

Interviewee: Mel Lucas

Interviewer: Genevieve Shurack

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S: Today is February 8, 2005, and I am here with Dr. Mel Lucas, who is Head of Research and Evaluation [for the Alachua County School Board]. This is on the FCAT. How did you first get involved in education?

L: Well, about thirty-five years ago, I was finishing a master's degree in general experimental psychology, and I was looking for a doctoral program to enter in psychology. The psychology field was kind of glutted at the time. There were good opportunities and good fellowships available in the College of Education for Ph.D in educational research. It was kind of a practical decision to going where the money and opportunity was. That's how I got involved in education, by getting that Ph.D. in educational research. The money for that fellowship came from the fairly newly-enacted Title I program, the first big federal money spent for education years ago with the Great Society. So that's where the money came from. The need for more educational research came from the requirements of that legislation to evaluate the quality of Title I programs nationwide. The federal government was reluctant about getting involved in education, and one of the compromises made during the legislation was that the expenditure of federal money towards education would be thoroughly evaluated at the local level. That created a lot of need for researchers in education. More money for graduate training and that's what got me into this and where I've been ever since.

S: What does your job entail?

L: The primary responsibility is running the state and district-wide testing program in Alachua County. I also do research on topics of interest within our educational community. Evaluate educational programs to see if the students are benefitting. I do some other research-related activities, but it's mainly research, evaluation, and testing.

S: I understand that the FCAT is part of an assessment program that started in 1972. What types of assessment did the state have before?

L: In the early 1970s in Florida, I've been trying to think of where the impetus came from, I suppose out of the Cold War competition with the United States and Russia. When *Sputnik* [Soviet satellite launched in 1957] was launched, there was a realization in this country that we had fallen behind in the race for space. There was a big emphasis on training more engineers and from that came more scrutiny on the quality of public education systems. Books were being written, I think, *A Nation At Risk* was one of the early ones that was written. [It] exposed, I think for the first time, that this country's public educational system was lagging behind. In response to those warnings, many state legislatures took steps to "beef" up the quality of public schooling. The early attempts of that in Florida was

with their first state-wide testing program, a basic skills test. Like its name, it focused just on the basic skills. It was not a comprehensive assessment of reading and mathematics, but an assessment of only basic skills. It was given at several grade-levels: elementary, middle, and high school. There were some mild stakes attached to it, which, later in [our] discussion, I'll bring in the impact of that early testing and how it's affecting FCAT. There was also instituted in the mid-1970s, for the first time maybe in the nation, Florida tried passing what they called, at that time, the Functional Literacy Test, that high school students had to pass the Functional Literacy Test to earn a high school diploma. That's the early stages of the state's assessment program, it wasn't called the FCAT until much later.

S: You said that this was basic test of skills. Are the basic skills reading, writing and math?

L: Just mathematics, they didn't have writing at the time.

S: So, no reading at all?

L: There's reading and mathematics.

S: So, fast-forward a couple of years, and prior to the FCAT, high school students were required to take the High School Competency Exam.

L: Yes, HSCT.

S: What was this like?

L: The first name of the high school graduation test was Functional Literacy Test, and then that name evolved into State Student Assessment Test, Part Two. Then they eventually brought over the High School Competency Test. The philosophy and the test itself didn't change too much during that period of time. It was mainly a change in name, but the test was still measuring a fairly low level of reading and mathematics skills. I think we could characterize all that early testing in Florida as kind of a basic skills test of reading and mathematics. It was not a comprehensive test. Depending on your questions later, I can bring in why that was important in setting the groundwork for the FCAT.

S: The state decided to phase out the HSCT. What were the reasons behind that?

