

Friends of Lee County Public Schools:

I wanted to take this opportunity to welcome everyone back for the start of the new semester of the 2011/12 school year. In fact, we're one of only a few districts able to start the school year early – which allows us to end the first semester at Winter Break. It's something we did in the past – and something that legislators are talking about this legislative session (it may be allowed for all districts depending on what happens in Tallahassee.)

Right now we get to start our school year earlier because we've been designated a "high performing" district by the Florida Department of Education. This is based directly on student academic achievement. We've been an "A" District for the past three years – thanks to the hard work of our students, parents, teachers and administrators. The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) can be debated forever, but the bottom line is that's the measure the Florida DOE uses to judge student, school and district academic performance.

And things are about to change.

That's because for the 2011/12 school year, the State is raising the "cut scores" on the FCAT – that means the minimum score needed to successfully complete the FCAT is going up. This new FCAT – sometimes referred to as FCAT 2.0 – is going to have two immediate effects.

First, whenever you raise the rigor on standardized tests there will be an initial "adjustment period" that schools and districts go through. It's anticipated that we will see a decrease in student scores, school scores and possibly a drop in our District's overall grade from the Florida DOE.

In fact, knowing the changes were coming, we already started working to address it, especially in the area of high school reading. Which leads to the second effect this increase in rigor will have for our schools. We will continue to prepare our students to be successful as they sit for these high stakes test.

Students are going to be learning more in class. We've seen it in the past when the State made modifications to the FCAT and we fully expect to see it again this time around. And that's a good thing – we are always looking to push the boundaries as our students are going to need to compete in an ever-changing world when they graduate from school.

The days of doing things the same ways are quickly ending – we must continually evolve and adapt, looking for new and innovative ways of increasing instruction and knowledge for our students. It's all about getting better – I've said it before and I'll say it again: We want to be better today than we were yesterday; and we want to be better tomorrow than we are today.

- MORE -

I know our teachers, support staff and administrators are working hard to ensure all of our students are prepared and we'll see those scores start to climb back to higher levels.

You may be asking: "Why on earth would we change things? Why is the State increasing the minimum scores for students?"

And those are valid questions.

The reasons are simple: it's the right thing to do in order to get our students, teachers and schools to the next level and it's in preparation to the tests that will replace the FCAT in three years.

These new tests – the Common Course Exams – are going to be much more rigorous than the FCAT has been, and Florida will be joining more than 40 other states in implementing them in our schools. By increasing the minimum passing score in the FCAT now, it can serve at what some have called an "academic bridge" to the future.

So as we start the second semester, there are changes and challenges that we're going to all face together. And I am very confident that our students, teachers, support staff, administrators and the community at large can meet them head on as we continue to move our District forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanne S. Dozier".

Jeanne S. Dozier
Board member, District 2