Testing in Florida

The story that keeps on giving
You've been warned... by students and superintendents, teachers and parents.

Kerry Saddler wants nothing more than to see her students pass Florida's Algebra I end-of-course exam.

Offering extra preparation help outside of class, the veteran Pasco County middle school math teacher has a success rate to envy: None of her students have failed the test.

But this year, with new tests and academic standards mandated by the state, Saddler isn't so confident.

It's not that she thinks the teens can't handle the work. Rather, Saddler doesn't believe the state has provided enough time or information to adequately prepare herself or her students for what lies ahead.
Mistakes happen. Often.

Glitches, cyberattacks deal blow to credibility of Florida’s new school tests

The debut of new standardized computer testing in Florida has proved anything but at state’s eighth-, ninth- and 10th-graders.

First came server problems caused by the state’s Institutes for Research. Then, according to officials known as a “distributed denial of service,” or DD system, and law enforcement is investigating.

Some kids took the test with a hitch. Some strug overcome the glitches. Some have yet to finish, day.

The upset has been doubt. Parents, educators and decisionmakers have demanded to know: Can the re trusted?

A technical failure prevented students from logging on early in the day to take the Florida Standards Assessment in language arts and math.

By midmorning, the Florida Department of Education announced the problem had been corrected. But it was too late for many districts — including Pasco, Brevard, Broward and Palm Beach counties — which already had started testing for the day and hoped to try again today.

But to no avail. Florida’s new computerized tests hit another round of problems Monday, drawing bright eyes and concern about their validity and bringing a halt of we’ll-research from teachers, parents and school officials.

The state announced that newate late Monday, saying an independent validity study of the exams required under a new state law won’t be complete in time for report cards. By law, the exams were supposed to count for 30 percent of a student’s grade in algebra I, algebra II and geometry.

Jeff Eakins, Hillsborough County’s acting superintendent, announced Tuesday that the 45,000 students in his district affected by the decision will be given choices, including taking a state final exam instead, or using a state-end-of-course exam grade from last semester.

“Our strategy is to provide options to students to ensure that they are not harmed by this decision,” Eakins said.

The uncounseled scores, which affect about 500,000 student exams statewide, and the unapproved calculators, added to a growing list of foul-ups in a testing season marred by problems. Reported cyberattacks on state testing servers, unauthorized server updates and log-in issues have added stress, uncertainty and wasted effort to this year’s testing process.
What did the kids say?

TAMPA — Tampa Bay Tech freshman Jude Cineas didn’t have high hopes as he sat for his state writing exam on Tuesday morning.

New computer systems rarely work well, he reasoned.

So as he began typing his answers, after more than an hour spent reading passages and gathering thoughts, Jude kept saving his work — just in case.

"When I got up to the middle of my third paragraph, two students said their computers logged off, just froze," he recalled. "I clicked save and continued writing."

Then, "like popcorn," other students’ hands flew up. They, too, were bumped out.

"I was the second to last person the computer turned off on," said..."
What will lawmakers, leaders do?

HB 7069 ...  
- Reduces some local testing requirements, eliminates others  
- Caps state and local testing at 45 hours  
- Suspends some test consequences  
- Mandates an independent validity study of all new state tests

In response ...  
- School districts eliminate dozens of tests, give teachers more flexibility  
- The Florida Department of Education detaches some test scores from student course grades  
- Parent, education groups continue to push for even more changes
Things to do

- Keep a list of sources with strong positions, knowledge on testing.
- Be aware of the things that can go wrong.
- Find out how the new tests compare to the old tests.
- Learn how cut scores will be set.
- Ask how the state plans to present results.
- Know your state testing laws, assessment windows, consequences, etc.
Who you gonna call?

National experts
Greg Cizek, University of North Carolina / 919.843.7876 / cizek@unc.edu
H. Gary Cook, Wisconsin Center for Education Research / 608.890.0471 / hcook@wisc.edu
Marianne Perie, Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation (University of Kansas) / 202.409.3358
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School testing gurus
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Test reform advocates
Peggy Robertson, United Opt Out / 720-810-5593 / writepeg@juno.com (Find your local Opt Out group, too)
Bob Schaeffer, FairTest / 239-395-6773 / bobschaeffer@earthlink.net

Your local schools
Officials, teachers and students are in-house experts. Their experiences and knowledge matters. Just ask.
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