

## Crist signs bill in Fort Myers

### New law allows bad schools to be closed

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Ft. Myers News Press 6/13/2009  
By: PAT McKEE

A bill that will give the state greater authority to deal with underperforming schools was signed into law in Fort Myers on Friday by Gov. Charlie Crist.

Described as Florida's Equal Opportunity in Education Act by Rep. Tom Grady, R-Naples, its House sponsor, the new law will allow the Department of Education to shut down a traditional school and reopen it as a charter school in the most severe cases.

The signing came at the end of a nine-minute ceremony that was part of a 25-minute visit by the governor to Lee Charter Academy on Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard in Fort Myers.

"I can't say how pleased I am to be here today to sign this particular piece of legislation because what it talks about is the education of our young people," Crist said to a gathering of about 100 in the school's foyer.

Specifically, Crist said the new law provides an opportunity to have more charter schools around the state and a greater chance for parents to have the power of choice for their children.

"That's really what this is all about," he said.

Grady said the point of the law is to pursue excellence, accountability and choice. He then explained that it not only looks at school performance, but it looks at performance of students within schools.

Any severe penalties, such as state takeover of a school, would come only after multiple years of subpar performance, he said.

If that were to occur, the state could reconstitute a school with a new staff, bring in a charter school company to oversee a school or convert it to a state-run charter.

"None of those steps would be taken without the creation of and input from a local citizen's advisory board," Grady said. "The (law) is designed to give the state the authority to do those things, but it first must consult with the community.

"At the end of the day, if it's not working, we're going to fix it."

Rep. Ken Roberson, R-Port Charlotte, voted for the bill and attended the signing ceremony.

"This improves accountability and standards," he said. "As the economy recovers and we try to diversify, we need a world-class education system for our students. This is one of the steps to do that."

Lee County school board members Bob Chilmonik and Jane Kuckel said they favored the law.

"I'm supportive of accountability for our schools and ensuring that all schools perform at a high level," Chilmonik said.

Kuckel concurred on the concept of accountability but said it is unlikely to apply locally.

"This is targeted to those schools with a trend of D or F (grades) for two years or more," Kuckel said.

"We don't have any of those because we take the standards that are in place seriously."

Crist picked Lee Charter Academy for the signing because of the improvement it has shown since it opened in 2004.

This year, the school had 100 percent of its fourth and eighth graders meet grade-level standards in FCAT writing.

## New law forces Florida schools to improve -- or else

### Latest effort aims to improve performance of struggling students

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Sun-Sentinel 6/13/2009  
By: Denise-Marie Balona

Thousands of Florida public schools will have to ramp up efforts to reach their weakest students this fall or face sanctions -- including possibly replacing principals and teacher aides and paying teachers based on performance instead of experience.

The requirements are the result of a new law signed by Gov. Charlie Crist on Friday that education leaders say could foster one of the biggest changes in schools since the state started grading them in 1999.

The law penalizes schools that fail to ensure academic progress for all of their children. That's a much higher standard than the state has been using to grade all public schools each year. School grades are essentially based on how the student body performs as a whole.

Since 2003, only schools that received federal poverty money -- about one-fifth of Florida schools -- had to meet the newer, tougher federal standards, known as "adequate yearly progress." Many have repeatedly failed to reach the mark, though, and have faced a variety of controversial sanctions, including having to replace staff and transfer their students to other schools.

It's an easy mark to miss considering a school fails if even one subgroup of children, such as those learning to speak English or the severely disabled, don't do as well as the federal government says it should.

Now, state officials want to raise the bar and require all schools to meet that standard. Although some of the details still need to be worked out, thousands of A-, B- and C-rated schools will be added this summer to the group of schools that face a long list of requirements and sanctions if they fail to make enough progress two years in a row or more.

Those schools have made hefty gains over the years, said Education Commissioner Eric J. Smith.

"We have already seen tremendous results taking place in the schools that have been a part of this program since its inception, and I'm excited to be able to offer this level of support to every school that needs it," he said in a prepared statement Friday.

But Jim Warford, executive director of the Florida Association of School Administrators, said the change sets schools up for failure. The state isn't giving school districts extra money to fund improvements.

"Now we're asking them [schools] to do everything with nothing, and that's my biggest fear," Warford said.

Last school year, Florida combined its school-grading system with the federal rating system developed under No Child Left Behind. The result was a trial program that created one set of criteria.

This past spring, lawmakers decided to make the trial program permanent, plus include all public schools.

Teachers and parents throughout Florida will now want to know what it all means:

Why did lawmakers do this?

State officials say they wanted to raise standards and streamline the state and federal rating systems in Florida. It's tough to explain to parents, for instance, how their children's schools could earn a high grade from the state but still be considered failing by the federal government.

State Sen. Evelyn Lynn, R-Daytona Beach, says it's time to require the most struggling schools to offer merit pay for teachers. New U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan is pushing it nationally as a way to improve teacher quality.

Will this change the way schools are graded?

No. But a school's grade, along with a series of other factors, will help determine whether it makes adequate yearly progress.

What are the possible sanctions

Many of nearly 100 requirements of the new accountability program are not necessarily new -- the state simply combined the various state and federal rules. But some of the proposed sanctions are new to a lot of schools. For example:

*fP* Schools that don't make adequate yearly progress two years in a row will have to hire teacher aides with at least associate degrees or who have passed a state exam. Now, many schools use aides with high school diplomas.

*fP* If a school misses the mark numerous times, it might have to give performance, or merit, pay to teachers and principals. It's not clear how this would affect a teacher whose annual raise already has been established through a union collective-bargaining agreement. Such merit pay programs, though, likely would have to be negotiated through the union.

*fP* If a school consistently fails to make adequate yearly progress, it may be restructured

with a new principal and staff. Ultimately the state could close it but that would be rare.

Who opposes this?

