

Orlando Sentinel, June 24, 2012:

My Word: 25 reasons to worry about the FCAT

By Marion Brady

Gerard Robinson, Florida's Education Commissioner, and Kathleen Shanahan, chair of the State Board of Education, want to "continue to talk about the FCAT*" ("Raising standards: FCAT is a portal to a lifetime of success," *Orlando Sentinel*, June 10).

Great. I have some concerns.

It worries me that the tests (1) can't measure complex thought processes, (2) provide minimal to no useful feedback to classroom teachers, (3) lead to the neglect of physical conditioning, music, art and other nonverbal ways of learning, (4) give unfair advantage to those who can afford test preparation, (5) penalize nonstandard thinkers, (6) radically limit teacher ability to adapt to learner differences and (7) give test manufacturers control of the curriculum.

It worries me that the tests (8) encourage use of threats, bribes and other extrinsic motivators, (9) use subjectively set pass-fail cut scores, (10) assume that what the young will need to know is already known, (11) produce scores that can be (and are) manipulated for political purposes, (12) emphasize minimum to the neglect of maximum performance, (13) create unreasonable pressures to cheat and (14) reduce teacher creativity.

It worries me that the tests (15) take inadequate account of ethnic, social class and regional differences, (16) have no "success in life" predictive power, (17) are open to scoring errors having life-changing consequences, (18) are at odds with deep-seated American values about individuality, (19) create negative attitudes toward schooling, (20) perpetuate the artificial compartmentalizing of knowledge and (21) waste taxpayer money.

It worries me that the tests (22) put corporate profit ahead of learner performance, (23) ignore the creative potential of human variability, (24) unduly reward mere short-term memory and (25) undermine the democratic principle that those closest to problems are best positioned to deal with them.

My list isn't complete, but it's probably long enough to start a dialog. It may be relevant that the National Academy of Sciences was asked by Congress to study the issue, and the academy said that standardized tests "have not increased student achievement."

Hmmm. Millions of dollars for nothing? Shouldn't somebody be held accountable?

Everybody agrees that we're in a hole. Wouldn't it be a good idea to stop digging while we talk?

* Florida Comprehensive Achievement Tests