

Local students show less of the 'COVID slide' than students statewide

During a school year severely disrupted by a global pandemic, Alachua County Public School students actually showed less of a 'COVID slide' than their peers across Florida.

Results of the 2021 Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) and end-of-course (EOC) exams were released today by the Florida Department of Education. They show that the average decline in the percentage of local students scoring a 3 or above on the tests was 5% when compared to the 2019 results, while the average decline for all Florida students was 7%. The state considers a student scoring a 3 to be 'proficient.'



State tests were cancelled in 2020 due to COVID.

"Considering the shift to online learning and hybrid classrooms, quarantines and all the other upheavals created by COVID, the scores are certainly better than they might have been," said Superintendent Dr. Carlee Simon. "Our teachers, staff, students and families deserve a lot of credit for persevering the way they did through a very tough school year."

The district had the same or less of a drop than the state in the number of students earning a 3 or above in 17 of 21, or 81% of the FSA and EOC courses.

In fact, ACPS students had lower declines than the state average in 13 of 21, or 61% of the courses. The percentage of students earning a score of 3 or above actually rose in both geometry and 10th grade English Language Arts (ELA) in 2021 compared to 2019.

District staff have already begun doing a deeper dive into the test score data, looking for trends and other information that will help direct instruction for the upcoming school year.

"We'll be drilling down to the school, grade level, classroom and even individual student level to determine what needs to be done to help all students make up any ground they lost during the past year and get them moving forward again," said the district's Chief of Teaching and Learning Jennie Wise.

Superintendent Simon has already laid out some of the strategies the district will implement this year to help students get back on track, including 'high-dosage' tutoring focused on literacy for individual students and small groups, fluency assessments for all elementary students and additional collaboration with the University of Florida Literacy Institute. An example of such collaboration is the SAIL (Summer Adventures in Literacy) program, which provided intensive literacy support for nearly 40 students at Idylwild over the past summer.

An influx of nearly \$90 million in federal ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funding over the next three years will support many of the new initiatives.

"With ESSER, we'll have an historic opportunity to address long-standing educational gaps that the pandemic magnified," said Dr. Simon.

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