The state teachers union fought the plan partly because it says a teachers' pay shouldn't be based mostly on how well children perform on the state exam. Some school officials say the changes, at best, will result in a paperwork nightmare. Some worry districts will have far less control over how their schools are monitored and operated. They also worry about a lack of money.

What are some of the other changes?

A key part of the new program is the expansion of help from the state Department of Education. There are now five regional directors in place from DOE who previously worked in urban districts or at struggling schools. Their job now will be to help all districts improve. Also, the law makes it easier to open charter schools as an alternative to a repeatedly low-performing school.

How many schools will be impacted in 2009-10?

No one knows yet. But the state will release new school grades and adequate yearly progress data later this month. But the requirements definitely will expand dramatically.

When will this start?

The law takes effect July 1. But the state intends to use the schools' past adequate yearly progress to determine their status for the new year. All public schools are measured annually for AYP. Until recently, only the poorest schools faced sanctions because they receive federal funding.

## Tough Challenges Ahead in U.S. Effort to Reshape Failing Schools

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Ocala Star Banner 6/2/2009  
By: SAM DILLON

CHICAGO — As chief executive of the Chicago public schools, Arne Duncan closed more than a dozen of the city's worst schools, reopening them with new principals and teachers. People who worked with him, and some who fought him, say those school turnarounds were worth the effort, but all aroused intense opposition.

"It's always painful," said David Pickens, who was Mr. Duncan's top lieutenant in the school makeover efforts here. "It's like a root canal every year."

Now Mr. Duncan, President Obama's education secretary, wants to take school turnaround efforts nationwide on a scale never tried before. In speeches and interviews, he said he would press local authorities to close thousands of the country's worst schools, the dropout factories where only a tiny fraction of students are reading at grade level, and reopen them with new staff members.

Mr. Duncan appears to have the money to drive the effort. Experts estimate the cost of overhauling a failing school at \$3 million to \$6 million. Mr. Duncan controls \$3 billion in the

economic stimulus law that could go to school turnarounds, and the administration's 2010 budget requests \$1.5 billion more.

Still, he faces many obstacles, experts said.

"Closing a school is the most difficult task any superintendent or school board can attempt, and not many succeed," said Terry Mazany, who watched Mr. Duncan's school makeovers as chief executive at the Chicago Community Trust. "But it's not impossible, and it's the right thing to do."

Mr. Duncan wants to see 250 schools closed and reconstituted next year. That would mean dismissing thousands of teachers next spring, hiring replacements and opening newly reconstituted schools in fall 2010.

Formal closure is necessary for chronically failing schools, Mr. Duncan said, to reset the learning environment more dramatically than simply tweaking the curriculum and retraining the old staff.

Eventually, he said, he hopes to see 1,000 failing schools turned around each year.

The federal government lacks the authority to close schools, so Mr. Duncan's first challenge is to persuade scores of local districts to begin school turnarounds that, judging from Chicago's experience, will anger teachers, administrators, parents and local politicians. Another challenge will be recruiting the high-quality educators crucial to helping reconstituted schools succeed.

Teachers union contracts could be another major hurdle.

The Chicago contract gives tenured teachers in schools shut down for low performance 10 months to be rehired by their reconstituted school's new leader or by another Chicago principal, after which they lose their job. (About 8 in 10 find jobs at other Chicago schools, Mr. Pickens said.) Contracts in many other cities give teachers who lose positions more extensive rights, which could make school makeovers harder, experts said.

Mr. Duncan said he had already discussed his plans with the presidents of the two national teachers unions.

"I've told them we all have to play by a different set of rules and figure out how we're going to take this on together," Mr. Duncan said.

Randi Weingarten, president of one of the unions, the American Federation of Teachers, said Mr. Duncan's focus on the worst schools was "the right strategy," but added, "What I've raised with Arne is, wholesale firing of staffs, pretending that if you just close a school and open a new one it will solve all the problems — that's the wrong way."

Mr. Duncan's initiative would seek to correct a troubling legacy of the No Child Left Behind law. The law has identified 6,000 failing schools, yet state and local authorities have left most of them to languish, neither holding their educators accountable nor helping to improve instruction.

"It's a rare thing for a state or even for districts to go so far as to close down a low-performing school," said Jack Jennings, president of the Center on Education Policy.

In Chicago, Mr. Duncan worked on eight turnarounds with the Academy for Urban School Leadership, a nonprofit group whose largest project has been remaking troubled Orr Academy High School on Chicago's West Side. Many of its 1,200 students have been incarcerated or kicked out of other schools, and its in-house day care center minds 35 babies each day while their mothers, some of them students and others teachers, are in class.

An earlier overhaul at Orr that divided it into three small high schools achieved little; Illinois's 2008 test scores showed that 9 percent of students were proficient in reading and math. So Chicago's announcement last year that the school would be overhauled again set off protests.

One opponent was the Rev. Charlie Walker, minister of a nearby Baptist church, who said he and the neighborhood had not been properly consulted.

"I became an attacker," Mr. Walker said. "I went at them like a lawn mower goes after grass."

The turnaround went ahead anyway.

Research has shown that teacher quality and a principal's leadership are key factors in raising student achievement, said Don Feinstein, executive director of the Academy for Urban School Leadership. So his group sorted through scores of résumés before picking Jammie Poole, a Memphis educator, as Orr's new principal.

Mr. Poole recruited a new instructional staff that included some strong teachers at Orr who had reapplied for their jobs.

After the three small schools at Orr closed last June, it got new science laboratories, and Mr. Poole organized teachers to work in teams and scheduled regular quizzes to help identify concepts that students had not yet mastered. Instructional coaches help teachers use the data.

Orr's school culture got an overhaul, too. Students wear black and gold uniforms. Parents participate in hallway patrols. Every adult, including cooks, meets regularly with 12 students to track academic progress.