L: I think it's better to think of it as that the limitations – the early testing program for the HSCT and for the basic skills test at the other grade levels – the limitations of those were being acutely felt within the education community. What was being learned was that, if the state had a test and they associated with it any kind of stakes--stakes for the students or stakes for the schools and teachers in the

schools--that [the test] was very powerful in determining what the teachers taught. In other words, the teachers would respond in their curriculum, and alter their curriculum to cover the content of the test that was being used. That was having, in Florida, a deleterious effect on the quality of education. The test was narrow in scope and not very challenging with respect to the cognitive levels of the skills that were being tested. So, it resulted in a shrinking of the curriculum at the school level into a more narrow curriculum focused on basic skills. That kind of narrow curriculum does not serve the community well. It was realized the state test was very much responsible for the narrowing of the curriculum and dumbing-down the curriculum.

So the FCAT was devised to measure a comprehensive set of skills. A very conscious effort was made state-wide to define specifically the knowledge and skills we want our children in Florida to learn in all the content areas: reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. Those skills were defined precisely, grade-by-grade, so there is a very complete and comprehensive definition of the skills we want our children in Florida to learn in public schools. The FCAT test followed along behind that and was designed to be a comprehensive measure of those curriculum areas. So far, there's assessments in mathematics and reading that are comprehensive across grades three through ten. Science has just been recently developed in grades five, eight, and eleven, and, of course, the writing test in [grades] four, eight, and ten. Florida has a very thorough comprehensive assessment of a well-defined family of skills and it assesses those at all levels of cognitive complexity. The test is broad in its content that is covered and it's deep with respect to the skill levels that are being assessed. That philosophy carried over to the high school graduation test and the tenth grade FCAT, as opposed to the earlier graduation test measuring basic skills. The current FCAT at the high school level measures a very complex set of skills.

S: In 1995, it was a Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability that began to conceptualize the FCAT. What was the function of this commission?

L: I think, I'm speculating here, I was involved on the technical levels during that period of the test and not at the political levels. I would speculate that the commission was involved in the development of the philosophy. The idea of defining well the full breadth and spectrum of our academic curriculum and devising the means for doing that, the definition of the curriculum and then devising the means to create the assessment of that.

S: You said you were part of the technical side for the development of the FCAT. Can you describe your planning sessions? And was there a name for the committee or council you were on?

L: The name of the committee was FCAT Technical Advisory Committee. Over the

years, I've been on so many of these committees, and sometimes, in my memory, they run together. It might have been on the very first stages of the Technical Advisory Committee, but I know I was involved in the evaluation of the bids offered by the commercial companies for the twenty-five million dollar state contract to start the development of the FCAT. The evaluation of those bids might have been the beginning of the FCAT Technical Advisory Committee. In that process, we read the bid proposals and questioned the bidders regarding their bids for developing the FCAT test and administering the testing program state-wide.

The FCAT Technical Advisory Committee would meet annually. In the early stages, we were involved with the basic development of the test, its comprehensive nature, involved with the development with the scoring rules, and the scoring philosophy. The fact that it has five levels of competency was a decision we made in that committee. The definition of those levels was made in that committee. The major focus of the committee, after those initial developmental stages, has been technical issues about scaling the test. Developing what's called the developmental scale score of the test. That's the means by which we can assess student growth over years on the test. Technical things about that, item-response theory, I was alluding to earlier. That's what the Technical Advisory Committee did. I also served on several other committees too, [regarding the] test. One, the Bias Committee, they have a committee that would review all the test items for gender-bias or racial-bias, and I served on those committees. I served on committees that developed the standards for scoring the FCAT writing test, where we would select what we would call range finders. Select the samples of papers, in the writing essay test, that are used to score the test. Also [I] served on several item-writing teams where groups of teachers in Florida would write items for the FCAT test. I've worked on those committees too.

S: I understand that some of the FCAT is based on the Sunshine State Standards. What are they and who designed them?

L: I alluded to them earlier. It's the definition of the curriculum, the knowledge and skills we want our students to learn. So, the Sunshine State Standards are a pretty detailed description of the knowledge and skills in each of the content areas – reading, math, science, social studies, [and] language arts – across all of grade levels. You can go to the Sunshine State Standards and look at grade three mathematics and see right there what it is you want third grade students to know in mathematics. It guides very tightly the curriculum that teachers teach. It guides very strongly the textbooks that are selected to be used because they have to match the Sunshine State Standards.

