Student Learning Growth Evaluation Questions

Submitted by teachers at workshops on March 14 & 16, 2012

Note: Senate Bill 736, or the Student Success Act, is the legislation that changed teacher evaluations in Florida. Throughout this document, all referenced statutes were amended by this legislation.

Implementation of Florida Statutes

1. Q: How are student learning growth and the value-added model tied to salary?

   A: Florida Statute 1012.22 requires districts to change their compensation systems beginning with the 2014-15 school year. The legislation links salary increases to the teacher’s overall evaluation rating. More information regarding performance compensation will be provided next school year.

2. Q: Does the DOE have to follow or consider recommendations of its Student Growth Implementation Committee? Or are they just a “puppet” committee?

   A: The Student Growth Implementation Committee, which includes teachers, administrators, university professors, and a parent representative, makes advisory recommendations to DOE. The Commissioner of Education and State Board of Education make policy decisions. For the FCAT value-added model, all of the committee’s recommendations were accepted by Commissioner Smith. Information about the committee, its members, and all records of its meetings can be found at http://www.fldoe.org/committees/sg.asp

3. Q: How can instructors that are not in a classroom (ex: guidance, speech/language) be evaluated fairly?

   A: Senate Bill 736 requires all instructional personnel, including those in non-classroom positions, to be evaluated using measures of student learning growth. Policymakers believe that all instructional personnel are responsible for student learning growth and must be evaluated accordingly. SCPS will strive to identify best practices in the evaluation of non-classroom personnel, but ultimately this is a legislative mandate with which districts must comply.

4. Q: Do the cut scores get made by teachers or administrators?

   A: For the 2011-12 school year, the FCAT cut scores in Seminole were set through a collaborative process with committees of teachers and administrators. For the 2012-13
school year and beyond, the Florida State Board of Education will set the cut scores for statewide assessments. Cut scores for any district level assessments will be set by Seminole County.

5. Q: How does learning growth go from 50% to 40%?

A: Senate Bill 736 normally requires that 50% of a teacher’s evaluation must be based on a measure of student learning growth using up to 3 years of student data. The legislation gives districts the option to reduce that 50% down to 40% whenever 3 years of data are not available. Since SCPS has chosen to only use one year of data in 2011-12, the district has also elected to reduce the learning growth weight from 50% to 40%. This decision gives more weight (60% instead of 50%) to the supervisor appraisal. Beginning with the 2013-14 school year, most teachers will have 3 years of data available and will, therefore, be evaluated using 50% supervisor appraisal and 50% learning growth.

6. Q: What is the compensation to teachers for the hours of preparation involved in meeting all these new aspects/mandates (learning Kagan, Marzano lingo for pre-observation, conference paperwork, gathering and interpreting data, new curriculum, new technology, PLC time cutting into Wednesdays and planning time, meetings to understand what is happening)?

A: Unfortunately, the Florida Legislature provided no additional funding to school districts to implement the changes to Florida Statute s 1012.34 and 1012.22.

**General Questions about the Model**

7. Q: Why aren’t the models the same from state to state?

A: There is not yet a federal/national mandate to use student learning growth measures in teacher evaluation systems. These decisions are currently made at the state/district level. In accordance with Florida Statute 1012.34, all districts in Florida are required to use the model developed by the Florida Department of Education for statewide assessments such as FCAT, EOC, and FAA.

8. Q: Who is doing all of these value-added calculations? How long will it take?

A: The Florida Department of Education will complete all calculations with contracted assistance from the American Institutes for Research.

9. Q: Who will determine the school’s component?

A: The school component is calculated by the Florida Department of Education. DOE has a technical assistance contract with the American Institutes for Research, a social sciences statistical firm, to actually complete this work.
10. Q: Who will determine the teacher’s score?

A: The teacher score is calculated by the Florida Department of Education. DOE has a technical assistance contract with the American Institutes for Research, a social sciences statistical firm, to actually complete this work.