Orr's turnaround will cost about \$6 million over five years. Nine months after it reopened, there has been a sea change in neighborhood attitudes. After Mr. Poole invited him to tour the school, Mr. Walker became a convert.

"They're the best leadership team that's been in the school in the last 12 to 15 years," Mr. Walker said.

Still, it remains unclear whether the changes will sharply raise student achievement. Eighteen months ago, Bryan Hassel, a Harvard-trained education consultant, reviewed conditions in half a dozen Chicago schools that had been turned around.

"I was favorably impressed with some of the schools, and not with others," Mr. Hassel said. "It was a mixed picture."

In the corporate world, Mr. Hassel said, turnaround efforts transform failing businesses only about 25 percent to 30 percent of the time.

"A lot of these school turnarounds are going to fail because the work is so difficult," Mr. Hassel said. "But as a nation, we'll never have the capacity to do this work successfully until we make the commitment."

## Cautious optimism at Broward school

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Miami Herald 5/29/2009

By: JOSE PAGLIERY AND KATHLEEN McGRORY

Larkdale Elementary's third, fourth and fifth graders cheered when principal Valoria Latson delivered the news Thursday afternoon:

Their math FCAT scores were much better than last year, Latson told the children.

A wave of relief washed over 12-year-old Fabriana Jones.

"Now, we're accomplished," said the fifth grader, who previously feared her Fort Lauderdale school would be shut down.

On Thursday, principals across the state found out how their students fared on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests.

It was an especially pivotal moment for Larkdale and four other South Florida schools at risk of closing if they don't lift their school grade from an F to at least a D. Larkdale faces the challenge of lifting its grade to a C.

State education officials pumped millions of dollars into the schools, hoping to see dramatic improvement on the state tests.

### NEW PRINCIPAL

Each school received a new principal and a plethora of academic coaches, tutors and master teachers.

The students also attended Saturday classes.

The state Department of Education won't release school grades until this summer. But principals can use individual student scores to estimate what grade their school will receive.

Larkdale Elementary's administrators combed through test data Thursday while students met with firefighters and professional athletes during the school's first career day in seven years. Thoughts of respective futures hung high in the air.

By noon, several improvements were apparent: The percentage of fourth graders who passed the FCAT math portion went up by a whopping 24 percentage points. For reading, the jump was 20 percentage points.

"We're hopeful," assistant principal Clarissa Coddington said.

However, the same was not true for all fifth graders: The percentage of students who passed the reading and science sections dipped by 6 percentage points.

But administrators didn't tell students about the decline. The students and teachers had a weight on their shoulders all year and they needed to bask in the good news, Coddington said.

#### ` LOT OF EFFORT'

Fifth grader Jasmine Smith did, cheering and clapping when she heard Latson make the announcement.

"It took a lot of effort for us to do it," Jasmine said. `` I wasn't surprised because we worked hard and gave it our all."

Broward Superintendent Jim Notter praised the students for doing a `` really awesome job."

"It proves that all children can learn regardless of their ZIP code," Notter said.

Students at Liberty City and Holmes elementaries in Miami made eye-popping gains in reading and math. Both are expected to raise their school grades.

Liberty City principal Tamme Y. Williams said teachers and students had carefully studied their weaknesses, strengths and progress.

"If you don't know how you're going to get where you're going, then you can't get there," she said.

#### CENTRAL HIGH

At Miami Central Senior High, scores surged in nearly every subject.

"Based on what I'm seeing, I'm confident that we've moved the grade at least one letter," principal Doug Rodriguez said. `` We're hoping to move it higher, though."

But at Edison Senior High, students continued to struggle. While some of the scores held steady from last year, others tumbled.

"Edison continues to be a point of major concern for us," said Miami-Dade Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, pledging additional support for the Little Haiti school.

It was not clear if Edison would improve its grade from an F to a D. But Carvalho said the school would remain open next year.

State Commissioner of Education Eric Smith praised the five South Florida schools for their courage.

"There were changes made in some of these school that were unpopular," Smith said. `` But people chose to do what they thought was in the best interest of children."

He added: `` I can't say loudly enough how proud I am of these schools."

Miami Herald staff writer Hannah Sampson contributed to this report.

## Miami Central High, others make major gains

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Miami Herald 5/29/2009

By: KATHLEEN McGRORY AND JOSE PAGLIERY

After five straight years of Fs, the students and faculty at Miami Central Senior High finally got the news they were hoping to hear.

"I can tell you, students and teachers, that the F is in the rear view mirror," principal Doug Rodriguez announced Thursday, after poring over the school's FCAT scores.

The message prompted students to clap and cheer.

"We made a miracle happen," said Destiny Greene, 16.

On Thursday, principals across the state found out how their students fared on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests.

The state Department of Education won't release school grades until this summer. But principals can use individual student scores to estimate what grade their school will receive.

### PIVOTAL MOMENT

It was an especially pivotal moment for Miami Central and four other South Florida schools that were at risk of closing if they didn't lift their school grade from an F to at least a D.

State education officials pumped millions of dollars into the schools, hoping to see dramatic improvement on the state tests.

Each school received a new principal and a plethora of academic coaches, tutors and master teachers. The students also attended Saturday classes.

At Central, scores surged in nearly every subject.

"Based on what I'm seeing, I'm confident that we've moved the grade at least one letter," Rodriguez said. ``We're hoping to move it higher, though."

Additionally, students at Liberty City and Holmes elementaries in Miami made eye-popping gains in reading and math. Both are expected to raise their school grades.

Liberty City principal Tamme Y. Williams said teachers and students had carefully studied their weaknesses, strengths and progress.

"If you don't know how you're going to get where you're going, then you can't get there," she said.

At Edison Senior High, however, students continued to struggle. While some of the scores held steady from last year, others tumbled.

