

# FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Commissioner of Education

August 11, 2009

Mr. Tyler Winik  
atkarbergwinik@atkarbergwinik.com

Dear Mr. Winik,

Thank you for writing to provide additional feedback regarding the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test® (FCAT). The Commissioner also received your letter, dated July 30, 2009.

You continue to express concern over FCAT workbooks that schools are using in day-to-day lessons for test preparation purposes. The Department does not publish such workbooks. The only Department-published FCAT sample test materials for student use are posted online at <http://fcap.fldoe.org/fcatsmpl.asp> and <http://fcap.fldoe.org/fcatrelease.asp>. As stated in previous correspondence, these materials are published for the purpose of familiarizing students with the test's format. The workbooks to which you object are purchased by your local school district from private vendors. In 2008, Senate Bill 1908 was passed, and section 1008.22, Florida Statutes, was amended to include the following:

- (4) STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT PREPARATION; PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES.--Beginning with the 2008-2009 school year, a district school board shall prohibit each public school from suspending a regular program of curricula for purposes of administering practice tests or engaging in other test-preparation activities for a statewide assessment. However, a district school board may authorize a public school to engage in the following test-preparation activities for a statewide assessment:
- (a) Distributing to students the sample test books and answer keys published by the Department of Education.
  - (b) Providing individualized instruction in test-taking strategies, without suspending the school's regular program of curricula, for a student who scores at Level 1 or Level 2 on a prior administration of the statewide assessment.
  - (c) Providing individualized instruction in the content knowledge and skills assessed, without suspending the school's regular program of curricula, for a student who scores at Level 1 or Level 2 on a prior administration of the statewide assessment or a student who, through a diagnostic

assessment administered by the school district, is identified as having a deficiency in the content knowledge and skills assessed.

(d) Incorporating test-taking exercises and strategies into curricula for intensive reading and mathematics intervention courses.

(e) Administering a practice test or engaging in other test-preparation activities for the statewide assessment which are determined necessary to familiarize students with the organization of the assessment, the format of the test items, and the test directions, or which are otherwise necessary for the valid and reliable administration of the assessment, as set forth in rules adopted by the State Board of Education with specific reference to this paragraph.

Since this legislation was just implemented in the 2008-2009 school year, the current curricula in Florida's public schools may differ from that which you experienced. There is certainly an ongoing effort to curb the practice of "teaching the test."

Many constituents have also responded to the Department's concerns regarding "template" writing with statements that are aligned to the use of "formulaic" writing. While it may appear to be a case of semantics, there is a significant difference. "Template" or "Patterned" writing refers to situations where students use a prescribed format for responding to any prompt, regardless of the topic, or intended purpose; use practiced or memorized settings, words, phrases, elevated figurative language; or use a contrived introduction that is disconnected from the prompt or purpose for writing. In contrast, "formulaic" writing refers to the over-reliance on a particular structure of organization. Below this e-mail message, please find a more thorough explanation of template writing, formulaic writing, and the Department's position on each.

You indicate that you cannot find the FCAT Writing prompts and sample answers for 2009. This information is posted at <http://fcat.fldoe.org/09writinganchorsets.asp>. You also express concern over the annual release of FCAT assessments. Currently, there is not sufficient funding to release FCAT assessments annually. You will find information pertaining to this issue in the Frequently Asked Questions about the FCAT Released Tests (<http://www.fldoe.org/faq/default.asp?Dept=202&ALL=N>).

In conclusion, the following information that we have posted relating to educator participation in the test development process may be of interest to you: *One Year of FCAT Participants 2007-2008* (<http://fcat.fldoe.org/pdf/oneyear-participants.pdf>) and *Participation in State Assessment Committees* (<http://fcat.fldoe.org/pdf/state-assessment-committees.pdf>).

Your continued interest in the statewide assessment program is appreciated. Being involved in education – contacting state officials and voicing your opinions about decisions – is the responsibility of every citizen.

Sincerely,

Sharon Koon  
Policy, Research & Accountability Coordinator  
Office of Assessment  
Accountability, Research, and Measurement  
Florida Department of Education