



# RESEARCH BRIEF

## Research Services

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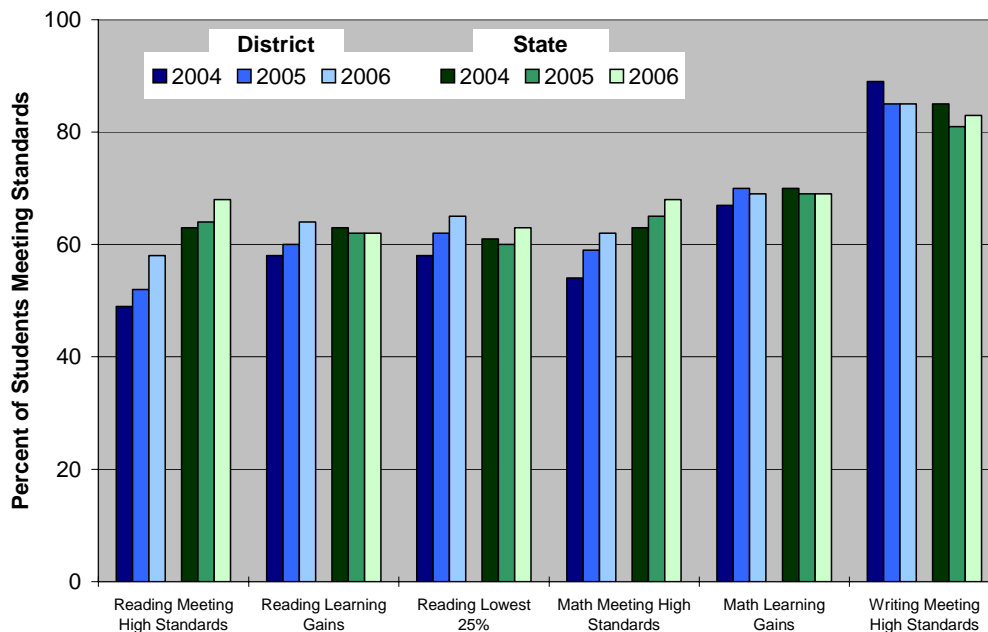
## FCAT Retrospective Trends Over the Last Three Years

### Changes in Points Earned Toward School Grades

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is the primary measure of student achievement applied to the grading of the Florida public schools. School grades utilize a point system in which schools are awarded one point for every percent of students (1) scoring in achievement levels 3-5 in Reading, (2) demonstrating learning gains in Reading, (3) in the lowest 25% of Reading making gains, (4) scoring in achievement levels 3-5 in Mathematics, (5) demonstrating learning gains in Mathematics, and (6) scoring 3.5 or above in Writing.

Each school gets points toward their school grade in direct proportion to the number of students meeting the standards in six different component areas. The graph below depicts the changes in FCAT points earned toward school grades in both the District and the State over the last three years. In all components (except Writing, where standards were raised in 2005) the District has demonstrated greater gains than the State and, in some components, exceeded the State's performance.

School Grade Points by Component -- District vs. State



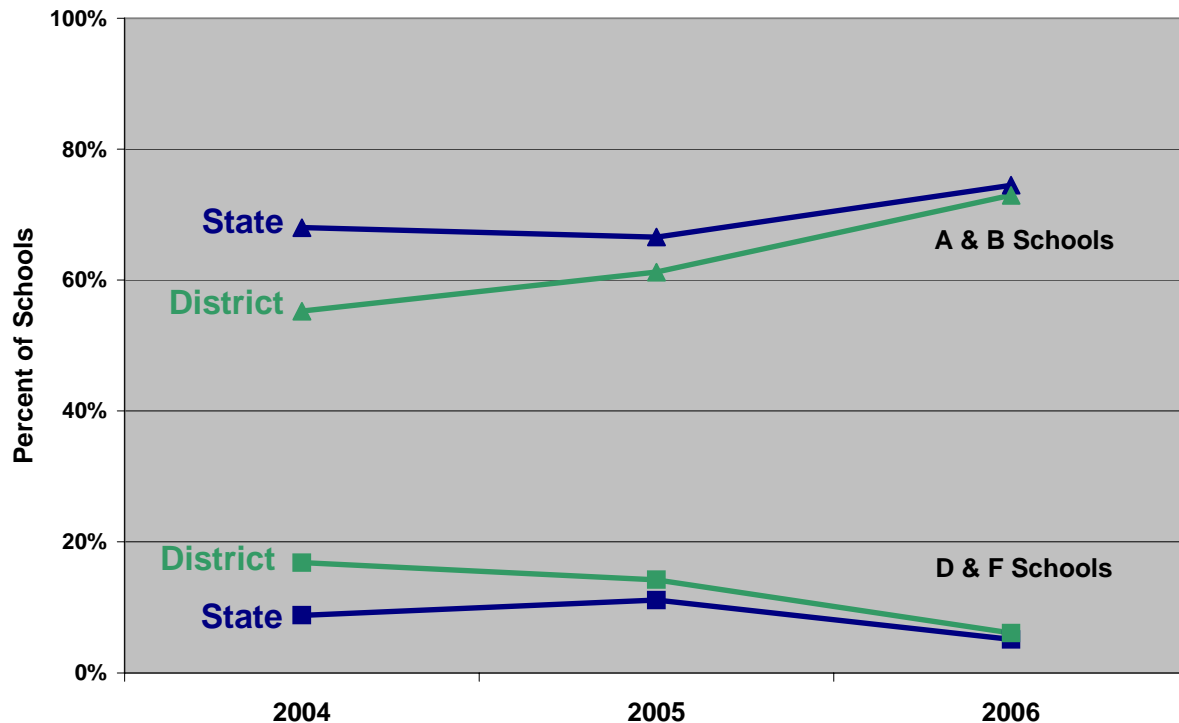
## Changes in Distribution of School Grades

