Rosa schools.

For part of that work, I've been reading through more than a decade's worth of grade reports for our schools.

Some of that research is reflected in the chart you see on pages 4-5 of this report, outlining school grades in the Pensacola metro area and changes to the state standardized test over those years.

In general, the FCAT (and FCAT 2.0) is not a sinister thing. Education has changed since I made it through my K-12 educational life with nothing but weekly quizzes, midterms and finals to gauge my academic progress.

The educational world now demands more of children at a younger age than it ever has. Because the world itself is more competitive than it ever has been.

Using a standardized test to measure a student's progress through a year of academic work measured against basic, age-appropriate benchmarks is not a bad thing.

But there were some other things I noticed in the data.

In that time:

- More than a dozen of our schools have closed outright, been reconstituted as charter schools, or remixed as combination schools of different grade levels.

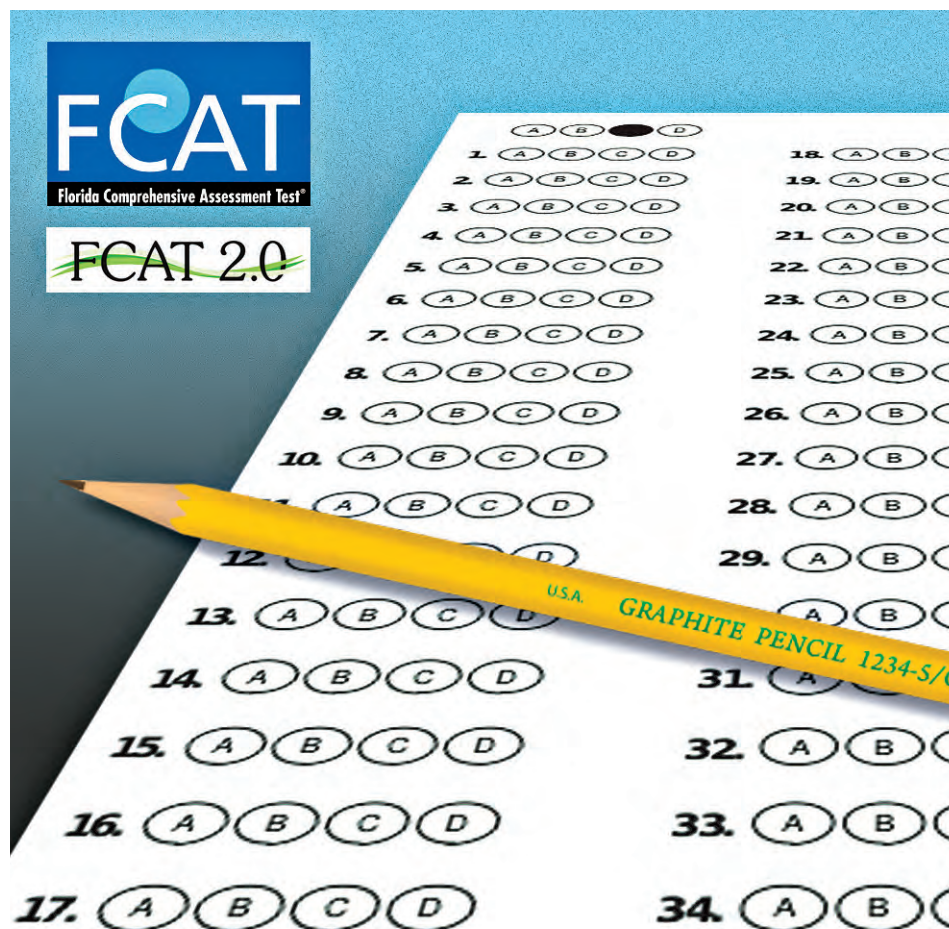
- Some seem no worse for the wear. Pensacola Beach Elementary School was an A/B school as a public school; as a charter school it has been A's all the way.

- A.A. Dixon School closed as a public elementary school with poor grades; it earned an F as a charter school in 2011. It's now a private school and doesn't participate in the FCAT merry-go-round.

- But that is an awful lot of change for a school system — and its students — to absorb in just 16 years.

- When the FCAT began, it issued grades based on reading and math test scores of fourth, eighth and 10th grades.

- Now we test students in grades three



through 10 in four subject areas and include more than two dozen measures, including End-of-Course exams in non-FCAT subjects. The state reset the test almost out of whole cloth in 2012. This year, the Florida Standards Assessment will reset the bar again — using a computer-based testing system that has yet to be tested on a statewide scale.

We really haven't been comparing apples to apples when we look at the results for a long time.

■ Poverty matters.

At schools with a free- and reduced-price lunch rate (which is used as a measure of poverty) above 85 percent, three have C's. The rest are D or F schools.

Schools with a poverty rate of 50 percent or below are A or B schools. One is a C.

■ Schools that serve low-income communities seem to live on borrowed time.



Shannon Nickinson of the Studer Community Institute, an organization committed to improving our community's quality of life.

Dixon and Spencer Bibbs were the only F schools in the state of Florida when the FCAT grades were released in 1999. Both are closed as public schools now.

Brownsville Middle closed in 2007; so did Brentwood Middle and Wedgewood Middle. Century Elementary and Carver Middle schools were combined into a K-8 school. By 2009, it was closed.

Edgewater Elementary closed in 2009,

too. Hallmark and Allie Yniestra closed in 2011.

Lincoln Park Elementary, which saw poor grades and a declining student population that put it on the brink of closure, was reconstituted as a primary school serving kids in grades K-2. Its third-, fourth- and fifth-graders were redistricted to other schools.

They won't receive grades any more, because grades based on standardized testing begin in third grade.

But they'll be tested. Between Discovery Ed testing, and reading tests for second-graders, testing for mandatory first-grade retention, there is scarcely a child drawing breath in a public school who isn't tested.

All that data taught me that we have taken a standardized test and turned it into a blunt instrument that we use on students, teachers and schools.

Tests can be a good tool to take a snapshot of what a student has learned about a subject. When that is all we use it for.

But that's not what we do. We use it to evaluate teachers, even when they don't teach a subject that is tested by FCAT. We use it to measure special-education students against a grade-level standard we know they will never meet.

As a state we use the test, even when we don't have the grading scale set, or know how well it matches the curriculum we're teaching.

Sometimes we use it and, as State Sen. Don Gaetz (a former school superintendent) pointed out, we don't really know if the ends will justify the means.