Now, they were developed a couple of different ways. During the early 1990s, there were, in the different content areas, several national movements towards curriculum definition. In mathematics, there is a national group called, the National Council for Teachers in Mathematics [NCTM]. It's comprised of

public school teachers and university professors and mathematicians that meet on a national level to discuss the mathematics curriculum nationally. They developed what they called NCTM math standards. The same kind of effort was undertaken by the National Reading Association. They had much more difficulty developing their standards. In science, there is a National Science group of the public school and university science teachers and scientists collaborating together at the national level for science standards. Those national standards played a very important role in the development of the Sunshine State Standards. The state contracted with other agencies to work with Florida teachers to adapt those national standards to what Florida wanted. That's the origin of the Sunshine State Standards and their function.

S: In 1998, the FCAT became the leading assessment test in Florida. What methods does the state require the school to go through in order to prepare for the exam?

L: Well, the preparation, the best way to answer that, I think, is that Florida has defined precisely what it is we want our kids to know in the Sunshine State Standards. Teachers are encouraged very strongly to adhere to the Sunshine State Standards when they teach, organize their classes and develop classes. The textbooks that are purchased in Florida are purchased so they correspond highly with the Sunshine State Standards. So all the instructional efforts, what the teachers teach, the materials they use, are focused on teaching the Sunshine State Standards. Teaching the Sunshine State Standards well is the best preparation for students doing well on the FCAT test, because the FCAT test assesses those skills and standards in a comprehensive manner. So good teaching is the best way to prepare students for that test. The state doesn't get involved in what we would call test prep things. You know, tricks and other types of test-taking skills that reportedly improve a child's test score. What we're interested in assessing is the child's knowledge of the Sunshine State Standards. The best preparation for that is teaching the child those skills effectively. So out of this office and the state we don't encourage any kind of test-prep type activities *per se*. I'm skeptical of the value of that kind of activity. The stakes are so high for these tests that, just to deal with the anxiety of testing, a lot of our schools and teachers feel that they have to participate in a lot of these test-prep activities. They are not encouraged.

S: Going back, actually, to your involvement with the development of the FCAT. You said you were part of the Technical Committee that decides the grading scale for FCAT. How did this committee determine the standards for the grading and what was the process?

L: The FCAT test is scored by what's called book mark procedure. That's where the state did a field test, let's say, of all the mathematics items in all the grades tested. They determined for each mathematics test-item its level of difficulty.

Once each item had its level of difficulty determined from the field test, they organized each math item--one item per page--into what we'll call a book, page-by-page, each of the math items on a page, let's say, for third grade mathematics. Then, the state organized a statewide meeting of some of the best math teachers in the state, grade-by-grade. They polled each district in the state who their best and most respected math teachers are. They pulled together those math teachers, grade-by-grade, to participate in this scaling procedure. Using these booklets, they asked the teachers at the third grade math level to go through each of those test questions, starting from the easiest math question and go through page by page until they get to the point where, in their judgment, there'll be a transition in knowledge from a student who is performing at the lowest, "F" level of performance to where that point in that ordered listing of test items where it transitioned into a "D" grade. In other words, they are going to put in four book marks in those test items to delineate "F" level, "D" level, "C" level, "B" level and "A" level performance of students, where they thought in their judgment that test item that delineated a child that should get an "F" from that child who should get a "D". Each teacher in that group put their own individual book marks in there. Then, electronically there is a way to summarize that very quickly and show the teachers how they varied with respect to where they put the bookmarks for each of those grade points. At that point, the teachers would sit down together and talk about it: "Well, here's where I put my mark at between item thirteen and fourteen for the "F." They would discuss it with other teachers, and, after the discussion, they'd go through the whole group again and do the procedure again. After several iterations of that bookmark procedure and discussion of the teachers' reasons for putting it where they did, there was a convergence of points and a consensus definition started to emerge about where those grade points ought to come in that ordered series of items. So it was a joint decision made by some of the best math teachers in Florida. Grade-by-grade in math and reading, they use that book mark procedure to set those achievement levels.