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It was not clear if Edison would improve from an F to a D. But Carvalho said the school

would remain open.

Broward County's lone school in danger of closing, Larkdale Elementary in Fort Lauderdale, improved in reading and math, but dipped in science.

Broward Superintendent Jim Notter praised the students for doing a ``really awesome job."

"It proves that all children can learn regardless of their ZIP code," Notter said.

State Commissioner of Education Eric Smith praised the five South Florida schools for their courage.

"There were changes made in some of these school that were unpopular," Smith said. ``But people chose to do what they thought was in the best interest of children."

He added: ``I can't say loudly enough how proud I am of these schools."

#### WORST RECORD

With a slate of failing grades from the state, Central was considered the school with the worst academic record in Florida.

Rodriguez became principal in December, giving him just weeks to prepare his students for the exams.

He hadn't eaten for three days before seeing the scores, he said. He hadn't been able to sleep much, either.

He arrived at school at 4:30 a.m. Thursday, eager to see how his students had performed. Later in the morning, he and a group of administrators gathered in a small room in the library, calculators and highlighters in hand. They spent hours studying the scores.

A proud Rodriguez announced the good news to the students in the early afternoon.

It came as a relief to sophomore Edline Demajuste.

"We really, really tried hard this year," said Demajuste, 16. ``We didn't give up."

After school, Carvalho held an impromptu news conference in the school library.

"Central Senior High will always be Rocket Country," Carvalho said, referring to the nickname of the school's athletic teams and drawing applause from students. ``This is hallowed ground. . . This school shall not be closed."

Miami Herald staff writer Hannah Sampson contributed to this report.

## Failing schools draw focus of state board

TALLAHASSEE - The State Board of Education unanimously approved intervention plans Tuesday for closing one school and revamping 11 with the worst student achievement records in Florida.

The plans will kick in at the schools still operating if they fail to get off the critical list after the state issues its school grades later this year. The steps include firing principals and removing or reassigning teachers or requiring that they reapply for jobs. Other actions include increased funding and staffing such as more reading, math and science coaches.

Tallahassee's Belle Vue Middle School will be closed at the end of the school year. The state Department of Education already has sent in support teams to offer recommendations and advice for pre-intervention programs at the other 11 schools, which are in six counties.

"They still have some challenges that they're continuing to work on, but overall all the schools are mending," said Iris Wilson, the department's deputy chancellor for student achievement.

The intervention plans submitted by local school boards are part of an experimental program called differentiated accountability designed to help Florida schools comply with the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Florida is one of six states the federal government approved to participate in the pilot program. It combines state and federal school grading systems and is aimed at focusing outside assistance where it is most needed.

Most Florida schools have failed to make adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind although three-fourths of the schools earned A's or B's on their state report cards.

The state grades are based on how well students do on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, or FCAT. Students have been taking the standardized test this month. Before differentiated accountability, a school had to meet up to 39 No Child Left Behind criteria and missing just one might be enough to get a failing grade.

Schools on the intervention list have received D's and F's from the state for the past couple years. A school must get a D or higher from the state and improve in at least one No Child Left Behind math or reading subgroup or its intervention plan will go into effect.

To get completely off the intervention list, a school has to get at least a C from the state and improve in two No Child Left Behind subgroups.

One of the intervention plans is for Warrington Middle School near Pensacola in Escambia County.

Paul Fetsko, Escambia's assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, praised state education officials who have been helping get the school turned around.

"Everything that was said and everything that was promised was done," Fetsko said. "There was never a tone of punitiveness. It was cooperation. It was facilitation. It was 'We will help you be better as long as you'll take our help.'"

Four of the intervention schools are in Miami-Dade County: Holmes Elementary, Liberty City Elementary, Miami Edison Senior High and Miami Central Senior High.

Three are in Hillsborough County: Franklin Middle Magnet, Middleton High and Sulpher Springs Elementary.

The others are Mollie E. Ray Elementary in Orange County, Larkdale Elementary in Broward County and John F. Kennedy Middle in Palm Beach County.

Belle Vue's students will be monitored at their new schools for at least a year to see how they do, Wilson said.

## Three of Florida's most low-performing schools are in Palm Beach and Broward counties

### Massive effort to fix them will begin

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Sun-Sentinel 7/30/2008

By: Marc Freeman

Florida education officials Tuesday identified the state's 13 most critically low-performing schools according to new federally sanctioned guidelines. Two are in Palm Beach County and one is in Broward.

Under fire for years of "persistent failure" are John F. Kennedy Middle in Riviera Beach, Lake Shore Annex alternative school in Belle Glade and Larkdale Elementary in Fort Lauderdale, state Education Commissioner Eric J. Smith said.

The branding of the 13 troubled schools — and the start of massive efforts to correct them — is part of a new program that aligns the state's school grading system with the Adequate Yearly Progress requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

The schools would be closed and later reopened in a different form if they show no significant progress despite numerous interventions in the upcoming school year, according to the program called Differentiated Accountability.

In a conference call with reporters, Smith said the program also was designed to give higher-performing schools credit for meeting at least 80 percent of federal standards and receiving A, B and C grades from the state, based on Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test results.

Until now, those schools with just a few areas of concern could have faced the same harsh sanctions as schools with major deficiencies.

"This new program allows state and federal accountability systems to work in a complementary fashion, and gives Florida the flexibility it needs to help schools improve their performance," Smith said, adding that hundreds of millions of dollars of federal funds and various grants will support the initiative.

The 13 critically low-performing schools are in a category called Intervene. These are D- or F-rated schools that also meet criteria including more than 65 percent of students lacking proficiency in reading and math, and showing the same percentages of low-performing students since 2003.

In Broward, D-rated Larkdale Elementary is among the state's most critical. It received an F in 2005 and 2007.