"We don't know how much time is consumed by state-mandated tests. We don't know how much money it costs to perform state-mandated tests. We don't know whether tests that are performed by state mandate are valid and reliable," Gaetz said at a Senate education committee meeting in early January. "... That troubles me as someone who believes in measurement and believes in accountability."

Brother Don, as a parent and concerned citizen, if you are troubled, then I fear the trouble is deeper than any of us has imagined.

Continued from page 2

How students coped under FCAT

Karen Corcoran started teaching in Escambia County schools in 1995. With a daughter in middle school at the time, Corcoran saw the impact of FCAT from both sides of the table.

Corcoran sees the benefits of using data, but she believes the FCAT stretched the limits.

"I don't think that data is our answer to what composes a student," said Corcoran, who teaches honors and AP history at Escambia High School. "When we place all our weight on statistical data, it's damaging to a lot of students."

Corcoran's concerns echo complaints that have dogged the FCAT — and all standardized testing — for years. Critics say it makes schools put too much emphasis on the test and not enough emphasis on teaching students how to make it in the real world.

Tate High School junior Patrick Smith has taken the FCAT every year since the third grade. He passed it to graduate on time next year, but he heard horror stories from classmates who stressed over the test.

He believes it is unfair to base high school graduation on a single test and found little value in the FCAT helping him learn.

"The FCAT hasn't prepared me for much," says Smith. "We go to through school the whole year to take a test that we know nothing about."

Another complaint is that changes to the test have made it impossible to make reasonable comparisons from year to year. The test of 2013 is nothing like the test from 1999; the 2013 version includes more subjects and higher standards for what is considered passing.

In one testing cycle, the state changed more than two dozen things about how

the test would be scored.

"Everyone of these layers that you add to the process, you really change the validity and reliability of the assessment measures you're getting," Escambia Superintendent Thomas said. "But we keep marching on like it's going to mean the same thing as last year to compare. That's why teachers, parents and educators are saying, 'Whoa, time out. This isn't about accountability.'"

Niley Dixon, a Workman Middle School eighth-grader, said the high-stakes test created stress and anxiety because teachers and principals put so much pressure on them "all day, every day."

"They pressure teachers way too hard and they do the same to us," Dixon said. "Pressuring and making things harder solves nothing, it only makes matters worse. Teachers are stressed out, and so are students."

Moving the bar

The state's attempts to respond to those concerns have had decidedly mixed results.

In 2012, Florida updated its standards, called the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. In that revision, teachers who taught subjects not covered by the FCAT faced having half their scores come from a test in subjects they had no influence over.

Then criticism rained down when only 27 percent of fourth-graders got proficient scores — down from 81 percent a year earlier — on a new FCAT writing test, and students in other grades also performed poorly.

The result: Officials lowered the passing score.

That same year state officials miscalculated grades that were given out to hundreds of schools and were forced to change them.

LOCAL SCORES

Often touted among the top-performing districts in the state, Santa Rosa County schools, for the most part, flourished under the A-plus accountability plan. The district overall has achieved an A rating for the past decade.

Of 26 district schools, more than half — 55 percent — of them earned A's or B's since 2001, the year FCAT expanded to include grades three through 10. Only two schools — East Milton Elementary and Milton High — received a grade lower than a C over the same period.

Schools in Escambia County haven't fared as well. With more schools and deeper pockets of poverty, the district's overall grade has fluctuated between B's and C's during the last decade.

Only 17 percent — eight of 47 schools — maintained either A's or B's during the 13-year period ending in 2014.

Thomas recalled testifying in front of the state education board to voice his concerns about the constant changes in the FCAT.

"I said I don't have a problem raising the bar," Thomas said. "But if we raised the bar so high that we start calling kids failures, and we start saying you can't read when you really can read, that's when I think we have pushed the limits to a place it shouldn't be."

In 2013, teacher unions sued the state and three school boards, including Escambia County's, over performance evaluations that grade teachers on subjects and students they didn't teach.

A federal judge eventually dismissed the lawsuit, declaring that it was unfair to rate teachers based on test scores of students they never taught, but not unconstitutional under the law.

While teachers lost the ruling, it was

another blow to supporters of state standardized tests.

Now comes this April, when the new Florida Standards Assessment test will be used. State officials say the new test aims to measure whether students are on track for "college and career readiness."

The new assessments may quell some of the criticism as the state moves away from a one-day test of academic skills to provide a more detailed measure of student achievement.

But there is growing concern that the new tests will be more challenging, leading to lower grades for schools and students.

"Every time I speak to parent groups, I tell them that this is a far more difficult test and that your students won't do as well," Wyrosdick says. "We have to get back to sensibility, back to being realistic about what we can do to affect education."

After years of constant changes to and complaints about high-stakes testing, now the state's top leader has come to believe that schools test students too much.

Gov. Scott, speaking on Feb. 11 at a Tallahassee education conference hosted by former Gov. Bush, said schools in Florida spend too much time on testing and that the Florida Legislature should fix that this year, the Orlando Sentinel reported. While he offered no specifics for changes, Scott said that a testing investigation he asked the Florida Department of Education to conduct should provide a "template" for changes.

"We have too much testing," Scott said. "We need to spend more time on learning. We need this year to work with the legislature to get something done."



Changing Test Scores

Florida began issuing school grades based on test results on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test scores in 1999. In the beginning, the FCAT evaluated students in grades four, eight and 10. Now students are tested in every grade from three through 10, including reading, math, writing and science.

Over time the test has changed significantly. This chart aims to highlight those changes, as well as track the grades that schools in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties have earned over the years.

Schools whose grades are highlighted in yellow have a poverty rate (as measured by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) above 85 percent. Those schools typically earn lower grades.

Schools that are highlighted in blue have a poverty rate of 50 percent or below. They earn higher grades.

POVERTY MATTERS

Yellow: At schools with a free- and reduced-price lunch rate (which is used as a measure of poverty) above 85 percent, only three have C's in 2014. The rest are D or F schools.

Blue: Schools with a poverty rate of 50 percent or below are A or B schools. One is a C.



2011 – 2014

Beginning in 2011, the test was revised to FCAT 2.0. That revision included the addition of new subject tests and data points, new calculations to determine what counts as passing, and standards for achieving proficiency at grade level. Here is a list of the changes in calculating student scores and school grades.