11. Q: Where does the teacher score come from?

A: The teacher score is calculated using a covariate adjustment model, a complex statistical model that accounts for student-level, classroom-level, and school-level variables that impact student achievement. See slides 56 and 60 for examples of teacher score calculation.

12. Q: How is the learning growth expectation calculated for each student?

A: The expected score for each student is generated by a covariate adjustment model. The predicted score is based on the student’s prior scores and other variables in the model and compares that student to other similar students from around the entire state.

13. Q: Will the teacher know each student’s predicted growth score at the beginning of the school year?

A: No. Because predicted scores include variables such as student attendance and require a student’s most recent score in order to calculate growth, the predicted score will not be generated until after the end of the school year. Teachers will never know a student’s predicted score in advance.

14. Q: Are effective teachers at low performing schools considered at an advantage with the VAM?

A: No. Because the school score is really a “grade, subject” score, each school will have multiple school scores. Schools may be high-growth at one grade and subject and low-growth at another grade and subject. These scores also vary from year to year. There is no evidence that high-performing or low-performing schools, as a whole, are advantaged or disadvantaged by the model.

15. Q: What happens if a teacher switches grades? Does his/her three years of data start all over again?

A: No. The immediate prior 3 years will be used regardless of grade/subject level taught.
16. Q: What is the anticipated standard error that will be used for calculations?

A: The standard error value will be different for every teacher based on the calculations for that teacher. A variety of student, teacher, and testing factors contribute to the creation of standard error. For 2011-12, SCPS will use the standard error that creates a 95% confidence interval for every teacher’s score. For 2012-13 and beyond, the State Board of Education will determine how the standard error is used in statewide assessment calculations.

17. Q: What if a teacher gets a student right before FCAT? Do they count toward the teacher’s score?

A: Scores are calculated based on student rosters at the FTE survey periods (October and February). Thus, a student arriving in March or April would not be linked to the student’s teachers at time of FCAT administration.

Impact of Value Added Model on Specific Teaching Situations

18. Q: For schools and classes that switch for subjects every quarter (for example: SFA schools), will the teacher’s homeroom class determine his/her score, or the students that he/she actually teaches?

A: Scores are calculated based on student rosters at the FTE survey periods (October and February). Whether a score is based on homeroom or specific subjects depends on the way that the student is scheduled. For example, a teacher who works with the same students all day and teaches all subjects will get one math score and one reading score; these will then be combined to create an overall value-added score. A teacher who instructs an English Langue Arts or Mathematics course all day will get a value-added score for all students taking that subject. The Florida Department of Education has not yet provided written guidance regarding the linking of teachers of other subjects to their students’ FCAT Reading/Math scores.

19. Q: What model will they use for kindergarten?

A: For the 2011-12 school year in SCPS, kindergarten teachers will receive the school-wide average value-added score for FCAT reading and math. No decisions have been made regarding plans for 2012-13 and beyond. Beginning with the 2014-15 school year, the district must implement an assessment for each course, including kindergarten subjects.
20. Q: How will the Value Added Model work for Primes/Gifted students that don’t have much room for growth on DSS?

A: The student’s personalized learning growth expectation is based on the trajectories of similar students (eg high-performing students are compared to other high-performing students). If most high-performing students in the state do not experience much growth on FCAT from year to year, then a student’s learning growth expectation will tend to be lower. Keep in mind that other variables in the model (student attendance, mobility, disability status, ELL status, etc.) will also alter a student’s personalized learning growth expectation.

21. Q: How does the value added apply to ESE teachers that are facilitators only? (We have no rosters; only a case load in which we update student IEP’s.)

A: The intent of the legislation is to hold all instructional personnel accountable for student learning. This includes facilitators, who do have a direct impact on student performance. For 2011-12, facilitators who are directly linked to student schedules will receive a value-added score based on those students’ performance. Facilitators who do not have a direct link to student schedules will receive the school-wide average value-added score for FCAT reading and math.