Broward Schools Superintendent James Notter said he was cautiously optimistic about the state's new accountability program, but added "it's very early. There are unknowns in [the plan]."

Whether the pilot plan works will depend on how it is implemented, Notter said. But he believes Commissioner Smith has been building trust and communicating well with district superintendents around the state.

Staff Writer Kathy Bushouse contributed to this report. Marc Freeman can be reached at [mjfreeman@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:mjfreeman@sun-sentinel.com) or 561-243-6642.

#### School check

Search our database to find your school's grades for 2008 and each year since the 1998-1999 school year at [Sun-Sentinel.com/schools](http://Sun-Sentinel.com/schools)

## Florida begins No Child Left Behind pilot program

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Ft. Myers News Press 7/30/2008  
By: AP

TALLAHASSEE -- A pilot program designed to help Florida schools meet assessment criteria under the federal No Child Left Behind Act began Tuesday.

In the last school year, three-quarters of Florida's public schools failed to meet adequate yearly progress under the federal law. That's in sharp contrast to the state's own grading system, which gave nearly three-fourths of the schools grades of A and B.

A key difference is that each school must meet up to 39 criteria under the federal program and missing just one can be enough to fail.

The state's grades are based on a single criteria - how well a school's students perform on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, or FCAT.

"This new program allows state and federal accountability systems to work in a complementary fashion," said Florida Education Commissioner Eric J. Smith. He said it also gives Florida more flexibility to help schools improve.

Florida is one of six states the U.S. Department of Education has selected to take part in the experiment known as the differential accountability program.

Schools have been placed into one of five improvement categories based on their state grade, the percentage of federal criteria they meet and the number of years they failed to

achieve adequate yearly progress.

The lowest ranking schools will get the most support services such as school improvement planning, teacher training, tutoring, school choice for students and curriculum alignment.

Thirteen schools have been identified as needing the most intensive actions such as restructuring or closure. Four are in Miami-Dade County, three in Hillsborough County, two in Palm Beach County and one each in Broward, Escambia, Leon and Orange counties.

## Feds find fault with 17 Lee County schools

### At least one showed FCAT improvement

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Ft. Myers News Press 7/30/2008  
By: Jason Wermers

Orange River Elementary in Fort Myers received a "B" from the state this year, up from a "C" last year, based on its FCAT performance.

That means the school is doing a good job of teaching math, reading, writing and science. Parents agree.

But the federal government doesn't.

Orange River is one of 17 schools in Lee County - and 1,081 schools across the state - that will be subject to varying levels of state and district intervention because it did not meet a standard set by the No Child Left Behind Act, according to the Florida Department of Education.

Only 13 Florida schools - none in Lee - will get the most severe actions, restructuring or closing, this year. In Lee County, Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres and Alternative Learning Center Central middle schools, Michigan International Academy and East Lee County High are among 421 schools across Florida that will receive closer state and district monitoring, including visits from state education officials.

The federal standard includes Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests performance, but it also takes a closer look at students of different races and ethnicities, those who speak little or no English, who live in low-income households, or who have disabilities. A school misses the federal grade if even one of these groups falls short on grade-level reading and math tests.

Orange River made 87 percent of the federal criteria. But the school's disabled students fell short on reading and math FCATs. Hispanic and low-income students fell short on math tests.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Education granted Florida and five other states the ability to be more lenient with schools that are close to making the federal grade.

"We look at this as an opportunity to move forward with the continuous improvement model we have already," said Sheryl Clark, director of intervention programs for the Lee County School District. "There are some differences we need to address right off the bat. But as a

general rule, it fits nicely with what we already have."

Marty Neubert, 48, of Fort Myers, said Orange River doesn't deserve the negative federal rating.

"They increased their letter grade this year," said Neubert, who has had two sons spend their elementary years at Orange River, including his younger son, who finished fifth grade in June. "Everyone put forth such an effort to improve the school. It's a shame that they have to get scolded, basically."

Another school that almost made the federal grade is Harns Marsh Elementary in Lehigh Acres, which the state gave an "A" this year.

Principal Charles Luckey said he plans to make sure teachers have more training, and students who struggled the most with FCAT exams will get more attention.

"We'll continue to reintensify our efforts," Luckey said. "We'll have small-group instruction, tutoring outside the school day and whatever technological infusion we can bring to them to make learning more fun and more active for them."

## Federal pilot program to help 18 Treasure Coast schools

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Stuart News 7/30/2008

By: Kelly Tyko

Eighteen Treasure Coast public schools will receive additional support and corrective measures to help their students meet federal and state education standards.

On Tuesday, the state Department of Education released details of a federal pilot program and classified Florida's 1,081 schools in need of improvement into five categories based on the schools' letter grades and other criteria.

Florida is one of six states that the U.S. Department of Education has selected to participate in a federal school improvement pilot program, which offers the states flexibility and softens how the 2002 federal school accountability law, No Child Left Behind, works. Critics have complained the old plan was too rigid and it treated schools the same regardless of whether they miss the mark by a little or a lot.

"Just scanning it, it looks like it's everything we've already done up to this point," Mary Krause, executive director of Title I for St. Lucie County Schools, said of the 132-page state report that outlines intervention and support plans.

Under No Child Left Behind, schools receiving federal money — known as Title I schools — to help teach low-income students must show "adequate yearly progress" or AYP on state standardized tests. Only Title I schools face sanctions for not meeting the standards and performance targets for specific groups of students.

Under the old plan, those schools with just a few problems could have faced the same harsh sanctions as schools with major deficiencies and schools that failed to make AYP for five or more years were forced to undergo major overhauls, including new principals, curriculum changes, teacher training and extra testing.

The pilot program gives schools credit for meeting at least 80 percent of federal standards

and receiving A, B and C grades from the state. The new program assigns schools not making AYP into three divisions: prevention, correction and intervene. Then, the prevention and correction categories are divided into subgroups based on the school's letter grade, percentage of adequate yearly progress requirements met, and the number of years a school has not made progress.