1. New cut scores for reading (grades 3-10).
2. New cut scores for math (grades 3-8).
3. Algebra End-of-Course cut scores.
4. Added geometry End-of-Course exam.
5. Added biology End-of-Course exam.
6. Added U.S. history End-of-Course exam.
7. New learning gain calculation for reading (grades 3-10).
8. New learning gain calculation for math (grades 3-8).
9. Add special education students to proficiency for reading (grades 3-10).
10. Add special-education students to proficiency for math (grades 3-8).
11. Add English-as-a-second-language students to proficiency for reading (grades 3-10).
12. Add English-as-a-second-language students to proficiency for math (grades 3-8).
13. Reweight middle school participation/acceleration.
14. Include special-education alternate assessment students in grade calculation.
15. Add special-education alternate assessment to gains calculation.
16. Include four-year federal graduation rate (excludes special diploma students).
17. Include five-year modified graduation rate (includes special diploma students).
18. Change cut for at-risk graduation rate.
19. Change cell size for grade calculation from 30 to 10.
20. Add reading threshold for passing grade (25 percent).
21. Remove students in level three from lower quartile reading calculation.
22. Remove students in level three from lower quartile math calculation.
23. Weight learning gains for students moving level four and five.
24. Add middle school acceleration component.
25. Writing scoring rubric revised (grades 4, 8, 10).
26. Writing proficiency score set at 4.
27. Writing proficiency score changed to 3.
28. Writing proficiency score changed to 3.5.
29. Special education center students scored count at attendance zone school.
30. New FCAT 2.0 assessment for reading.
31. New FCAT 2.0 assessment for math.
32. New FCAT 2.0 assessment for science.
33. Revised middle school grade scale.

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2007 Added science proficiency and math lower quartile learning gains



Escambia County

SCHOOL NAME	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	CHARTER	FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH RATE	MINORITY RATE
A.K. Suter Elementary School	B	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	NO	49	31
Bellview Elementary School	C	C	A	C	A	B	B	B	A	B	A	C	A	B	C	B	NO	83	47
Beulah Elementary School	C	A	C	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	B	C	C	NO	52	23
Blue Angels Elementary School			N	B	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	NO	50	40
Bratt Elementary School	D	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	B	C	C	NO	71	31
Brentwood Elementary School	F	A	B	B	B	B	B	A	C	A	A	B	B	B	C	D	NO	86	70
Byrneville Elementary School, Inc.					A	A	A	A	B	A	A	C	A	A	B	A	YES	68	27
Cordova Park Elementary School	C	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	NO	43	36
Ensley Elementary School	C	C	C	C	A	B	C	C	B	B	C	C	B	C	C	D	NO	86	74
Ferry Pass Elementary School	C	A	C	B	A	B	A	B	C	C	B	C	C	C	B	C	NO	83	54
Global Learning Academy														D	D	C	NO	97	89
Hellen Caro Elementary School	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	B	A	NO	33	28
Holm Elementary School	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	B	B	D	C	C	C	D	C	D	NO	88	73
Jim Allen Elementary School	C	C	C	C	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	B	B	C	NO	76	25
Lipscomb Elementary School	B	A	C	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	B	C	NO	52	27
Longleaf Elementary School	C	A	C	C	A	B	C	C	A	C	C	C	B	C	A	B	NO	80	61
McArthur Elementary School	D	A	B	B	A	B	B	B	B	B	C	A	B	C	B	NO	66	41	
Molino Park Elementary						A	A	A	A	A	B	B	A	B	C	A	NO	64	14
Montclair Elementary School	D	D	D	C	C	C	C	D	F	A	D	F	A	B	C	D	NO	100	97
Myrtle Grove Elementary School	C	C	C	C	A	B	C	C	D	C	C	C	B	C	D	F	NO	83	49
N. B. Cook Elementary School		B	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	B	NO	32	32	
Navy Point Elementary School	D	C	C	D	B	B	C	C	C	F	A	C	B	C	D	F	NO	90	64
O. J. Semmes Elementary School	D	D	D	D	C	D	F	D	F	C	C	C	C	B	C	D	NO	100	90
Oakcrest Elementary School	F	C	D	D	C	B	D	F	D	D	D	C	A	B	C	D	NO	100	83
Pensacola Beach Charter School					A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	YES	1	15
Pine Meadow Elementary School	C	A	C	B	B	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	B	B	NO	54	28
Pleasant Grove Elementary School	C	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	C	C	A	B	NO	75	50
Scenic Heights Elementary School	C	B	B	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	B	C	B	NO	64	43
Sherwood Elementary School	C	C	C	C	B	B	B	C	C	A	B	C	B	C	C	D	NO	90	55
Warrington Elementary School	D	C	C	C	A	B	C	C	D	C	A	C	C	D	D	F	NO	82	74
Weis Elementary School	F	D	D	D	C	D	D	C	C	C	D	D	A	B	C	D	NO	100	93
West Pensacola Elementary School	C	C	C	C	B	C	C	C	C	D	C	D	C	D	F	F	NO	91	71
Bellview Middle School	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	B	C	C	C	C	C	D	F	C	NO	86	65
Beulah Academy Of Science	D	C	A	B	B	C	D	A	B	A	B	A	A	B	C	C	YES	35	30
Brown Barge Middle School	B	C	C	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	NO	45	41
Ernest Ward Middle School	C	C	C	B	B	C	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	C	A	NO	66	23
Ferry Pass Middle School	B	B	B	A	A	C	C	A	B	B	A	B	A	B	C	C	NO	68	57
Jim C. Bailey Middle School	C	A	A	A	A	B	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	C	C	NO	62	46
Ransom Middle School	C	C	A	A	B	B	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	C	B	NO	48	25
Warrington Middle School	D	C	C	C	C	D	D	C	D	D	C	C	C	D	F	D	NO	100	82
Woodham Middle School										C	C	C	C	D	D	C	NO	88	68
Workman Middle School	C	C	A	A	B	B	B	A	C	B	B	C	C	C	D	C	NO	69	66
Escambia High School	C	C	C	C	C	C	D	C	C	D	C	D	C	C	C	C	NO	59	51
Northview High School	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	B	D	B	B	C	B	C	NO	54	31
Pensacola High School	C	C	C	B	C	D	D	C	C	B	B	B	B	B	C	NO	62	69	
Pine Forest High School	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	D	C	D	C	D	C	C	C	C	NO	69	62
Tate Senior High School	C	C	C	C	B	C	D	B	C	C	B	B	B	B	B	B	NO	38	23
B.T. Washington High School	C	C	C	B	B	B	D	C	D	B	C	B	B	B	B	B	NO	50	53
West Florida High School					N	C	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	NO	41	46

