



RESEARCH BRIEF

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FCAT Retakes

Trends in Multiple Attempts at Satisfying FCAT Graduation Requirements

According to Florida Law, students must pass the Grade 10 FCAT, among other academic requirements, in order to receive a standard high school diploma. Specifically, students must achieve a “passing” score of 300 or above on both the FCAT SSS Reading and the FCAT SSS Mathematics tests. Students have other options for graduating if they fail the FCAT tests, including receiving comparable scores on the ACT or SAT, or receiving a waiver of the FCAT requirement for students with disabilities who cannot be accurately measured by the statewide assessments. However, the main avenue for graduation remains passing both the Reading and Mathematics FCAT tests.

Technically, students can retake the FCAT as many times as they want, until they pass it, and can even enroll for a “free” 13th year of public education should they need additional instruction to successfully pass the FCAT. At the time of this study, students had up to seven standard opportunities to pass the Grade 10 FCAT prior to graduation. Students who did not pass the FCAT in the spring of their sophomore year could retest in the fall, spring, and summer of their junior and senior years. (Because of financial constraints, the summer retakes will no longer be made available.)

The purpose of this study is to report the results of tracking the FCAT retake occurrences and outcomes for one grade-level cohort group as they advance through their M-DCPS careers. Although summaries of the test results for any retake occasion across all current test-takers have been available on a yearly basis, this is the first cumulative tracking for FCAT retake performance.

The Research Sample

The population of interest for this study starts with the active ninth grade class in 2003-04. It is this cohort, excluding transfers into the district, whose FCAT performance was followed through the summer of 2008. Of the initial 29,023 students in this cohort group, 4,881 (16.8%) transferred, withdrew, or dropped out without ever taking the FCAT Reading or Mathematics tests in our district. This study focused on the 24,142 students for whom we have FCAT test results. Note that the percentages described throughout the rest of this report are percentages of those who took the FCAT test at least once. We are emphasizing that the cumulative pass and fail rates reported here are not for the entire student cohort starting group, but are only for those who took the FCAT tests.

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FCAT Data Files

Students can take the FCAT tests numerous times. In order to maintain consistent data file integrity, the results of only the last few attempts of the FCAT are kept on record in the District. In addition to the most current scores, a data element records the number of total FCAT attempts and the pass/fail status of the latest attempt for each student. Since not all of the test results are kept on file, it is impossible to reconstruct a complete history of test-taking behavior for the entire student cohort.

If one is willing to make the assumption that a student would not retake the FCAT test if they had once passed it, it is possible to re-establish the cohort test-taking history from the incomplete data record in sufficient detail to infer cumulative pass/fail patterns. This assumption would imply that any student taking the test for a second time must have failed the test on the first attempt, and any third attempt implies failing on the first two attempts, and so on. Using the last three actual test results stored on the data files, it was possible to confirm that these assumptions were warranted.