Nine of the 18 Treasure Coast schools are in the first phase of the correct category and two schools are in the first phase of prevent. The seven local schools in the second phases of the correct and prevent categories are St. Lucie schools.

Fran Adams, Indian River County's assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, said the state is becoming more specific in what schools that don't make adequate yearly progress are required to do. She said the district has implemented most of the state's requirements already at its three Title I schools.

Adams said the district is pleased with the improvement made by its three Title I schools this year, and doesn't think complying with the new program will be difficult.

"I think we're going to be fine with what they are asking us to do," she said.

Staff writer Colleen Wixon and the South Florida Sun-Sentinel contributed to this report.

#### SCHOOLS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT

Here are the Treasure Coast schools in need of improvement and the improvement category the state has classified them in:

#### INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

- Fellsmere Elementary: Correct I
- St. Peter's Academy: Prevent I
- Vero Beach Elementary: Correct I

#### MARTIN COUNTY

- Indiantown Middle: Correct I
- J. D. Parker School Of Technology: Correct I
- Port Salerno Elementary: Prevent I

#### ST. LUCIE COUNTY

- Chester A. Moore K-7 School: Correct I
- Dale Cassens Educational Center: Correct II
- Forest Grove Middle: Correct II
- Fort Pierce Westwood High: Prevent II

- Garden City Elementary: Correct II
- Indian Hills: Prevent II
- Lakewood Park Elementary: Correct I
- Lawnwood Elementary: Correct I
- Samuel S. Gaines Academy K-8: Prevent II
- St. Lucie Elementary: Correct I
- Weatherbee Elementary: Correct I
- White City Elementary: Correct II

#### SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT CATEGORIES

Here are the five categories or improvement levels the state has classified the schools in need of improvement into.

**Prevent I:** These schools have a school grade of A, B or C, meet at least 80 percent of AYP criteria and have been in need of improvement for three years or less. These schools decide which interventions meet their needs and the district provides assistance.

**Correct I:** These schools are in at least their fourth year of needing improvement and meet at least 80 percent of AYP criteria. Interventions are directed and monitored by the district.

**Prevent II:** These schools are in at least in their fourth year of needing improvement, meet less than 80 percent of the AYP criteria, have a school grade of D or F. Interventions are directed and monitored by the district and the state.

**Correct II:** These schools are at least in their fourth year of needing improvement, meet less than 80 percent of the AYP criteria, have a school grade of D or F or are repeating F schools. Interventions are directed and monitored by the district and state.

**Intervene:** A total of 13 schools are considered the most critically low-performing schools and graded D or F. These schools have not increased student performance or have four or more F grades since 2003. The state intervenes in the operation of these schools.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION :** A To view detailed information about the state's pilot program and its five improvement categories, go to [www.fldoe.org/news/2008/2008\\_07\\_29/diffaccountimplem.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/news/2008/2008_07_29/diffaccountimplem.pdf). For a complete list of the 1,081 Florida schools in need of improvement, go to [http://www.fldoe.org/news/2008/2008\\_07\\_29/2008DAList.xls](http://www.fldoe.org/news/2008/2008_07_29/2008DAList.xls). To learn more about the federal Differentiated Accountability pilot program, visit [www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2008/07/07012008.html](http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2008/07/07012008.html).

## State Program Aids Struggling Pasco Schools

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Tampa Tribune 7/30/2008  
By: RONNIE BLAIR

LAND O' LAKES - Eighteen Pasco County schools in need of improvement will receive additional support services from the state under a federal pilot program launched Tuesday by the Florida Department of Education.

Statewide, 1,081 schools are to receive support under the program, which focuses on schools that need improvement because they failed to meet adequate yearly progress two or more years in a row under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

The amount of support services will vary. Schools were placed into five categories based on their state-assigned letter grade, percentage of adequate yearly progress requirements met and the number of years they failed to achieve adequate yearly progress.

Seven Pasco elementary schools were listed as Prevent I, the least restrictive category. They are Sunray, Gulf Highlands, Locke, Richey, Fox Hollow, Giella and Shady Hills.

Prevent I schools have letter grades of A, B or C under the state grading system and meet at least 80 percent of progress criteria. They get to direct their own intervention, with assistance from the district and monitoring by the state.

Marlowe, Chasco, Schrader, Moon Lake, West Zephyrhills, Northwest and Hudson elementary schools were categorized as Correct I schools.

Correct I schools are planning for or implementing restructuring because they failed to meet progress marks several years in a row. They also have letter grades of A, B or C and meet at least 80 percent of progress criteria. The school district will direct and monitor the interventions for those schools, and the Department of Education will review their progress.

One school - Ridgewood High - was categorized as Prevent II. Schools in that category meet less than 80 percent of progress criteria. All Title I D and F schools and all non-Title I D schools also are included. Ridgewood is a non-Title I D school. The school district will direct the school's intervention and provide assistance.

Three elementary schools - Cox, Pasco and Lacochee - were categorized as Correct II schools. Correct II schools are planning for or implementing restructuring and meet less than 80 percent of progress criteria. All Title I D and F schools and all non-Title I F schools are also included. Cox is a D school. The county has no F schools.

For Correct II schools, the school and the district implement interventions that are directed by the state.

Florida was one of six states chosen for the pilot program by the U.S. Department of Education.

## Struggling schools will get help Brevard taking part in pilot federal program

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Florida Today 7/16/2008  
By: MEGAN DOWNS

As many as 27 schools serving low-income students in Brevard County will benefit from a pilot program designed to help schools that receive passing grades from the state, but fail to meet federal education standards.

Despite more A grades than ever this year, Brevard Public Schools failed to make adequately yearly progress, known as AYP -- the designator of success -- under the No Child Left Behind law.