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SANTA ROSA COUNTY

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Bagdad Elementary School	C	C	C	B	A	A	B	C	A	C	C	A	A	B	C	D	NO	68	27
Bennett C Russell Elementary School										B	A	A	A	A	A	A	NO	64	22
Berryhill Elementary School	C	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	NO	51	17
Chumuckla Elementary School	C	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	B	NO	54	6
East Milton Elementary School	C	C	C	B	A	B	A	B	A	C	A	B	B	C	D	D	NO	86	16
Gulf Breeze Elementary School	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	NO	19	11
Holley-Navarre Intermediate	C	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	NO	43	29
Jay Elementary School	D	C	C	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	C	A	B	A	A	NO	48	5
Oriole Beach Elementary School	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	NO	40	17
Pea Ridge Elementary School	C	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	B	NO	48	22
Rhodes Elementary School	C	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	B	C	C	NO	80	39
S.S. Dixon Intermediate School	C	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	NO	39	15
West Navarre Intermediate School		N	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	NO	37	22
Avalon Middle School		N	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	B	NO	57	22
Gulf Breeze Middle School	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	NO	21	12
Hobbs Middle School	C	A	A	A	A	B	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	C	A	NO	57	24
Holley-Navarre Middle School	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	NO	39	28
Martin Luther King Middle School	C	A	C	A	A	B	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	C	B	NO	79	24
Thomas L Sims Middle School		N	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	NO	34	13
Woodlawn Beach Middle School			N	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	NO	31	22
Central School	C	C	B	C	C	B	C	C	C	B	B	B	B	B	C	B	NO	66	5
Gulf Breeze High School	B	B	A	A	A	A	A	B	B	A	A	A	B	B	B	A	NO	17	14
Jay High School	C	C	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	B	A	A	B	NO	38	3	
Milton High School	C	C	C	B	B	C	D	C	C	C	D	A	B	B	A	A	NO	54	23
Navarre High School	C	C	C	B	B	C	B	B	B	A	A	B	B	B	A	B	NO	27	27
Pace High School	C	C	A	B	A	A	B	A	A	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	NO	30	15

GLOSSARY

Charter school: A private school that receives public tax money to operate. Charter schools may select the students they wish to enroll. Their enrollment population is not bound by geography or attendance zones the way a public school's is. Charter school students must take the FCAT, a state standardized test.

Free- and reduced-price lunch rate: The percentage of students in the school whose parents' income level qualifies them for the federal free- or reduced-price lunch program. It is often used as an indicator of the poverty level of a school and the community it serves.

A school grade of P: Some schools don't get a letter grade because the number of students taking the test is too low to report publicly. P means progressing in state education parlance.

Minority rate: The percentage of the student population of a school who are members of an ethnic minority.

Proficiency: The minimum score that the state says a student must make in a subject to be considered proficient and on grade level in the topic. Over time what is considered "proficient" has changed on the FCAT. For example in writing, when the test first began, a score of 3 out of 5 was considered proficient. In 2005, a score of 3.5 was needed to be proficient. In 2012 and 2013, proficient required a 4 on a 5-point scale. Also those two years the writing grading sheet, or rubric, was changed to focus more on expository and persuasive writing skills. Reading, math and science also have had scale changes since the beginning.

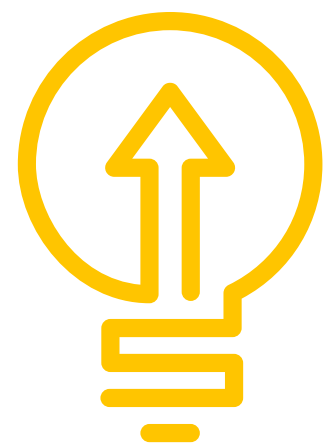
ESE: Exceptional Student Education, or special education.

ELL: English Language Learners, or students for whom English is not their first language.

Quartile: Standardized test scores can be reported in quartiles (quarters). If listed individually, the lower quartile scores fall in the bottom 25 percent.

Learning gains: Measurements of how much progress an individual student has made in a subject from one year to the next. Every student can show a learning gain. But, for example, a student may not earn a score of proficient, but he or she may have increased the score 10 points from the previous year. When learning gains were added to the scoring sheet for FCAT results, schools could get partial credit for students who did make progress (learning gains) even if those students didn't score at proficiency.

End-of-Course exams: Not every subject is tested by FCAT, thus the creation of the End-of-Course exams to measure what a student has learned in a specific subject. The state provides End-of-Course exams in geometry, algebra, biology and U.S. history. Each of the state's 67 districts must create its own End-of-Course exams for every other subject area, because teacher evaluations will be based in large part on those exam results. Escambia, for example, has created 150 End-of-Course exams.



**1998**

The Florida Department of Education implements the FCAT statewide.

1999

Under Gov. Jeb Bush's A-plus plan, the FCAT expands to include grades three through 10.



Bush

2000

Letter grades are given to public schools based on student performance on the reading, writing and math sections of the FCAT.

2003

Students are required to pass the FCAT to graduate from high school and receive a standard diploma. FCAT science was administered for the first time to fifth-, eighth- and 10th-graders.

2006

FCAT Writing exam is expanded to include a multiple-choice section in addition to essay.

2008

The FCAT no longer is the main factor to determine high school grades. Lawmakers remove the writing, multiple-choice section and a test that compared Florida students to other across the country to save money.

2009

Budget cuts lead to the elimination of summer retakes and a portion of the science FCAT.

2010

FCAT math and science is phased out at the high school level and replaced with End-of-Course exams.

FCAT 2.0

2011

FCAT 2.0, Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, ushers in a new, more rigorous test. New standards that require higher passing scores become effective with the spring 2012 FCAT.

2012

State Board of Education lowers the passing score on the FCAT writing test after the passing rate dropped after changes to FCAT writing in 2011.

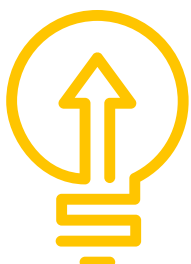
Common Core

2014

The FCAT is phased out in favor of a new assessment aligned with state Common Core standards.

