



State Board of Education

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July 3, 2018

The Honorable Jason Fischer
4130 Salisbury Road
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The Honorable Dennis Baxley
206 So Hwy 27/441
Lake Lady, Florida 32159

The Honorable Michael Bileca
9555 North Kendall Drive, Suite 208
Miami, Florida 33176-1978

The Honorable James Grant
12972 North Dale Mabry Hwy
Tampa, Florida 33618-2806

The Honorable Bob Rommel
3299 Tamiami Trail East
Naples, Florida 34112-5746

The Honorable Jennifer Sullivan
2755 South Bay Street, Unit D
Eustis, Florida 32726-6275

Dear Senator and Representatives:

Thank you for your letter inquiring about districts' scheduling of Civics courses and the associated required statewide assessment. I have consistently attributed much of Florida's success for our students to our state's strong accountability system. I have witnessed the power of our system to spur positive actions on behalf of all students and have personally taken actions to improve student and school achievement as a school principal, district administrator and Commissioner of Education under our accountability system. The amazing work of our educators is recognized and supported by our accountability system. If our accountability system were to be taken away, I believe strongly that great numbers of our most vulnerable students would be returned to a system of decades ago that did not serve them well, if at all. At the very least, parents would have little to no information to ensure their child was receiving a meaningful education. Our students' continued improved performance on our statewide assessments and further on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are evidence that Florida has made the tough decisions and instituted the right supports to improve the ability for all of our students to reach their fullest potential.

Regarding Civics specifically, section 1003.4156, Florida Statutes, requires that students take the Civics course and the associated statewide, standardized end-of-course (EOC) assessment at some point in the middle grades, but does not specify a particular grade level. This statutory flexibility provides districts the ability to schedule students for civics considering educationally sound factors, such as staffing levels and student maturity. Further, the statutory flexibility for when civics must be taken by a student, is consistent with many other courses, such as Algebra I,

Geometry and Biology I. While students must take the EOC associated with the course, when the course is offered by a district and taken by a student varies.

As a first step in response to your letter, we researched data for the past five years to see whether there were districts whose data would indicate they had made a decision about the year middle school students would take Civics. For example, if a district changed the grade level students typically take Civics from seventh to eighth grade, there would be a one-year drop in test takers. This occurs because the students enrolled in eighth grade would have already taken the Civics EOC when they were seventh graders in the prior year, and the students enrolled in seventh grade would have to wait until they are eighth graders in the following year to take the Civics EOC.

Over the last 5 years, there have been districts that have followed this practice. For example, between 2014-15 and 2015-16 the number of Civics EOC test takers in Osceola County decreased from 4,654 students to 1,311 students. The percentage of students scoring a Level 3 or higher during that period, increased from 61.5% to 70.3%. However, by 2016-17, the number of test takers in Osceola returned to historical levels (4,193 students), and the performance, as well, increased with 73.7% of students earning a Level 3 or higher on the Civics EOC. Levy County followed this practice, as well, between 2014-15 and 2015-16, and most recently Bradford, Hamilton, and Sarasota Counties followed this practice between 2015-16 and 2016-17.

As a second step, we researched the districts you have inquired about, and in 2017-18, data indicate that Duval, Manatee, and Polk Counties may be following this practice, since the number of test takers has decreased this year and performance has increased. However, based on earlier data from other districts, we would expect the number of test takers to return to historical levels in each district in 2018-19, since middle school students must eventually take the Civics EOC before entering high school. In addition, the performance may, in fact, increase, as it did in other districts when the number of test takers returned to historical levels. The chart below recaps these data.

Civics End-of-Course (EOC) Assessment										
	2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18	
	# of Test Takers	% Scoring Level 3 and Above	# of Test Takers	% Scoring Level 3 and Above	# of Test Takers	% Scoring Level 3 and Above	# of Test Takers	% Scoring Level 3 and Above	# of Test Takers	% Scoring Level 3 and Above
04-BRADFORD	215	42.8%	223	58.3%	202	42.1%	*	*	185	53.0%
16-DUVAL	8,762	54.0%	8,493	60.3%	8,492	64.0%	8,654	65.5%	5,757	84.1%
24-HAMILTON	117	19.7%	119	33.6%	89	47.2%	*	*	215	53.0%
38-LEVY	396	49.7%	361	56.5%	31	64.5%	333	68.2%	359	72.4%
41-MANATEE	3,736	56.6%	3,617	60.7%	3,648	63.9%	3,596	66.0%	2,655	78.5%

Civics End-of-Course (EOC) Assessment (continued)

	2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18	
	# of Test Takers	% Scoring Level 3 and Above	# of Test Takers	% Scoring Level 3 and Above	# of Test Takers	% Scoring Level 3 and Above	# of Test Takers	% Scoring Level 3 and Above	# of Test Takers	% Scoring Level 3 and Above
49- OSCEOLA	4,434	57.3%	4,654	61.5%	1,311	70.3%	4,193	73.7%	4,852	70.3%
53-POLK	7,156	49.5%	7,049	54.7%	7,143	58.4%	7,375	61.4%	3,652	81.8%
58- SARASOTA	2,719	70.9%	2,713	71.0%	4,077	77.2%	377	96.0%	3,076	80.5%

To provide meaningful results and to protect the privacy of individual students, data are displayed only when the total number of students in a group is at least 10 and when the performance of individuals would not be disclosed. Data for groups less than 10 are displayed with an asterisk ().

Data are available at <https://edstats.fl DOE.org>.

At this time, we do not have any evidence that the districts you have listed have done anything that is in violation of the law or improperly manipulated the accountability system. Further, while educational decisions are by their nature unique to student needs, data we have from other districts indicates that in some cases, delaying the year civics course is taken in middle school can result in more students passing the exam and, thus, can be an educationally sound decision. We will continue to monitor districts' participation and outcomes under our assessment and accountability systems. If there is additional information that you receive that could be helpful to our review, or if you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Pam Stewart