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Education Study Assesses Teachers Perceptions of FCAT

By: [Donna Self](#)

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USF St. Petersburg education professors Brett Jones and Robert Egley have validated voices in public school faculty meetings all over Florida with results from their study of teacher and administrator perceptions of the FCAT, which will be published in the summer edition of the education journal, Education Policy Analysis Archives.

Jones said they conducted the study to give voice to the opinions of educators. "It seems that the focus of the current program [FCAT] is on catching teachers doing something wrong instead of helping students who need it. This study validates what educators have been saying for years. Hopefully people will start to listen to their concerns."

This study is not Jones's first look at standardized testing. Jones published his book, Unintended Consequences of High Stakes Testing, in April 2003 and has also published several journal articles on the topic. His partner in the study, Robert Egley, is also well published. He is currently writing a book on managing the marginal employee, targeted for educational administrators.

Jones and Egley's study included Florida teachers of third, fourth and fifth grade from 30 districts, as well as 325 Florida elementary principals and assistant principals in 32 districts. Participants completed questionnaires regarding their demographics, current practices and beliefs about the FCAT. The surveys were distributed in the spring of 2002; four years after the State of Florida began using the FCAT, not only student assessments, but also for teacher and school accountability.

The study used open-ended and yes/no questions along with scaled responses and found many common themes. Ninety-three percent of teachers and 94 percent of administrators reported that they felt that FCAT results were being used improperly because one-time test scores were not an accurate assessment of students' learning and development; especially when variable factors such as disabilities, English as a second language, varied student backgrounds and learning styles were considered.

Almost half of the teachers surveyed reported that they felt that the test actually impeded student learning because teaching how to take a test all year limited their ability to accommodate different learning styles. In fact, teaching test-taking strategies occupied about 40 percent of classroom time during the year. The study also found that the test has negative effects on teacher satisfaction because of the added stress. Interestingly, teachers noted that they were not against being held accountable, but only against using the FCAT as measurement.

"The study shows that teachers and principals have a lot of concerns," Jones said. "I think they realize it's a complex process – some people don't seem to recognize the complexity of assessment and school rating. If we really want to rate schools, there are more variables, such as types of courses, extracurricular activities, tutoring programs, sports, arts and music. We should consider a student's background and how far teachers are taking them."

"There is a lot of good teaching and learning going on – even at schools with a poor rating," Egley said.

Jones said he hopes that their study can also be used to determine if standardized testing should be used in higher education. "What we are seeing now in Florida is conversation about a similar system for universities. So as they come up with a system for university professor accountability, the same question could be asked to determine if it makes any sense for doing this with higher education."

Egley said that the FCAT study shows that the test can be used as a tool, but not as a sole assessment of school, teacher and student performance. "The FCAT is a snapshot of one period of time," he says. "It's not a video. We can't use one assessment as a comprehensive measurement when there are so many factors to consider."

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