

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Before Winter Break, we received some great news that our graduation rate rose 4.6 percentage points to 71.2 percent. Shortly after that, high school grades came in and many of our high schools made tremendous improvement.

The gains in our graduation rate are record setting. In fact, our graduation rate has increased 13.8 percentage points over the last five years. What is especially encouraging is that some of our most challenged schools are seeing the results from the hard work and dedication taking place over the past several years.

These achievements did not take place over night. In 2006, our School Board took bold steps to ensure that our students were graduating prepared for post secondary education and the world of work. This included our students meeting the highest graduation requirements in the state, which makes the continued increase in our graduation rate that much more noteworthy in Duval County. The Board also increased the career academy program options in our schools and implemented advanced level acceleration program opportunities in each of our high schools.

Duval County students, teachers, administrators and staff are to be commended for a job well done. However, it should be noted that the state Board of Education has recently approved new standards that may cause some of our school grades to decline next year. Many "A" rated schools will become "B" or "C" schools even though their performance improved. Additionally, your child's individual FCAT score may decline during this coming school year. It should be noted that this change in score may occur simply because the FCAT cut score has been raised.

I am in support of almost all of the new FCAT cut scores approved in December and agree that raising the standards is in the best interest of the future for our students, community and the state. I ask you to support us as we transition to these new cut scores by reminding your child of the importance of giving their best effort on these state tests.

We must also consider that with tougher standards, comes more rigor in the classroom and funding education needs to become a priority.

While we are optimistic about the Governor's proposed budget, earmarking additional funding for education, it does not equal the loss of federal funds, leaving us with a \$50 million budget shortfall. I would also ask that our legislators look at ways to provide school districts with more local control, creating the ability to use funding in the best interest of our schools, while still having accountability for results.

I would like to urge our community to congratulate our students, teachers and principals for these recent accomplishments and support our schools as the new FCAT standards are implemented.

*Ed Pratt-Dannals*  
Superintendent