

## **Florida Council of 100 Releases Study Showing “Rigor Gap” in Florida Classrooms**

*~ Students, now more than ever, need consistent rigor in the classroom ~*

**TALLAHASSEE** – The Florida Council of 100 today announced the release of a detailed study indicating that a substantial “rigor gap” exists between the grades Florida high-school students receive and their mastery of the content required to pass the pivotal Algebra I and Grade 10 English Language Arts end-of-course (EOC) exams. The results come on the heels of last year’s substandard National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores that illustrated stagnant growth, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic school campus closures and impromptu distance learning, which have likely increased achievement gaps due to students being out of the classroom. This data is a clear sign that Florida can do more to align efforts on student growth by helping students and families in real time.

The analysis, conducted by the Council of 100 using three years of data from the Florida Department of Education, found that almost three-quarters of high school English 2 students and more than half of Algebra I students who failed the corresponding EOC exam earned a classroom grade of C or higher. Further, more than one-third of English 2 students and 12% of Algebra I students who failed the relevant EOC earned a classroom grade of B or higher. The data clearly illustrates that Florida can do better in accurately communicating academic achievement to students and their parents before it is too late to empower the students to grow and thrive in their unique scholastic ways.

This is especially vital as students return to the classroom after months of lowered academic expectations and accountability resulting from the disruptive spring e-learning experience. Although no data is available for the 2019-20 school year because of the absence of end-of-course exams after schools were shut down amid the COVID-19 crisis, Florida faces the very real risk of a widening of this rigor gap, causing large groups of students to fall even further behind.

“Our analysis concludes that if teachers, leaders, and administrators hold students accountable throughout the school year for the standards they’ll be evaluated on at the end of the year, their grades and test scores will be closely aligned,” said Chris Corr, Chair of the Council of 100. “The rigor gap we see instead indicates the contrary, the result being that students are less prepared for success at the postsecondary level or in the workplace.”

Noting that the responsibility for closing the rigor gap falls upon the system as a whole, Corr pointed to a 2010 study indicating that students tend to study 50% less when they expect teachers to award relatively higher grades, leaving them surprised by less favorable end-of-course exam scores and facing harder challenges after high school. Conversely, recent research from North Carolina found that teachers with higher grading standards improve student learning.

“It’s been said we can love someone into mediocrity, and with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now more important than ever to care to give a quality education that is driven by high expectations to each and every student in Florida, said Commissioner of Education Richard Corcoran. “The COVID-19 pandemic has likely exacerbated gaps in student achievement, so it is imperative that all students, especially low-income students, students with special needs, English Language Learners, and other struggling students are given the supports and honest learning feedback to achieve their individualized educational dreams. Governor DeSantis has created such an environment for success in our schools, delivering on promises such as record investments in teacher compensation to ensure that every child can have a great teacher,

ensuring that every child's education is aligned to great curriculum flowing from Florida's new B.E.S.T. standards, ensuring that parents have increasingly robust learning options to choose from, and that students have meaningful opportunities to connect lifelong learning skills with high-demand college and career pathways requiring a rigorous high school experience."

The Florida Department of Education further released the CARES Act and Re-Opening Florida Schools plan that outlines the beginning of record investments in clear and candid progress monitoring, and a new wave of supports for early literacy, all to help close achievement gaps. Florida school district leaders have expressed, almost universally, that they too are investing in more progress monitoring to help students recover from educational loss due to COVID-19. According to information collected by FDOE, Florida parents have consistently said that the number one aspect they would like to improve regarding testing is to receive information on how to help their child grow, in real time.

**To see the full Council of 100 report visit: <https://www.fc100.org/docs.ashx?id=684769>.**  
**To see the Q&A of the report visit: <https://www.fc100.org/docs.ashx?id=686585>.**

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### **About the Florida Council of 100**

Formed in 1961, the Florida Council of 100 is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization of business, civic, and academic leaders. It exists to improve the quality of life and economic well-being of all Floridians through the relentless pursuit of better, business-driven public policy. For more information about the Florida Council of 100, visit [fc100.org](http://fc100.org).

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