That's because even if the school population as a whole met reading, math and writing standards, if one subgroup of students -- such as black, Hispanic or disabled students -- didn't meet the target standard, the whole school was marked as failing under the federal guidelines.

In the past, that would have led to penalties such as restructuring the school, including changing the principal and teachers, as well as overhauling the curriculum.

But the pilot program allows schools to target their remediation efforts at the children who need it most, without disrupting the students who were making learning gains.

"The plan enables us to focus on specific students' needs rather than enforcing global reform," said Teresa Wright, director of Title I programs for Brevard Public Schools. "It allows us to work smarter instead of harder and target resources where they need to be."

Florida was one of six states selected to test the pilot program.

Twenty-seven Title I schools in Brevard didn't make AYP but received an A or B grade from the state Department of Education.

Although every school is tested, only those receiving Title I funds for serving high percentages of low-income students face penalties.

Many schools in the county met 97 percent of the federal criteria, but still failed to make adequate progress.

Under the pilot program, the state will classify schools that don't make progress into three improvement levels -- preventive, corrective and intensive -- based on the school's letter grade, percentage of annual yearly progress requirements met and the number of years the school has not made progress.

Wright said the pilot program provides a welcome alternative to forced restructuring, which doesn't always work.

Schools such as Endeavour Elementary in Cocoa underwent a major restructuring after five consecutive years of AYP failure.

The school, which serves a high percentage of low-income and disabled students, had seen measured growth, but not enough to make AYP.

Endeavour, which received a B this year, only met 69 percent of the criteria outlined in AYP standards.

"I'd like to think Endeavour was a catalyst for the state to take a look and realize that we need to be smart about this," Wright said.

Also under No Child Left Behind, schools that fail federal standards for multiple years must allow students to transfer to another school.

The new pilot project likely will mean fewer students transferring to different schools, Wright said. More than 140 Brevard Public Schools students opted to attend better-performing schools this past year, the largest number of transfer requests since students were given the option under the federal law.

Even with the pilot project, though, some parents at Title I schools were notified in May that they would have the option to switch schools.

Other highlights:

Columbia, Golfview and South Lake elementary schools have not made AYP for two consecutive years. They will be placed in a "needs improvement" category.

Seven schools had no AYP sanctions because of their pattern of AYP achievement.

Contact Downs at 242-3549 or [mdowns@floridatoday.com](mailto:mdowns@floridatoday.com).

## State eases rules for troubled Broward, Palm Beach County schools

### Plan helps them avoid 'restructuring'

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Sun-Sentinel 7/3/2008

By: Marc Freeman and Kathy Bushouse

Sixty Palm Beach and Broward County schools facing serious federal sanctions may be catching a break.

The Florida Department of Education on Wednesday announced that state schools will have new flexibility with the Adequate Yearly Progress requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

It means that schools unable to make Adequate Yearly Progress, or AYP, for five or more years can avoid a dreaded "restructuring" status. The new system enables schools to be placed in a less drastic "corrective" category if they can meet at least 80 percent of federal standards.

"Under this pilot program, schools in Florida that miss a few AYP criteria can easily be distinguished from schools exhibiting widespread areas of deficiency," Education Commissioner Eric J. Smith said in a statement. "This will give us more flexibility in our improvement and intervention strategies for these schools."

Four Palm Beach County schools were restructured last year, and 33 were at risk this year. The four restructured schools got new principals and had to follow a blueprint for instruction, including curriculum changes, teacher training and testing.

No Broward schools were in restructuring last year, but 27 schools faced an overhaul in 2008-09. Broward Superintendent James Notter lauded the new rules.

"It's certainly not a cure-all. However, it's truly a very enlightening first step," he said.

The program will allow school districts to craft more individual remedial programs for schools and students, "not taking a hatchet and just hacking away at it," Notter said.

The state plans to announce AYP results and the much-anticipated school letter grades within two weeks. Both measures are drawn from student performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, administered in February and March.

After the results, the state will place schools into one of three new AYP slots — preventive, corrective or intensive — under the new program, spokesman Tom Butler said.

Pompano Beach Elementary School was planning for restructuring and trying to avoid sanctions under the old system.

The school, which earned a B grade in 2007, met 90 percent of its AYP benchmarks last year. Principal Garie Rose said the new flexibility is welcome news on the campus, where nearly three-quarters of the school's students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

"We'll maintain our B at least," Rose said. "But it's the AYP that always has us worried."

Educators across Florida have been frustrated, and parents confused, because it had been possible for a school to get an A or B grade and still fail as far as the federal government was concerned.

## Eight struggling Treasure Coast schools may get reprieve

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Jupiter Courier 7/3/2008

By: Kelly Tyko

Eight Treasure Coast public schools that were facing possible makeovers in August for failing to make adequate yearly progress for five consecutive years might have been given a reprieve.

The schools, as well as others in Florida and five other states, are part of an experimental pilot program that could resolve differences in how schools are graded by the federal government versus states.

The pilot program that state officials announced Wednesday could affect the eight Treasure Coast public schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test for five consecutive years and are at risk for being restructured.

Under the 2002 federal school accountability law, No Child Left Behind, Title I schools that receive federal money to help teach low-income students must show adequate yearly progress on state standardized tests.

"This will give us more flexibility in our improvement and intervention strategies for these schools, and allow our state and federal accountability systems to work in a complementary fashion," Florida Education Commissioner Eric J. Smith said in a news release.

The federal law uses the FCAT to measure whether students pass education standards and sets strict performance targets for schools and specific groups of students, including minorities, low-income students, students with limited English skills and students with disabilities. If even one group fails, the entire school fails.

Statewide, about 450 schools, including the six St. Lucie County and two Martin County schools, did not meet adequate progress for five consecutive years and had to submit a restructuring plan to the state in March. The restructuring plans were expected to become effective in August if the schools didn't make progress based on the last school year's FCAT.