S: So that's how we got the levels one through five?

L: We had achievement levels one through five frankly because of me and my role in that early stages of the development of the FCAT. There was a discussion of about how many levels of performance the test ought to have. The initial thinking was it ought to have four levels of achievement because many others – National Assessments of Educational Progress, particularly, has four achievement levels. I made the argument that we in Florida should have five achievement levels, and I shared with them some research I had done here about grading practices in our schools, about how inflated the grades are. [I] made the argument successfully that we needed a test that had five levels of achievement that were levels that meant the same thing when we mean an A, B, C, D, or F in grading students. So parents understand that grading scale, A, B, C, D, and F, they get that all the time from their student report cards. It's understood widely in the public the

meaning of that scale. We needed a scale from the FCAT test that would easily be related to everyday classroom work to try to inhibit the grade inflation that I showed them that was occurring in the schools. I think, that's the reason why we have five levels on the FCAT.

At least in the bookmark procedure they were called A, B, C, D, and F, and the descriptions of those levels were what we'd come to think of in terms of A, B, C, D in normal grading scale. When the test was finally published, the state got a little weak about naming the levels A, B, C, D, and F, and in the end they named them levels 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 instead. So they changed the name a little bit, but the meaning of those levels are still the same and it is what we think of commonly as an A, B, C, D, and F.

S: You said that other state assessment tests use a four-level grading, how would you say the FCAT compares to other state assessment tests?

L: I haven't done a comprehensive comparative study of other states, but I'd be real surprised, and I've heard other people who have done these in other states agree with us, that the Florida's FCAT is one of the best, if not the best, nationally. [This is] because of a couple of things, on the one hand, it is a comprehensive assessment of a well-defined curriculum, the Sunshine State Standards. It's a deep assessment, in other words; it measures all levels of cognitive functioning. It's scored on the five level scale. So, it's technically a very sound test; it's comprehensive, it's deep, it's well-developed across the grade levels with the developmental scale score, and the scoring of it with the five levels is sound. So I think it's the best.

S: Florida is the fourth-largest state in the nation, and, yet, aside from the fact that [the FCAT] was critiqued by in-state educators, it was written by an out-of-state testing company – at least from the research I did, I found that it was written by CTB/McGraw-Hill. Why did the state go outside the state for assessment questions?

L: Your premise isn't really accurate; the state did contract this out. There are not adequate resources in Florida alone to do this type of test development. This kind of test development requires resources beyond what's available in Florida *per se*. These kind of tests are extremely complex to develop. Now, Florida teachers did, in many cases, write the test items themselves. We contracted CTB to organize the development of the test. They hired teachers in Florida to write test items. Now, I won't say that over the years, the initial items, I think,

every one of them was written by Florida teachers. I served on those test-writing committees, but since that period of time, test-item writers are coming from different areas. It doesn't matter, you don't need Florida teachers to write a good test-item on the Sunshine State Standards. A good test-item could be written in India for the Sunshine State Standards. It doesn't matter where it's written; a good test-item is a good test-item. It doesn't need to be home-grown.

S: How often do they reassess the FCAT questions? Because I'm sure some of them could be outdated.

L: Every year there are new test-items that are phased in, and old test-items that are phased out. Not the whole test, but there's a certain portion of items every year that are new. There are a certain portion of test-items that are experimental, being prepared for inclusion for future tests.

S: I did a lot of my research on the Florida Department of Education website. It said that the FCAT is graded throughout the nation. How are those graders trained? I understand that you can't grade the entire test in-state because there aren't enough people.