2015

Students in April will take the Florida Standards Assessment, the state's new accountability test based on the new Common Core Standards.



How schools have changed since FCAT

When the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test was used to grade public schools in 1999, the only schools in the state of Florida to earn F's were in Pensacola's inner city.

Spencer Bibbs Elementary School on North Sixth Avenue and A.A. Dixon Elementary School on North H Street gained national media attention in that first year, especially given the high profile then-Gov. Jeb Bush had on the political scene.

FCAT was a centerpiece of Bush's plan to increase accountability and reform public education in Florida. That plan included a voucher system that would give parents at "failing" schools tax dollars to spend at a private school of their choice for their child to attend.

Spencer Bibbs closed in 2011 as a public school, when it received a C. Its students were redistricted into other schools. The building now is being converted into a training space for district staff and teachers.

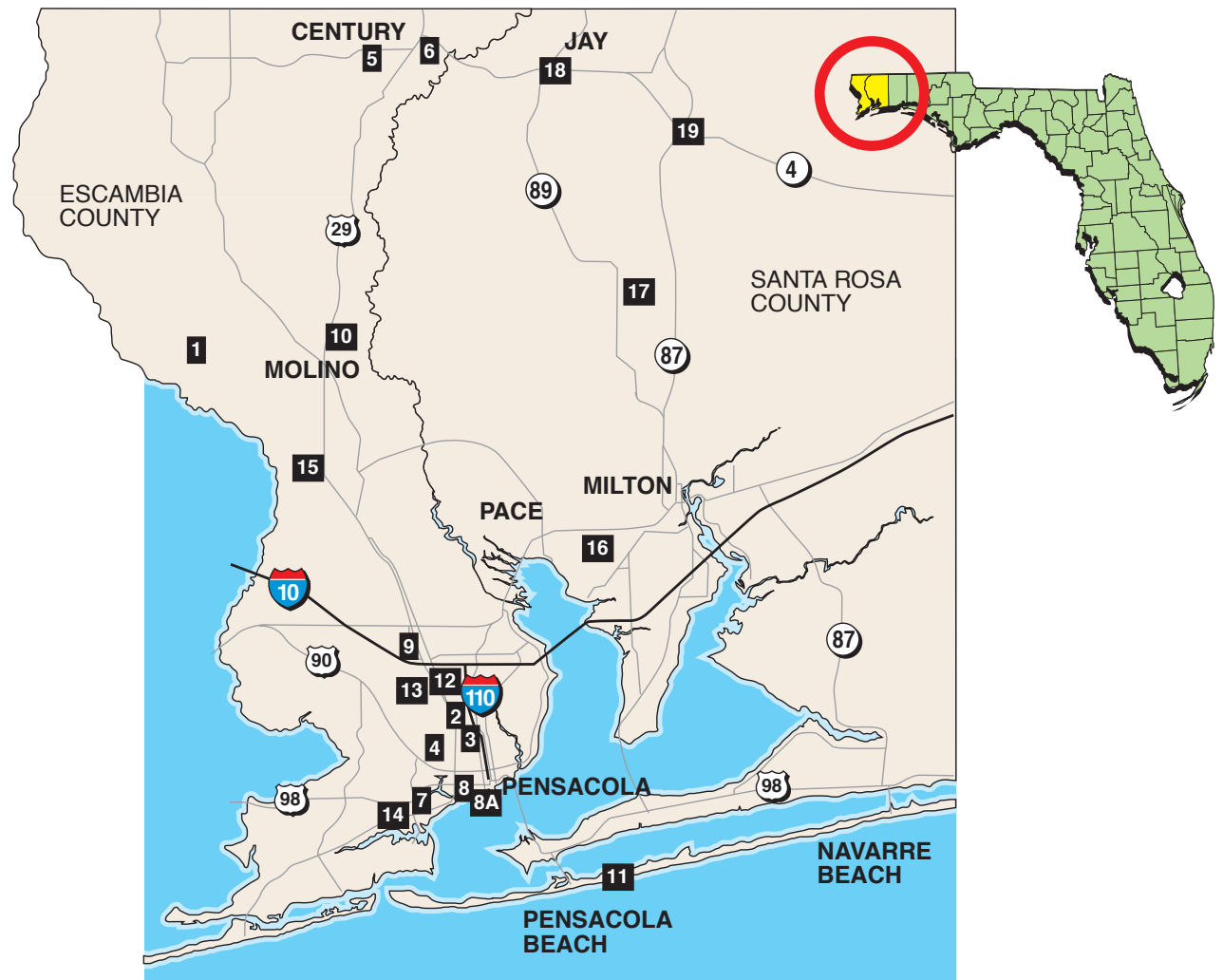
A.A. Dixon remained a public school until 2002.

The building was used by other groups as a charter school, but none of those thrived. It reopened in 2011 as a charter school, A.A. Dixon Charter School of Excellence, when it received an F on state standardized tests. It is now a private school.

Many other schools have closed or been reconfigured in the FCAT era.

"It is important to reiterate that in every case except the charter conversions, each of the closures had all students placed in a superior, more modern, more technologically advanced facility," said Escambia Superintendent Malcolm Thomas. "These changes were not related to school grades but rather consolidation and replacement of aging, underutilized facilities."

In addition to Dixon and Bibbs, here's how the landscape has changed:



GRAPHIC BY RON STALLCUP / RSTALLCUP@STUDERI.COM

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

1. BARRINEAU PARK ELEMENTARY:

Closed as a public school after the 2003 school year, when it earned an A. It was consolidated into Molino Park Elementary School, which earned a B in 2014. It was presented to the Barrineau Park Historical Society, which continues to use the building.

2. BRENTWOOD MIDDLE: Closed as a public school in 2007, when it earned a C. It is now the home of Brown-Barge Middle School.

3. BROWN-BARGE MIDDLE: Moved from its Fairfield Drive location, which was turned into an overnight storage area for school buses. It was reopened in current location on Hancock Lane.

4. BROWNSVILLE MIDDLE: Closed in 2007, when it earned a C. The building is vacant. The district is considering a purchase offer by GSI Recycling, which owns a scrapyard across the street. The same family also owns Scrap Inc., a car crushing facility just behind the scrapyard.

5. BRYNEVILLE ELEMENTARY: Closed as a public school in 2002, when it earned a D. It was reconstituted as a charter school. It earned an A last year.