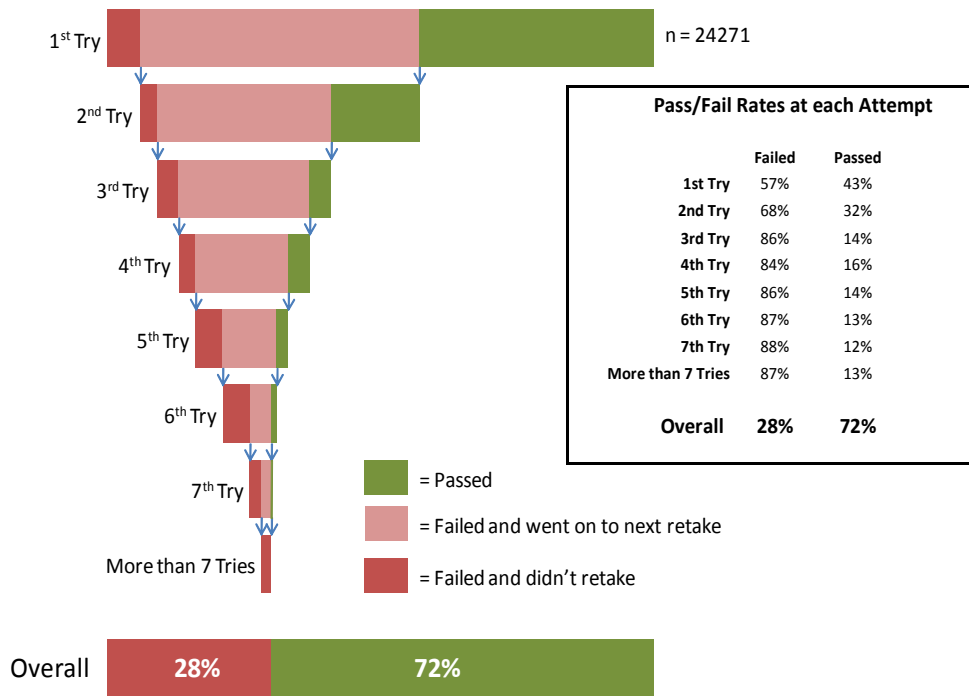
Cumulative FCAT Retake Results

Although approximately the same numbers of students take both the FCAT Reading and Mathematics tests **at least once**, the numbers of students taking retakes varies quite a bit between the two tests. In the table below the row entries refer to that number of tries only. So, the percents taking the tests once and only once, whether they pass or fail, are 49% for the Reading test and 74% for Mathematics. The principal cause for the difference in one-time test-taker percents is a direct reflection of the number of students who pass each test with only one attempt.

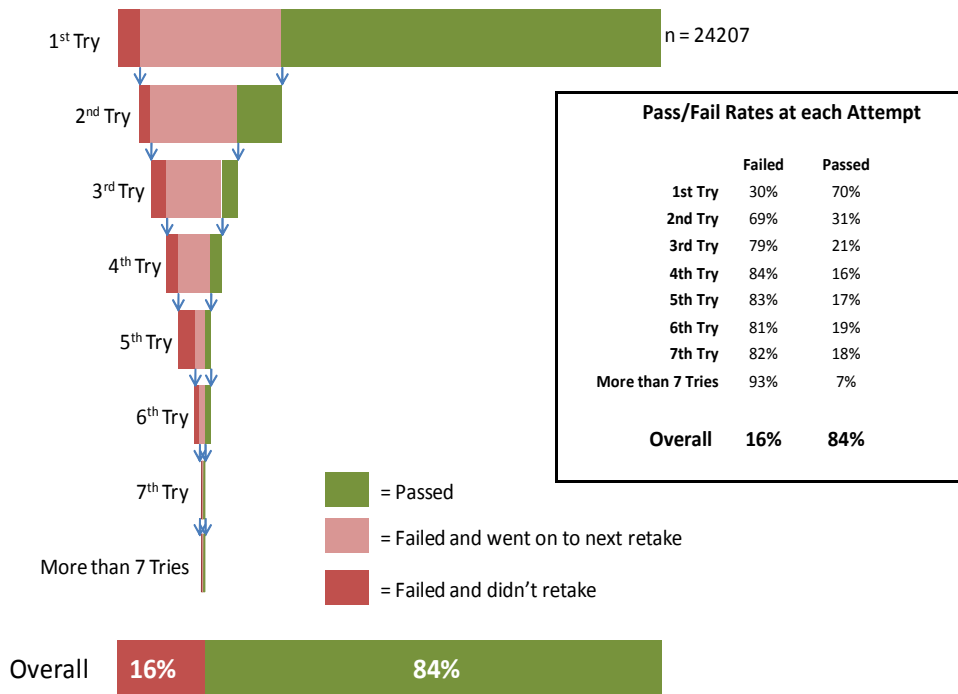
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
1 Try	11794	17862	49%	74%
2 Tries	4801	2544	20%	11%
3 Tries	1911	1411	8%	6%
4 Tries	1641	830	7%	3%
5 Tries	1790	919	7%	4%
6 Tries	1427	459	6%	2%
7 Tries	691	149	3%	1%
More than 7 Tries	216	33	1%	0%
	24271	24207		

The pattern of results for FCAT Reading and Mathematics Retakes are presented in the graphs on the following page. It can be seen that the passing rate for the first attempt is much higher for the FCAT Mathematics Test than for the FCAT Reading Test. For each subsequent attempt on both tests, although the percent taking the test diminishes substantially, the percent passing remains quite similar. The percent passing in the Reading Test accumulates considerably through subsequent testing opportunities, but the ultimate aggregate percent passing remains below that of the Mathematics Test. The overall cumulative percents passing the tests are 72% for Reading and 84% for Mathematics. Note that the ultimate Reading passing rate is approximately equal to the Mathematics first-time passing rate.