The consequence of the changes in FCAT points earned toward school grades is that the distribution of grades for the District has also changed. The percentage of schools receiving an A or a B grade for the State has risen from 68 percent in 2004 to 74 percent (i.e., +6 percentage points) in 2006. Over that same time span, the percent of A or B schools in the District has climbed from 55 percent to 73 percent (i.e., +18 percentage points).

In a similar fashion, the percent of schools receiving a D or an F grade for the State has declined from 9 percent to 5 percent (i.e., -4 percentage points) between 2004 and 2006. Over the same time span, the percent of D or F schools in the District has dropped from 17 percent to 6 percent (i.e., -11 percentage points).

The result of these changes is that the District has essentially matched the distribution of grades in the State. In fact, for A schools alone, the District showing of 54 percent in 2006 exceeds the associated percentage in the State.

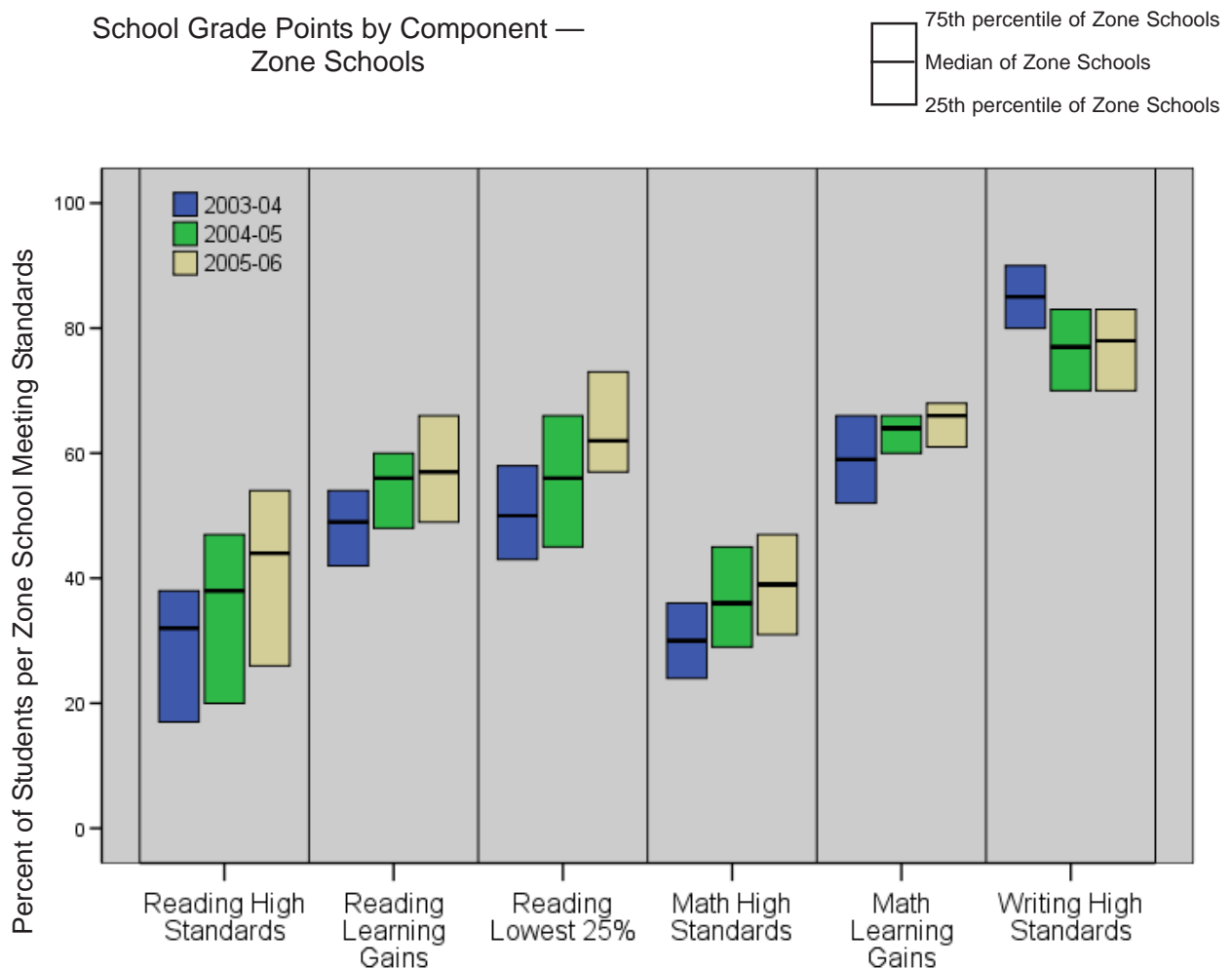
### Changes in School Grades



## Changes in Points Earned Toward School Grades in Zone Schools

At the start of the 2004 school year, 39 low performing schools were designated as members in the School Improvement Zone. These schools received special attention and extended school days in an effort to improve their performance on the FCAT.

