Assignment # 3 Assessment

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Provided in this assignment is a brief history of the test that is used in the state of Florida, along with its development and implementation. Also discussed are the controversies that surround this test. Further discussed will be the average reading test scores of three different middle schools. Then there will be a table charting the grade level with the lowest scores and the grade level with the highest scores. Last, the differences in reading scores among the schools will be described.

In the state of Florida the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is given to students in grades three through eleven. The FCAT originated in 1998 as a part of the state of Florida’s overall plan to increase student achievement by implementing higher standards. (Florida Department of Education, 2011). The FCAT was first introduced requiring fourth grade students to pass the reading portion of the test in order to be promoted to fifth grade. When Congress passed the ‘No Child Left Behind Act,’ in 2011, passage was moved to third grade. Students in tenth grade must pass the reading as well as the mathematics portion of the FCAT in order to receive their high school diploma.

The FCAT is a criterion-referenced test that is administered annually in all public schools in late February and early March. Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush established the A+ Plan, which requires public school students to achieve a certain passage level. (Randall, 2008). The FCAT is administered to students in grades three through eleven, testing them in reading, science, writing, and math. Students in grades three through ten must be tested in reading and math every year. Although the FCAT mainly consists of multiple choice questions, long answer questions as well as fill in the blank questions may be found on the FCAT.

Many things in life are subject to criticism and the FCAT is no exception as educators believe that instead of class time being spent on academics that will benefit students in the long run, emphasis is instead placed on the FCAT. Parents are opposed to the FCAT because their children are being sent to school to learn how to take the FCAT instead of learning core concepts. Along with parents and educators, lawmakers have also expressed their opposition to the FCAT as well. Democrat Carol Castagnero has made her opposition to the FCAT public when she referred to the FCAT as being unconstitutional and stated that, “children are being terrorized with a test called FCAT.” (Liberto, 2004).

The three middle schools that have been selected are (1) Pines Middle School – urban, (2) Sawgrass Springs Middle School – suburban, and (3) Margate Middle School – rural. The most recent average test scores in reading for grades 6, 7, and 8 are provided along with a brief description of each school.

Pines Middle School is located in Pembroke Pines, Florida and is an ‘A’ school. Pines Middle School prides itself on providing a variety of different programs to meet the needs of students as well as creating an atmosphere of respect, positive reinforcement, and understanding for the achievement of students. The mission statement of Pines Middle School is, “to create an environment that is conducive to learning, which will enable the students to develop to their fullest potential.” (Pines Middle School, 2011). The most recent average test scores (2010) for grade six in reading was 317, grade seven 322, and grade eight was 311.

Sawgrass Springs Middle School is located in Coral Springs, Florida and is an ‘A’ school. The staff is dedicated to providing educational programs that will allow students to engage themselves in the learning process through the use of technology is a clean and safe environment to achieve personal and academic growth. (Sawgrass Springs Middle School, 2011). The most recent average test scores in reading which are from 2010 for grade six was 325, grade seven 340, and grade eight achieved the average score of 327.

Margate Middle School is located in Margate, Florida and is an ‘A’ school. Margate Middle School promotes a safe learning environment to create academic excellence to create lifelong learners and responsible citizens. (Margate Middle School, 2011). The average test scores in reading for the year 2010, which was the most recent, for grade six was 299, grade seven was 307, and grade eight was 302.

Average FCAT Reading Test Scores

As indicated by the chart above, Margate Middle School has the lowest scores for grades 6-8 and Sawgrass Springs Middle School has the highest scores for grades 6-8. Of the three middle schools Pines Middle School consistently had median scores for grades 6-8. Margate Middle School and Pines Middle School had very similar scores, even though Pines had slightly higher scores than Margate. However, Sawgrass Springs consistently had significantly higher scores for grades 6-8 than the other two schools. The total enrollment count for Pines Middle School is 1715. Ninety-nine students are Native American, 11 are Native Hawaiian, 733 Black, 742 White, 69 are multiracial, and 61 are Asian. Of the 1715 students, 819 are girls and 896 are boys. Sawgrass Springs Middle School has received great reviews from parents and students praising the facility and the educators. Reviews for Margate Middle School revealed that teachers only received three out of five stars and principal leadership received three out of five stars as well. Comments left by students and parents were mostly positive as students and parents were writing about the involvement of the faculty and how the school overall was improving every year.

One reason for the difference in reading test scores among these three schools is the location of the schools. Sawgrass Springs Middle School had the highest test scores of the three schools and is located in a suburban area where one may infer that suburban areas contain more stay at home moms than urban and rural communities do. With that inference stated, parent involvement in a students’ academic career is crucial to the overall success of that student. Another reason for the high test scores at Sawgrass Springs may be because Sawgrass Springs Middle School only has twenty-two students in each classroom, thereby creating a better teacher to student ratio. Generally when there are less children in the classroom the teacher is able to attend to the needs of each individual student, thus increasing the amount of information learned.

Overall, most states require a comprehensive test to be taken within the public school system. With state standardized tests usually comes criticism or optimism. However, whether state standardized testing is loved or hated, it is crucial not to lose sight of the most important factor in the equation, the children and their academic success.

References

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