L: When I was talking about FCAT, one of the good elements of it is that it assessed the full depth of the curriculum. The lower-order cognitive skills and higher-order cognitive skills, it is one of the unique characteristics of the FCAT that not many other state tests have. It has, in addition to multiple-choice questions, it has, in reading and mathematics, short answer and short essay questions – what we call constructed response, where the student taking the test has to create the response, not select from a series of responses already given. It is more difficult to grade those kind of constructed responses because you have to get a trained team of test scorers to do that. The process of training people to score this test has been very well developed. When the tests are scanned, an image is made of each page and that image contains both the kid's response to the multiple-choice questions and also the image of what they wrote in response to the short answer question. So that goes into the computer. That computer image of what the child wrote on the short answer question, that little essay in a sense that the child wrote, that can be directed out to a number of different scorers and they could be remotely dispersed. They could be anywhere in the world. They score that according to certain rules they are trained to follow. How they score that question and other questions can be monitored by an individual who sees how the test scoring's going. That person can intersperse, without knowledge of the people scoring the test, certain test-calibrating items that there's strong agreement on the score it should get. So they can monitor how each individual is scoring items and seeing if there is any score drift. They can control qualitative scoring that way by monitoring [how] scorers are scoring each individual item and in that stream interspersing these control-items. So there's a very structured training of the scorers. They are assessed after that training on their ability to score on a standard student responses. [They]

screened out the successful ones from the unsuccessful ones until they go into a pool of scorers. Then their scoring is monitored. The scoring goes on the computer and is kind of a instantaneously at the time – they are being monitored on how they are scoring the standard item that has been interspersed in there to kind of check to see if they are still scoring on target. Can you see how that works? (The items that there's a high degree of certainty about what score it should get, and they will send those out, along with the other items.) You'd score it and then you'd see if it gave the right score or not. To see if you, as a scorer, are drifting too much away from the standard.

S: Kind of like that benchmark thing?

L: It could be called a benchmark. A benchmark is something else. It's that idea of known standard item that could get interspersed in there to see if the scorer is starting to drift in their scoring. A very high level of training goes into doing that. Also, a high level of monitoring due to sophisticated computer programs that are available.

S: In 1999, the Florida A+ Plan was developed. Can you explain the school grading system?

L: I think in Florida, and this is also transnationally, that the great reform effort that's occurring is called Standards Reform. That's a way we can characterize the Public School Reform effort nation-wide, Standards Reform. The idea is you establish very precisely what you want/we want our children to know, like the Sunshine State Standards do. You have a good solid description of what it is you want our kids to know, then you have an assessment of that knowledge and skills in that test. Then you have an incentive system that we encourage the children and the teachers to learn that requisite knowledge and skills better.

So you have to have definition of knowledge and skill. You have to have the assessment and you have to have an incentive system that ties those two things together. That's the kinda of paradigm for standards reform. In Florida, the incentive systems that ties the incentive system back to the standards themselves, that incentive system is called the A+ Plan. The A+ Plan is a system of rewards and sanctions based on student performance on FCAT for students, for teachers, and for schools. So how a child performs on the FCAT test has the impact on that child, on the child's teacher, and the child's school as a whole.

Now, on the stakes that affect the child, at grade three they must pass the FCAT reading, as we already noted. At grade three, promotion decision is based on FCAT score, very important. At high school graduation, they have to pass FCAT reading and math. There [is also some] legislation in Tallahassee this year to extend to some other grade levels a promotion based on FCAT performance that is coming down the road. Probably this year some more grade levels will have to pass the FCAT to be promoted. For schools, I'll tell you how the grades work.

The schools are awarded grades through the A+ Plan. If the school makes an A, they receive money for every child tested in FCAT in that school. The money is substantial. A school can get enough money, it can share that money to the teachers and other staff members of that school. The amount of money is nothing to sneeze at, it might be worth up to maybe \$50,000? Several thousand dollars of bonus money can come to a [teacher] if they make an A. If they make an F, there are sanctions of increasing pain; that function would come in. If a school makes an F one year, they might go into school improvement with monitoring. If they get that second F, I think that opportunity scholarships are made available to students. They don't have to go to that school, they can get a opportunity scholarship to go to another school. If they keep getting more F's after that, eventually the state can dissolve that school and get rid of those teachers.

[End of Side 1, Tape A.]