6. CENTURY ELEMENTARY: Closed in 2002, when it earned an F. Reconstituted as Carver-Century K-8 School, combined with Carver Middle School in 2003. Carver-Century closed in 2009 with an F. The Carver Middle building is being leased to Pensacola State College to offer classes in Century.

7. EDGEWATER ELEMENTARY: Closed in 2009 when it earned a C. The building was sold to S.L. Jones, a private school.

8. HALLMARK ELEMENTARY:

Closed in 2011, when it earned a D, along with Allie Yniestra. The student populations were combined into Global Learning Academy, which earned a C in 2014. The Hallmark building on F Street was bought by developer Matt Pair in 2013.

8A. ALLIE YNIESTRA: Closed in 2011, when it earned a C. Yniestra's students were sent to the new Global Learning Academy, which earned a C in 2014. A plan last year to lease the school, on North Q and Jackson streets, to Remnant Church of Deliverance Christian Academy Inc. fell through. It is vacant.

9. LINCOLN PARK ELEMENTARY: Earned a D in 2011, it was nearly closed because of low enrollment. The school was converted to a primary school, serving students in grades K-2. It no longer receives a state grade. Third-, fourth- and fifth-graders were redistricted to various other schools.

10. MOLINO ELEMENTARY: Closed in 2003 when it earned an A. The students were redistricted to the new Molino Park Elementary School. The old building was sold to the county for use as a community center.

11. PENSACOLA BEACH ELEMENTARY: Closed as a public school in 2001. Reopened as a public charter school in 2002. It received an A in 2014.

12. WOODHAM HIGH: Closed as a public high school in 2007, when it earned a D. Reopened as a middle school in 2008. It received a C in 2014. Long-term district plans call for breaking it up as a middle school, redistricting the students to a yet-to-be-built new middle school and

existing schools, and relocating West Florida High School to the Woodham campus.

13. WEDGEWOOD MIDDLE: Closed as a public school in 2007. The building was turned into a community center.

14. A.V. CLUBBS: Closed in 2010 as an alternative middle school. Students were relocated first to E-SEAL, which became Camelot Academy on Patton Road. It serves the E-SEAL and previous Clubbs students.

15. SID NELSON SCHOOL: Closed in 2010. The building on Muscogee Road was razed. The property is being used for bus parking. The preschool program and the alternative school programs were relocated to other district schools.

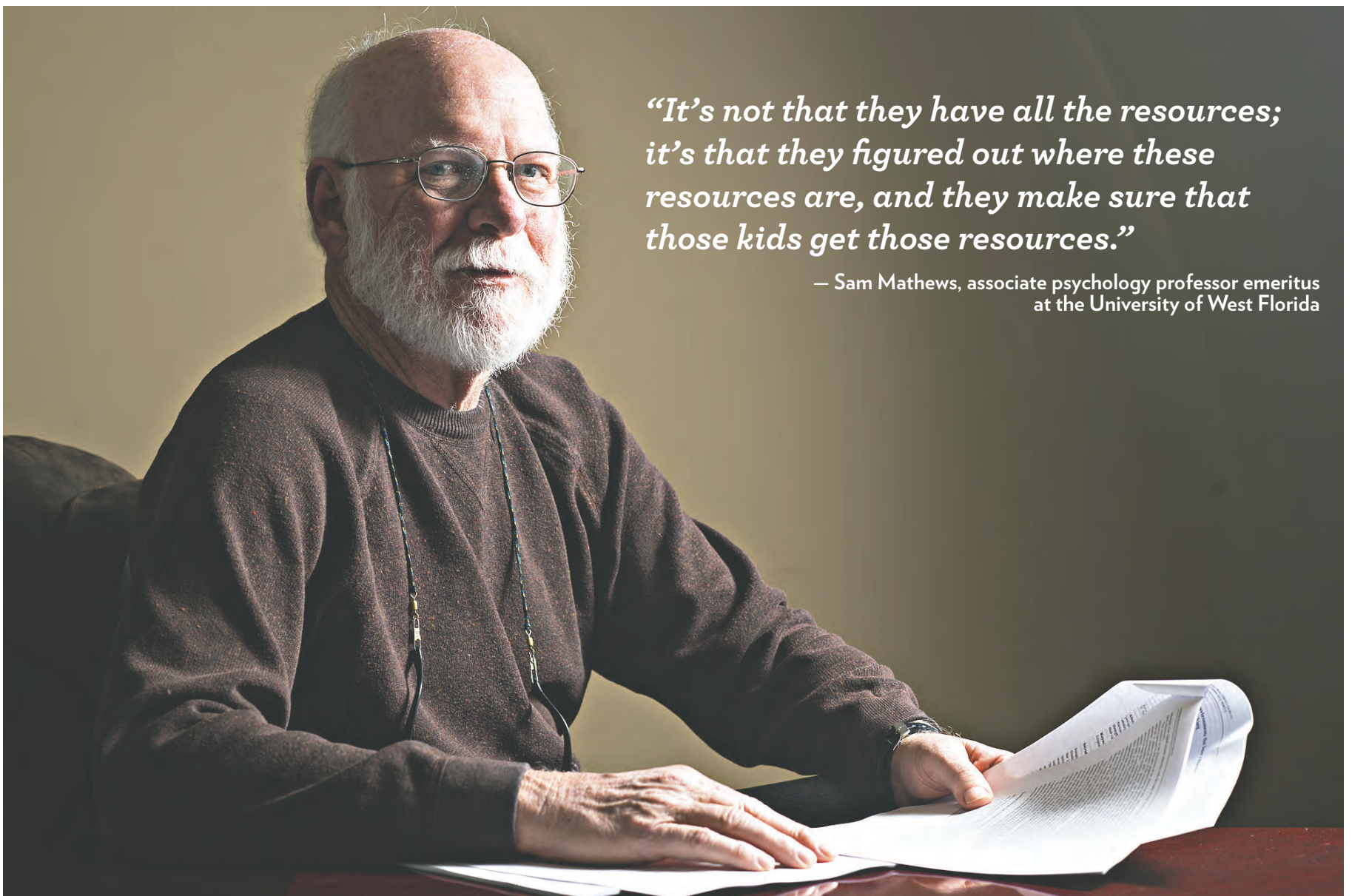
SANTA ROSA COUNTY

16. BENNETT C. RUSSELL ELEMENTARY: Opened in 2007-2008 school year. It earned a B its first year and has been an A since.