Changes in FCAT scores from the base year of 2003-04 to 2005-06 for the zone schools are depicted in the special simplified “box plot” below. The percentage of students meeting the standards in each component of the school grading system is shown in each vertical box — representing the middle half of the distribution of those percentages across zone schools. Using this graphing technique, it is easier to see the improvement for the zone schools in each component over the three years. The only exception to the consistent improvement trend is in FCAT writing, where the standards were raised at the beginning of the 2004-05 school year.

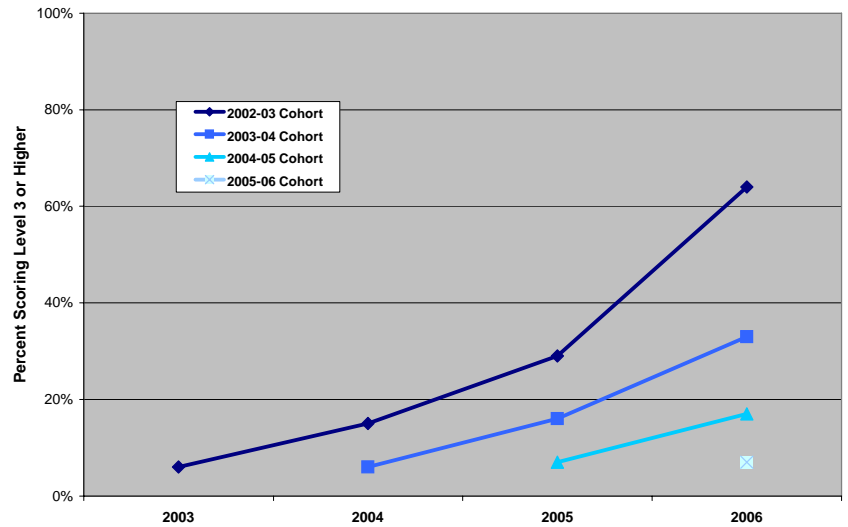


## Changes in FCAT Performance Among Students with Limited English Proficiency

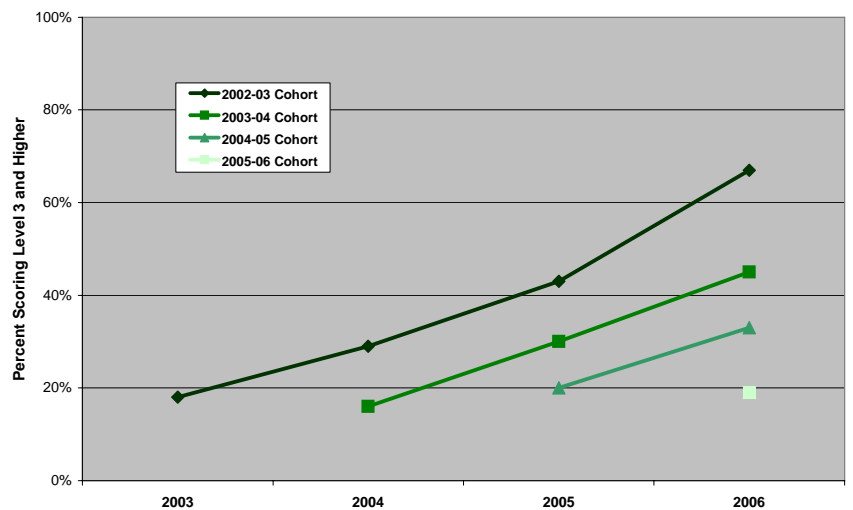
One of the factors that distinguishes the Miami-Dade school district is the relatively high proportion of students for whom English is not their native language. By breaking down the LEP student population into yearly cohort groups by the year in which students began participating in the English language program, it is possible to track the progress of students over the course of their years in the program.

As the graphs for FCAT Reading and Mathematics show, LEP students exhibit considerable progress in scoring in the higher achievement levels during their time in the program. In fact, after three years, the 2002-03 LEP cohort achievement outcomes exceeded the Florida's Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks in both Reading and Mathematics.

FCAT Reading



FCAT Mathematics



## Conclusions

It is important to exercise caution in attributing changes in student achievement to specific causes. There are a great many of potential influences on achievement and, in many cases, trends in our district seem to be paralleled by similar trends across the state.

However, the improvements observed over the past three years in achievement scores and school grades are hard to interpret as anything but substantial improvement for the district.

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