Each state has its own guidelines and a different test to comply with the federal act.

"Florida has some of the toughest criteria in the country and tough should not be equated with good," St. Lucie County Schools Superintendent Michael Lannon said.

Under the state's pilot program, the state will classify schools that don't make progress into three different improvement levels — preventive, corrective and intensive — based on the school's letter grade, percentage of annual yearly progress requirements met, and the number of years it has not made progress.

Florida schools designated as intensive "require the most intensive intervention methods such as restructuring and closure," according to a news release.

"I think it's a step in the right direction," Lannon said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

#### LOCAL SCHOOLS THAT COULD BE AFFECTED

Here are the Treasure Coast Title I schools that had to submit restructuring plans to the state in March because they failed to meet adequate yearly progress for five consecutive years:

##### ST. LUCIE COUNTY

- C.A. Moore Elementary
- Forest Grove Middle School
- Lakewood Park Elementary School
- St. Lucie Elementary School
- Weatherbee Elementary School

- White City Elementary School

#### MARTIN COUNTY

- Indiantown Middle School

- J.D. Parker School of Science, Math & Technology

Six states were selected to participate in a federal school improvement pilot including Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Illinois, Maryland and Ohio. This gives the states more flexibility under the No Child Left Behind Act.

- The pilot program allows Florida to create a tiered approach to address required interventions for Title I schools that have not made adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act for two or more years.

- With the pilot program, Florida Title I schools that do not make progress are classified into three main improvement levels based on the school's letter grade, percentage of adequate yearly progress requirements met and the number of years it has not made progress.

- Title I schools face increasing levels of "corrective measures" based on the number of consecutive years they fail to meet annual yearly progress. Before the pilot, the actions were the same regardless of the percentage of criteria a school meets or what grade it received under Florida's A-plus plan.

## New flexibility to No Child law

Florida is part of a pilot program that offers a reprieve to some schools

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Sarasota Herald Tribune 7/2/2008

By: Tiffany Lankes and Christopher O'Donnell

Hundreds of Florida schools — - including eight in Manatee and Sarasota — will be spared the drastic reorganization called for in the federal No Child Left Behind law.

The U.S. Department of Education announced Tuesday that Florida would be one of six states to pilot a program that allows schools in compliance with most areas of the law to face less stringent penalties. The other states are Georgia, Indiana, Illinois, Maryland and Ohio.

No Child calls for schools that have been out of compliance five years in a row to be taken over by the state or turned over to private companies. But with Tuesday's change, most of those schools will instead be able to choose less severe options, such as hiring consultants or offering more teacher training.

"You have to be able to demonstrate you are making improvements," said Sarasota Schools Superintendent Lori White. "But it is certainly not to the extent of some of the things included in the original law."

State education officials said the change allows them to focus attention on schools that need the most help. It will also prevent Florida from imposing harsh penalties on schools that may not need them.

More than 400 schools were on track to be reorganized this year under the law. With the changes, just seven of the state's poorest-performing schools could be closed or reorganized.

"Sometimes a school that barely misses making adequate yearly progress falls under the same judgment as a school that misses the majority of the criteria," said Juan Copa, a Florida Department of Education official. "It would allow us to move away from a one-size-fits-all model."

Along with the eight schools that faced complete overhauls in Manatee and Sarasota counties, eight others in the area face penalties this year and will benefit from the changes to the law, which aims to have all students proficient in reading and math by 2014.

In Florida, schools must have a certain percentage of students meeting state reading and math goals each year. They must meet the goals both overall and among eight different groups of students that reflect race, income and disabilities. If they miss the targets in just one of the groups, schools are considered out of compliance.

Last year, just 33 percent of Florida schools met the standards. Schools that get federal funding because most of their students are poor are penalized by having to pay for things like transportation to other schools or tutoring. Each year the penalties get stiffer.

But despite the law's tough language, each year state and national policy makers have found ways to lessen No Child's burden.

Last year, 27 Florida schools -- including Wakeland and Samoset elementaries in Bradenton -- failed for a fifth year in a row and were supposed to be restructured. But the U.S. Department of Education ultimately backed down on the original penalty in the law, allowing most of the schools to take lesser remedial actions.

Even then, Samoset Principal Scott Boyes said the school still had a lot of work to prove it was in compliance.

"Restructurings are constantly causing us to do more work, to do extra reports, which takes us away from getting the children ready," Boyes said.

The new guidelines put failing schools into two categories: Those that earn an A, B or C under Florida's grading system and those that are below average. They also consider whether the schools' scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test are improving.

Only the poorest performing schools will face the toughest penalties.

The rest will have to introduce new remedial programs that target the areas where they were out of compliance. So for example, schools whose students did poorly in math might bring in a consultant to show teachers how to infuse math skills into their lessons.

"It changes how we focus interventions on the schools," said Iris Wilson, K-12 deputy chancellor for student achievement. "That school can look at that area as opposed to everything, which becomes overwhelming for a school to improve."

Some watchdogs say the Florida changes are good, allowing the state to give the most attention to schools with the biggest problems.

"One of the serious complaints from the beginning was that schools with different circumstances were all treated the same and faced the same penalties," said Jack Jennings, director of the Center on Education Policy, which has been monitoring No Child's implementation.

"States are told to fix all of the schools that are not making it. But there are so many."

There are concerns, however, that the flexibility diminishes the original intent of the law -- to ensure students in all groups are learning.

Some of the loudest criticism comes from advocates for students with disabilities, a group of students who typically fail to meet the No Child targets. Advocates worry that if schools no longer have to meet the goals in all of the categories, some students will be forgotten.

"If they give more discretion to local school districts, the states need to provide the monitoring to make sure they are still making progress with all students," Jennings said.