L: The A+ plan has a system of sanctions and rewards; rewards for getting the high grade, and sanctions for getting an F. Sanctions apply to the teachers and schools and the students. Now the grades of how the school is awarded an A, B, C, D, or F, is pretty complex. It's based on FCAT scores, both on the percentage of students who score level three and above in reading, mathematics, and writing, and an additional element called value added or gains. The percentage of children that make gains from one year to the next on FCAT is also included in that grading. Between those two ways of looking at the percent of kids scoring at a certain level, and the percentage of kids making a gain from one year to the next, those values are combined in such a way that yield a grade of either an A, B, C, D, or F for the school.

S: So basically the FCAT performance really is the determining factor for schools. Can you describe the relationship between the school and the school board and its relationship with the FCAT? How does that all tie together?

L: At the school board, [which has the] elected six members in each county—some school boards may have more than six in Florida, but in Alachua County there's six board members—they're elected and they set broad policy. They hire the superintendent. They handle budget and those kind of matters. They set the general tones and policies of the schools. They are not specifically involved with each school every year when it comes to issues about the school grade. Of course, the school grades are reported publicly, the school board members are aware of what those grades are, but the school board doesn't have any specific responsibility on an annual basis regarding the grade of each school.

Now schools that get low grades, of course, there's a lot of pressure internally because they want good grades, because they don't like bad grades, and they want good grades because they'd like to do well. Everybody wants to do good. Those schools that get low grades are motivated to improve, but there's

no specific action that's required annually by the school board with respect to the school grades.

S: You mentioned that the state monitors the low performing schools. Do they give them any other assistance whatsoever?

L: Yes. The schools that scored an F get assistance from the state, and I think there's probably even some money that's available for that assistance. Of course, that money can't be construed in any way, it's money that's used for specific remedial purposes of the school. The state does provide technical assistance and some resources to help the schools.

S: What would you ask principals to do differently to prepare for the FCAT?

L: I don't think there's anything I'd ask them to do differently. We've been giving the FCAT for a number of years, I think everyone understands basically how it works. The issue really is that the schools understand that the Sunshine State Standards are the guide to what we want to teach in our schools. All of our curriculum is focusing on the Sunshine States Standards. All textbooks are focusing on Sunshine State Standards. All of our in-service training for teachers is focusing on Sunshine State Standards. So we're teaching the Sunshine State Standards thoroughly in our schools. That's what we want to happen. I think everybody understands that, so there's not anything different that needs to be done with respect to the principals and how they focus their instruction and their efforts at the school. Now maybe I could say, we want the principals to get all those kids that are scoring low and make them score high; yeah, that's what we want them to do.

S: With any assessment test, there is going to be a plethora of criticism. What is your opinion of the many criticisms the FCAT receives?

L: I haven't heard too many valid criticisms of the FCAT. Most of the criticisms about FCAT are criticisms that are legitimate for most testing programs, but not for the FCAT. They just don't understand how the FCAT's different from those testing programs. The major criticism of FCAT and the incentives that go along with it is that teachers teach the test. We know that, teachers do teach the test. But that's only bad when the test is a narrow, shallow assessment of what we want kids to know. If teachers teach to a narrow, shallow test, that's bad. I would criticize an accountability system that was based on a shallow, narrow test. Fortunately, the FCAT is a deep and broad test, and we want the teachers to teach those skills. So for that criticism that's legitimately applied to a lot of other testing programs, when it's applied to FCAT, it just is not a valid criticism because the FCAT test is not a shallow test. It's fine for teachers to teach the skills in Sunshine State Standards, that's what we want them to do. That is the most frequent criticism, and it's a criticism that just reflects a misunderstanding

by the critic of the FCAT test and how it was designed.

S: You also said you were on the Bias Committee for the FCAT. In light of that, I've heard that many minority students don't do as well on the FCAT as other students, so there's a criticism that there's unfair treatment towards minority students. Since you were on the Bias Committee, what is your opinion of that?