FCAT Reading Retake Trends*

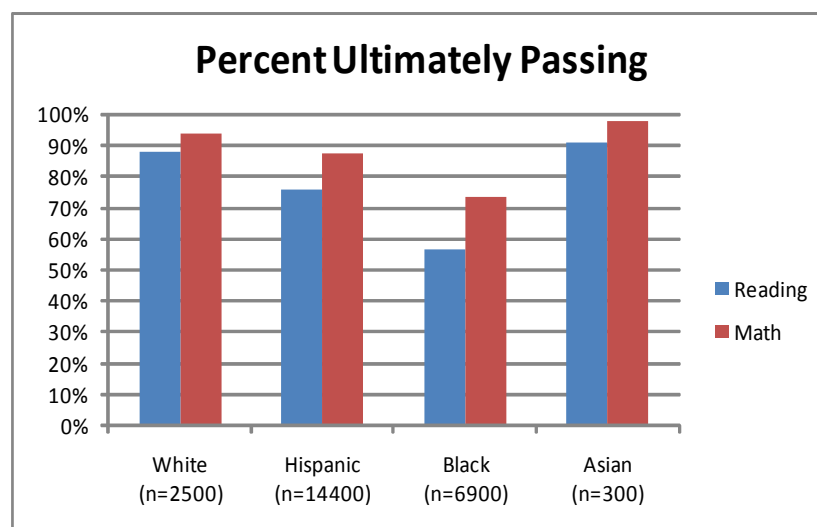
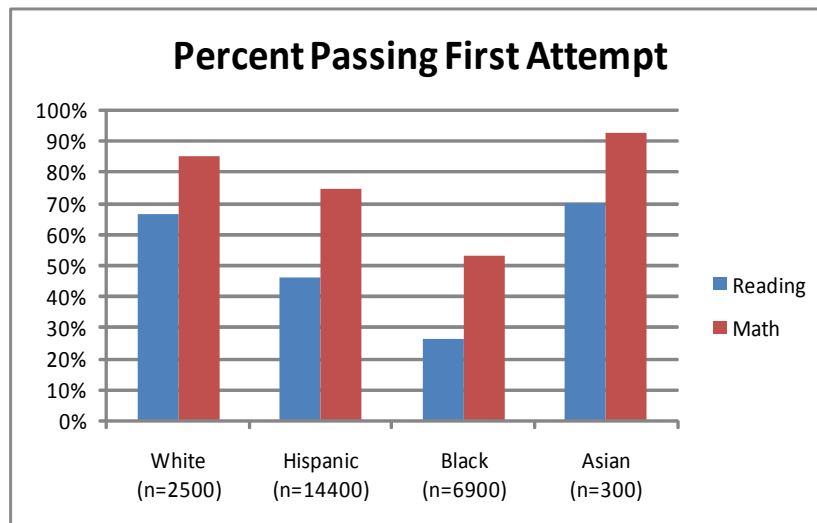


FCAT Mathematics Retake Trends*



*Percentages represent only the FCAT test-takers from the original 9th grade cohort.

The final passing rates vary quite a bit by race/ethnicity. The graphs below depict the passing rates for the first attempt and the ultimate passing rates for both tests for the major race/ethnic groups. In these graphs it is easy to see the disparity between groups, the disparity between tests, and the gains by virtue of the retakes.



Conclusions

It is apparent from this analysis that many students avail themselves of the opportunity to retake the FCAT tests. It is equally apparent that considerable benefit is derived through retaking the tests. Among the students of the entering 9th grade class who took the FCAT tests at least once, 43% pass the Reading test and 70% pass the Mathematics test on the first try. Through retakes, those numbers increase to 72% for Reading and 84% for Mathematics. Offering students multiple opportunities to retake the FCAT exams has undoubtedly served the students and the district well.