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## A Note on the Florida Accountability System: Supplemental Document for "Analyzing Data and Asking Questions at Shell School, Sea County Florida."

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A Note on the Florida Accountability System:

Supplemental Document for *Analyzing Data and Asking Questions at Shell School,*

*Sea County Florida*

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*This document provides additional information on the Florida accountability system for readers of the case by Vanover (2015). It was drafted in January 2015.*

The 2012 and 2013 school years were times of transition for the Florida accountability system. As discussed in the Florida Department of Education's (FDE) (2013) online publication, "Florida School Grades," the combination of new tests, standards, and accountability requirements caused the number of schools the FDE rated as high performing to drop from 76% of the state's schools in the year 2011 to 52% of the state's schools in the 2013 school year. Between the year 2012 and 2013, the FDE decreased the letter grades of 994 elementary schools and raised the grades of only 94 elementary schools. It should be noted that these actions occurred after the state school board took action to buffer schools from the changes caused by the new tests and standards; the declines would have been much greater if the state school board had not intervened (Solocheck, 2013).

According to the FDE, 50% of a school's grades are determined by student test scores and 50% of the grades are determined by other components such as graduation rates and participation in accelerated curricula, such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses. The test data used to evaluate elementary schools comes from the FDE's high stakes assessment, the FCAT 2.0. Elementary schools are assessed by students' performance on the exam and then by what the FDE describes as students' learning gains: the

percentage of a school's students who made what the FDE determined was a full year's growth on the FCAT 2.0.

The state standards and the test the FDE purchased to measure them, the FCAT 2.0, were designed to act as a transition to the more cognitively demanding curriculum envisioned by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The reading scores displayed in Appendix 1 of *Analyzing Data and Asking Questions at Shell School, Sea County Florida* are fictitious results from the FDE's FCAT 2.0 READING test. As discussed on the test specifications published on the FDE's website (Florida Department of Education, 2012), the purpose of FCAT 2.0 READING was to "measure student achievement in constructing meaning from a wide variety of texts" (p. 3). To this end, students were asked to read narrative and informational texts that, in third grade, averaged about 500 words, and in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, averaged about 600 words. The questions students were asked to answer on these texts were said to require substantial levels of cognitive processing. In third grade, the FDE rated at least 65% of the items to be of moderate or high complexity. In fifth grade, at least 75% of these items were rated as moderately to highly complex. According the FDE (2012), the moderate complexity items focused on core comprehension skills:

FCAT 2.0 READING moderate-complexity items require two steps: comprehension and subsequent processing of text. Students are expected to make inferences within the text and may encounter items that include words such as *summarize, infer, classify, gather, organize, compare, and display*. Depending on the objective of a particular moderate-level item, students may also be required to explain, describe, or interpret. (p. 14)

High-complexity rated items, which may be a maximum of 15% in third grade and 25% in fifth grade, required "several steps involving abstract reasoning and planning" (FDE 2012, p.14). The

FDE also assessed student progress in mastering foundational reading skills in FCAT 2.0 READING. Students were tested on a number of items designed to measure what the FDE classified as student learning of the reading process. These items included using context clues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words as well as using antonyms, synonyms, homophones, and homographs to determine the word meaning.

The standards that guided the development of FCAT 2.0 READING are no longer used to guide reading instruction in Florida. What were called the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS) have been replaced with a new set of standards, The Florida Language Arts Standards (Florida Department of Education, 2014). These new standards are more closely aligned to the CCSS. In 2014, the FDE hired the American Institutes for Research to create a new statewide exam to measure student progress on these new standards that will be implemented in 2015. This exam, at least initially, will be based on questions developed in Utah (Wood, 2014).

As of the writing of this documents in January of 2015, the NGSSS standards for reading have been take down from the FDE website. People interested in the official reading curriculum in Florida during the time period discussed in the *Analyzing Data and Asking Questions* may receive a copy of the NGSSS standards for reading for grades 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> from the author, by request. The other documents in this note are also available from the author if they are removed from the FDE website.

## References

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