17. CENTRAL SCHOOL: Became a combination K-12 school in 2002.

18. JAY HIGH: Became a combination 7-12 school in 2002. Jay Elementary housed students in grades K-6.

19. MUNSON ELEMENTARY: Closed in 2009, when the school on Munson Highway in Milton earned an A. It is vacant and for sale. Part of it is leased out for reunions, the Blackwater Heritage Festival, training of emergency personnel and other events, said Superintendent Tim Wyrosdick.



“It’s not that they have all the resources; it’s that they figured out where these resources are, and they make sure that those kids get those resources.”

— Sam Mathews, associate psychology professor emeritus at the University of West Florida

Parents find a way to help their children learn

By Reggie Dogan
rdogan@studer.com
Photo by Michael Spooneybarger

When the state Department of Education released FCAT grades in 1999, the good news was that only two elementary schools received failing scores.

The bad news: Both of them— Spencer Bibbs and A.A. Dixon — were in Escambia County.

Vouchers were offered to students at both public schools. Nearly 50 students and their families chose to attend one of a few nearby private schools.

What about the hundreds of students who remained at the schools rated as failures?

Sam Mathews had an idea.

Mathews had spent decades studying, learning and teaching about human behavior as a psychology professor at the University of West Florida.

He got in touch with the Escambia County School Board. The board asked him to find answers to the looming questions about failing schools, student performance and what could be done to make them better.

School Board members approved \$17,000 for the project, says Cary Stidham, a former board member. “I don’t remember many details about the study, but I do remember hoping that it would provide some data to improve failing schools,” Stidham recalls.

Mathews and Leticia Freeland (now Groves), a UWF graduate student, spent part of a school year observing and analyzing classrooms, performing field studies and interviewing parents and caretakers.

Their mission: Examine the differences between high-achieving and low-achieving students at a school rated as failing.

In the 47-page report, “A.A. Dixon Elementary School: A Study of School and Families,” Mathews concluded that students under some of the most difficult circumstances can perform and excel in school with the right resources, support network and attention, regardless of their socioeconomic level and family dysfunction.

The study emphasized the importance of parents’ attitudes, and their activities in the home to support children’s success in school.

“As a friend of mine says, ‘It’s not rocket surgery, and it’s not brain science,’ says Mathews. “Everybody knows this, and you got to have data.”



SAM MATHEWS

Sam Mathews is an associate professor emeritus in the Department of Psychology at the University of West Florida. He has a doctorate in educational psychology and currently is conducting research as part of a grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. His efforts have

focused on working with public school students who experience difficulties achieving success within the school setting. These efforts include programs within schools, in after-school, community-based programs and in efforts to better understand how students’ home environments relate to school achievement.

The impact parents can have

When it comes to education, parental involvement continues to be a hot-but-ton issue, locally and nationally.

Both President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act and President Obama’s Race to the Top touted parental engagement as one remedy for persistent socioeconomic and racial achievement gaps.

Mathews’ three-month study showed, despite claims to the contrary, that even in low-income, disadvantaged neighborhoods, children who had strong, engaged and involved parents performed well in school.

While Mathews’ discoveries were not earth shattering, the study highlighted the importance of parental involvement in their children’s education.

It also showed the importance of schools and communities stepping in to fill the gaps for students who lack support from parents, guardians or extended families.

“They did what they needed to do to get help,” says Mathews. “It’s not that they have all the resources; it’s that they figured out where these resources are, and they make sure that those kids get those resources.”

It was the ability to get the help they needed, coupled with committed, hard-working mostly African-American single mothers, that made a world of difference.

Parents, schools must work together

For Mathews, it was eye-opening to see parents in what was considered a dysfunctional, disadvantaged environment make education a priority with positive results.

Studies show that when parents and schools work together to form a network of support, children thrive.

In recent months, there has been

engagement practices that make a difference create collaborations among parents, teachers and students and share effective strategies for strengthening students’ academic skills.

Mathews says his research showed parents influence their children’s success in school through high expectations, talking to their children about school and generally working to create a positive attitude about learning and strong work habits.

“The big difference was that the parents of the kids who were succeeding had figured out how to get resources for their child, were engaged with their child, knew the teacher, the principal, the counselor if need be, they were engaged with that school,” Mathews says.

“Parents of the (students) who were very low-performing were totally disengaged.”

The next research step

Research indicates that when parents and families are involved in their children’s schools, the children do better and have better feelings about going to school.

Parents of high-achieving students showed strong parental skills, set boundaries and maintained consistency in their children’s lives.

“You create an environment in which they can see that what they do, what they control, results in a positive outcome in a domain where they have never seen that before,” Mathews says.

Mathews says he came away impressed with parents who made the sacrifices to put their children’s educational needs ahead of their wants, needs and desires.

“Parents who worked outside the home and returned home after the end of the school day adapted their lives to meet the academic needs of their children,” Mathews says. “We didn’t find a single, high-achieving kid who had parents who weren’t engaged in the school.”

Semi-retired, Mathews still dabbles in research, doing contract work at UWF. What he’d like to do is to get parents or guardians of high-achieving students together to share with other parents their secrets of success.

“How can you help these other folks make it work?” says Mathews. “That’s what I think will be a real interesting experience.”

ABOUT THE STUDY

In 1999, Sam Mathews studied fourth- and fifth-graders at A.A. Dixon.

Dixon was a Title I school where nearly 100 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, which is used as a measure of poverty.

The demographics of the neighborhood surrounding the school were consistent with those of urban communities: high levels of poverty, crime and mobility rates.

All of the families Mathews tracked were families led by single mothers, with the exception of one.

Mathews noted instructional strategies, teacher-student interactions, instructional materials and students’ behaviors, discipline and the general demeanor of the classrooms.

The second part of the study involved interviewing the parents or guardians of selected fourth- and fifth-grade students in their homes.

Teachers submitted names of their highest- and lowest-performing students. The goal was to find out how parents in high-poverty, low-income areas were able to produce high-performing students.

increasing debate about the impact of parental involvement in schools and engagement in their children’s education.

In a new study, “The Broken Compass,” sociologists Keith Robinson and Angel Harris argue that when parents attempt to help, they really have little impact, and may even harm their children’s grades and test scores.