22. Q: Could scores be linked to teachers that never taught math to that particular student?

A: DOE performs value-added calculations using teacher-student schedule data reported at FTE surveys. The course code that a teacher instructs determines whether the subject is related to FCAT Reading, FCAT Math, or another subject. Until additional subject tests are available, teachers outside of Reading and Math will be tied to Reading/Math scores. This is based on the principle that all instructional personnel are responsible for literacy and numeracy education, and that all instructional personnel contribute to student learning, motivation, and test performance.

23. Q: I’m one of two school counselors at my school. Currently teaching classroom guidance on the wheel every day, Monday through Friday for third, fourth and fifth grade students and performing guidance duties in the afternoon. Will I be tied into FCAT?

A: Non-classroom instructional personnel are those who do not have a direct link to students on the school’s master schedule. Those employees will receive the school-wide average value-added score for FCAT reading and math.
24. Q: How is this process justifiable when my 4th grade ESE student reads on a 1st grade level but has to take the grade level FCAT?

A: A 4th grade ESE student who reads on a 1st grade level would, in theory, have a low 3rd grade FCAT score. That prior score, combined with other variables in the model (including disability status, ELL status, attendance, mobility, etc.), might hypothetically produce a low personalized FCAT learning growth expectation. It would be unlikely that the model would predict that this student would, for example, be expected to grow from level 1 to level 3 in one year since other similarly situated students do not typically experience that much growth.

25. Q: How will special area teachers who only see their students once a week be compared with others who may see their students more often?

A: There is no provision in the model for amount of time a teacher spends with a student. If a teacher is linked to a student on that student’s class schedule, then the teacher becomes responsible for FCAT learning growth.

Variables in the Model

26. Q: What variables are actually being controlled when you are implementing value added?

A: The variables include number of subject-relevant courses in which the student is enrolled, up to two prior years of achievement scores, Students with Disabilities (SWD) status, English Language Learner (ELL) status, Gifted status, Student attendance, Mobility (number of transitions), difference from modal age in grade (as an indicator of retention), class size (number of students) and homogeneity of students’ prior year FCAT scores in the class.

27. Q: Is free/reduced lunch percentage included in the school score?

A: No. Free/reduced lunch is considered to be a measure of socio-economic status. By state law, SES cannot be used in any student learning growth evaluation model.

28. Q: If socio/economic status cannot be factored in, are Title I schools expected to achieve the same as a high level socio/economic school?

A: Value-added measures are not used to compare teachers, not schools. Teachers are linked to student predicted scores, and those predicted scores are based on the above variables including prior performance. There is no evidence that high-performing or low-performing schools, as a whole, are advantaged or disadvantaged by the model.
29. Q: Is there a parent component?

A: No, the model does not include a parent component. These types of variables cannot be included in a learning growth model because there is no district or state system that collects this type of information.

30. Q: Where are the variables that are out of my control? For example, death, divorce, drugs, parental responsibility and help, home life in general, job held by parent(s), economics, siblings, not yet tested and placed?

A: These types of variables cannot be included in a learning growth model because there is no district or state system that collects this type of information.

31. Q: How can we predict growth of a student if we ignore individual student variances? For example: SES

A: Individual student variance is not ignored in the model. The model does incorporate several student variables (attendance, mobility, disability status, etc.). SES is not included in the model because Senate Bill 736 specifically prohibited DOE from using this variable.

32. Q: Will student attendance/absences include suspensions and activity days/field trips, since these are all days where a student is missing instruction?

A: DOE has not provided specific guidance on this topic. We are waiting for further written documentation on this topic.

**SCPS Process Questions**

33. Q: Who is evaluating the principals and assistant principals? How are they being evaluated? When are they being evaluated?

A: Assistant principals are evaluated by their principals, and principals are evaluated by their Executive Director. The supervisor’s appraisal (60%) is done at the end of the school year, and the value-added score (40%) is added in at the same time as teachers (projected for September, 2012).