L: Well, there's certain differences, fairly systematic differences, in the average score among various ethnic groups in the average score, but there's certainly plenty of students, African-American students, who score very well on the FCAT. There's certainly some Asian students whose average score on FCAT is very, very high. There are some Asian students who score very poorly on FCAT. So you have to understand that when we're talking about differences in performance by ethnic groups, we're only talking about differences in the average performance. There's certainly plenty of African-Americans that are very good students and score very high on FCAT. But as a group on average, African-Americans tend to score lower than Anglos tend to score. Anglos tend to score lower than Asian students. Hispanic students in Alachua County score very well on the test. The differences in the scores on the FCAT tests are due to differences in knowledge, not differences due to a bias in testing. The tests have been tightly scrutinized with respect to any kind of bias. There are very sophisticated and very adequate ways to make sure that a test is not biased against an ethnic group of boys or girls, so the test is essentially free of bias, and the differences that we see in average test scores are differences in knowledge.

S: Would you say there's a difference between the more affluent communities and the poor communities in scoring, and if so, what would some of the reasons behind that be?

L: Yes, there are differences again. There are plenty of students who are poor who score very high. There are plenty of students who are from rich families who score very low, so we're just talking about differences in averages here. But there is a correlation between the socio-economic status of the family and the child's test score. That correlation is ubiquitous, widely seen in all kinds of tests and all kinds of environments, not just an issue about FCAT. Every test that exists that I've seen of either mental ability or academic achievement, that correlation exists, and it exists around the world. Now, the reasons for it are complex, in some ways complex, and some of the reasons are pretty obvious. Children resemble their parents with respect to their success in school. Parents pass on to their children habits of study, habits of discipline, and intelligence are passed on to the children. Families that are effective families, adults who are effective individuals who have good jobs. They have those good jobs and make more money because they have some self-discipline, they are reasonably well-educated, [and] they're reasonably intelligent, and they tend to pass on those good habits of study and discipline and intelligence to their children, one way or the other. So

those children who come to school with those good study habits, that good self-discipline, they will thrive better in a school situation than children who come from a dysfunctional family. A family where maybe they don't have two parents present, maybe there might be some substance-abuse problems, or there might be other habits that contribute to that family's low income where they can't get a good job or hold a good job [could be due to] some dysfunction in their behavior. Those kinds of problems that adults have unfortunately we pass on to our children. If we're, as adults, undisciplined and careless, our children tend to be the same way, unfortunately. So children with those habits that come to school don't benefit as much from the educational program that we provide.

S: Overall, how would you evaluate student performance since 1998?

L: That's an important, important question. The question is, really, has the FCAT test and A+ Plan and Standards Reform Movement benefitted the kids in Florida? We can certainly look to the FCAT test itself to see improvements in scores, but that's not adequate to answer that question, because just by a change in what's being taught and focusing really on the Sunshine State Standards, you could see an improvement in skills. That in and of itself, even though the Sunshine State Standards have a broad definition to what we want our kids to learn, it's still not adequate to answer the question. You have to go beyond Florida's FCAT testing program itself to look for evidence to answer that question. We've all been anxiously waiting to see the evidence, and it's starting to emerge. The best way to look at it is to look at what's called the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP]. That's a testing program that's gone on for twenty-plus years across the nation where a sample of children have been tested in every state for twenty-plus years. State-by-state comparisons are now possible with that test. Florida has been moving up in the NAEP comparisons from what it was earlier. All the southeast has been lower than most of the country. Florida has been higher than most of the states in the southeast. Florida has been improving faster than most states in the nation recently, so the NAEP data is starting to come back and showing the benefits of the A+ Plan and FCAT testing in Florida.

S: That's good to know. This is pretty much my final question for you. Is there anything you would do to make the FCAT better since you've worked with it for so long, or do you feel that it's sufficient as it is now?

L: I don't think there's anything really that needs to be improved on the FCAT. I think it's as good as it can be. We need to expand it in all the curriculum areas, we are moving into science now. We need to move into language arts, but it's really a good test.

S: Is there anything else you'd like to say that I left out that you'd want to share?

L: No, you had good questions.

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S: Thank you. Then that's it, thank you very much.

L: It is my pleasure.

[End of Interview.]