But as Mathews’ study showed, family



Rick Harper serves as director of the Studer Community Institute, a Pensacola-based organization that seeks citizen-powered solutions to challenges the community faces. He also directs the University of West Florida's Office of Economic Development and Engagement in Pensacola.

Skills, not just degree levels, affect graduate wages

By Rick Harper
rharper@studer.com
Photo by Michael Spooneybarger

In 2012, State Sen. Don Gaetz passed legislation requiring Florida's Department of Economic Opportunity to report annually on the wages earned by recent graduates of the many programs offered by our public colleges, universities and technical schools.

The purpose was to improve the information families have when choosing where to enroll and what to study. The 2014 report was published six weeks ago.

In it one can see easily that it is not just the level of degree attained (whether an associate or bachelor's degree), but it is competencies that matter most.

Scarce and job-specific skills pay better than more general qualifications.

Consider:

- Some 21,526 students completed an associate of science degree in nursing over the 2007-08 to 2011-12 school years.

- Of those, 87 percent were employed in Florida in the year after they graduated. Those 18,810 employed grads earned an average of \$49,700 during their first year.

- About 70 percent of the associate of science grads with child care provider/assistant degrees were employed a year after graduation, and at an average wage of \$25,308.

- There were almost 240,000 associate of arts graduates over the five years that were examined. Their average first-year earnings were \$26,936.

- The average bachelor's degree graduate had first-year earnings of \$33,432. Among the popular majors, biology came out at the lower end with wages of \$25,680; accounting was at the top of the heap with an average wage of \$40,286. Psychology is the most popular major, but had first-year earnings that were about \$4,000 lower than the average across all majors.

Power of industry certifications

Wages aren't everything – many people study what interests them most rather than what pays best. However, the report shows that wages vary substantially depending on the program of study.

Some of the lower-wage majors are necessary stepping stones to graduate degrees. This can be seen in that some 25 percent of University of Florida graduates were pursuing additional education rather than going directly into the job market. That figure was 19 percent statewide and 18 percent for University of West Florida.

Those students who choose not to go to college or university might attend a district technical center to pursue a certificate, such as cosmetology, patient care technician, automotive service technology, firefighter, practical nursing or nursing assistant.

The average first-year earnings for a student completing these programs were \$27,724. Locally, that number was \$26,168 for Locklin Tech (Milton), \$27,714 for Okaloosa Applied Technology Center (Fort Walton Beach) and \$29,670 for George Stone Technical Center (Pensacola).

Some students begin preparing for the workforce while attending more traditional high schools. The legislature is putting increasing amounts of money behind these programs. Funding for courses that result in completion of an industry certification and articulation with a follow-on course at the college/university level is \$800 more than for a standard course. This puts career training funding on par with university prep programs such as International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement.

Industry certification program

Data presented to the Florida Senate in January found that industry certification programs are associated with lower dropout rates, absences and disciplinary actions and higher GPAs across high schools.

READ MORE

The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity report is "Labor Market Experiences after Postsecondary Education: The Earnings and Other Outcomes of Florida's Postsecondary Graduates and Completers." The data are available at <http://www.beyondeducation.org>.

Among medium to large school districts, Okaloosa ranked first in the state in terms of additional career education funds earned per student. Escambia ranked fourth; Santa Rosa ranked 19th.

Clearly, there are substantial wage differences between degree programs. It can be hard to tease out whether it is the skills and aptitudes of the student, the curriculum in a program of study or the reputation or quality of the institution that makes a difference.

Research done by Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Josh Angrist finds that after controlling for the skills of the entering students, graduation from a highly selective university doesn't add more to wages of graduates than does graduation from any other university.

The bulk of the evidence suggests that differences in aptitudes, competencies and, eventually, wages, are determined relatively early in life.

This process takes place in school and in the social environment, but mostly in the home. The best predictor of future incomes for children is the education and income of their parents.

Building a community with better economic outcomes requires our best efforts in the schools, in homes and in the community.



Pensacola Metro Report

In August 2014, the Studer Community Institute produced the Pensacola Metro Report.

That 64-page publication used data from the University of West Florida's Office of Economic Development and Engagement to provide a snapshot of the two-county area's economic, educational and social well-being.

The report used that data as the underpinning for a series of stories that looked at the progress the Pensacola metro area has made in the last 10 years, and examined the challenges that continue to face our community.

A centerpiece of the Metro Report was the community dashboard, a series of objective benchmarks to provide an at-a-glance look at our community. The 16 benchmarks provide data points to help us track the community's growth, educational attainment, economic prospects, safety and civil life.

Visit the dashboard at www.studerinstitute.com/dashboard for more detailed information and analysis, interactive charts and comparisons to peer metropolitan statistical areas and state averages.

Coming up in part 2:

Schools that work

In the next edition of Pensacola Metro Report on education, we highlight "bright spots" that are providing a quality education far and near.

Hundreds of miles northeast of Pensacola, North Charleston High School in South Carolina has shown some of the highest gains in test scores and graduation rates in the state. With a minority enrollment of 95 percent, and nearly all students eligible for free- or reduced-lunch price meals, North Charleston is shining a bright light in education.

At home, West Florida High School is Escambia County's only consistent "A"-rated school, with test scores and graduation rates that are higher than all other county high schools. While the School District's overall graduation rate reached 66 percent last year, West Florida's graduation rate — at 94 percent — is one of the highest in the U.S.

The Institute's second edition will be released Sunday, Feb. 22, in the Pensacola News Journal.

Coming up in part 3:

Building a better reader

Experts agree that the key to building a good student is building a strong reader.

Increasingly, research suggests a pivotal time to influence a child's reading ability is ages 0-3, which is often long before a child enters a classroom.

In the third installment of the Studer Community Institute's education report, we looked at the growing body of research that supports the importance of early learning, the importance of getting parents involved in the learning process at all ages, and at two programs working now in the Pensacola metro area to help bridge that gap.

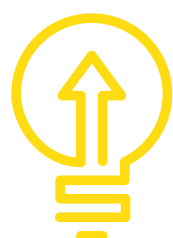
On the cover

Students in Stacie Hammer's fifth-grade class take a test at R.C. Lipscomb Elementary School.

Photo by Michael Spooneybarger
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About us

The Studer Community Institute is dedicated to helping people understand their community. We sponsor research and the development of benchmarks that allow cities and counties to evaluate the health of their local economy, government and quality of life. Our goal is to create a nonpartisan process that allows citizens to identify the critical issues a community needs to address to move forward.



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