34. Q: Who evaluates district level employees? For example: Zone Coordinators

A: District employees are evaluated by their immediate supervisor.
35. Q: So is our reappointment solely based on the supervisor evaluation since FCAT results come back so late?

A: Staffing and reappointment timelines will be similar to previous years (4th quarter).

36. Q: What is the approximate cost to our district for this model? Are we getting money from Race to the Top to fund the evaluation cost?

A: The Florida Legislature did not appropriate any additional funds to school districts to cover the cost of complying with the changes in Florida Statute 1012.34. Because the bill is phased in over a number of years, we do not yet know the full cost of compliance with this mandate. Race to the Top funds are being used to cover parts of the implementation of the evaluation system.

37. Q: Just curious how the county and state will account for differences which will happen because of rater bias between school value and administrator ratings?

A: Administrators are participating in training sessions designed to create an accurate (correct) and reliable (same rating would be given by multiple administrators) evaluation system. As with all skills, training and practice increase accuracy and reliability over time.

38. Q: Are instructional coaches tied to their school score for their subject? For example: Math Coach tied to Math and Reading Coach tied to Reading.

A: The SCPS plan calls for use of the school-wide average value-added score for FCAT reading and math, regardless of the employee’s specific responsibilities.

39. Q: How long has this value-added model been in the works for SCPS?

A: SCPS did not create the value-added model. This is a legislative mandate that all districts must implement. The Florida value-added model was created by a committee of educators chosen by the Florida Department of Education. It was created in a series of meetings held in April, May, and June, 2011.

40. Q: Eight students on the date of FCAT or average for the year?

Q: Eight students (only self-contained) or including monitor students who are only in ESE class for 15 minutes per week?

A: For 2011-12 only, if a teacher has 8 or fewer students linked to him/her in the value-added calculation, then the teacher will get a school score instead of an individual score. This is 8 total students for the year based on student rosters at the FTE survey periods (October and February). DOE has not provided written guidance on whether monitored students would be included in the calculation.
Specific Questions about the Presentation Materials

41. Q: What is the difference between the “dot” and the “line”?

A: In slides 24-26, the dot represents a teachers’ exact value-added score. The line represents a range of scores (confidence interval) within which the score would be likely to appear again in a future year if the teacher was randomly assigned to a different schools with different students.

42. Q: What did you mean by scheduling practices that may put teachers at an advantage/disadvantage?

A: Because value-added scores are computed based on student schedules, SCPS will study specific scheduling practices and service delivery models to ensure that scheduling methods and practices are equitable across the school district.

43. Q: What does it mean that there is no link to grades or to “game” the system?

A: One possible (erroneous) conclusion that a teacher might make is that they would be better off teaching at one type of school over another type of school, or one type of student over another type of student. Because the value-added model produces an individualized student learning expectation for each student based on that students’ prior performance and background variables, there is no evidence that changing schools/grades/classrooms will advantage or disadvantage a teacher.

44. Q: By showing the teacher value added scores, it seemed as if all three teachers had an enormous range. So, how does the committee tell if a teacher is effective or not?

A: Analysis of value-added models in use throughout the United States has shown that these tools are reasonably good at identifying the highest-performing and lowest-performing teachers. Because all statistical measures contain a degree of error, and because value-added models based on standardized tests can contain a moderate degree of error, large confidence intervals are not only possible but expected. This makes it more difficult to distinguish teacher effectiveness. SCPS is using standard error when evaluating teacher performance, but it is not known whether the State Board of Education will consider statistical error when it sets the cut points for future school years.

45. Q: How can I participate in a focus group?

A: Focus groups are used on an as-needed basis to provide additional perspectives on specific evaluation topics, and participants are selected for their expertise in certain
areas. The Teacher Evaluation Committee is the primary group that meets regularly to make recommendations to the Superintendent.