

**Florida's Teacher of the Year says
Students Must Use the "Power of Knowledge" to
Compete**

By: Grace A. Williams, 1998 Florida Teacher of the Year

In three to four months, many of the students in this state will be taking the new Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Do you know who these students are? Do the students know who they are? Overcoming this lack of educational awareness is one of the bigger challenges faced by the educational community today.

It appears many know the "hot issues" in education: vouchers, charter schools, and low performing schools. Of course, most of their information was received from letters to newspaper editors, campaign debates, and hearsay. It is so much easier to rely on the opinions of others rather than finding those answers for yourself.

As a classroom teacher, the number one philosophy I try to impart to my students is that "Knowledge is Power." For those students who know that the FCAT is coming, there is much power. They can prepare for this test and their scores will reflect their efforts.

As a parent, a truly involved parent, there is much that you can do to empower your child. Make sure that you are informed about the logistics of the test. It is not good enough to know whether or not your child takes the test. A step beyond must be taken towards finding out more. It is important to know what dates and times the test is being administered and by whom. Make it a point to find out the types of questions (i.e. multiple choice, short answer, essay) that will be given on the test. Even more vital is for you to seek out ways that you can help your child to do well on the test. What type of things can be done at home to help "study" for any test? Ensure that your child gets extra rest and a good breakfast before the test so they can be alert and concentrate. Believe it or not, all of these things are important and can make a great deal of difference in how well a child does on a test, Remember that if you do not have the knowledge concerning your child's test, you voluntarily give up some of your power to help them.

As a community member, with or without children, you have a responsibility to be informed. We live in a day and age where education impacts every area of our lives. It also defines our communities, at the city, county, and state level. Corporations look closely at school systems within particular states and cities. They explore educational data and statistics about an area and it is an important factor when opening a corporate facility or headquarters. It is the responsibility of those in the community to not only hold their areas to the highest educational standards but to know what those standards are, how they are measured, and what the results mean as a whole to the community .

Find out what the FCAT pilot test scores for your area were last year, what the state average was, and what range of scores are required. Find out what long term effects this test might have on your community as a whole. Could it bring negative publicity or financial rewards to your schools? Beyond that, explore what role that you, as a community member, can play in helping your school meet their goals. Remember that "Knowledge is Power." Good education will ultimately bring about good things for your community. Arm yourself. Know the answers to the most important issues in education, not necessarily the most controversial.

Finally, whether it is the upcoming FCAT test or another educational issue in your city, county, state, or nation, it is your duty to be informed. At any level, whether we are a student, teacher, parent, or community member, we must be informed. Empower yourself with accurate information, not just the hearsay of others. Go out, find the answers, and encourage us all to be a vital part of a great education for all students.

Dominic M. Calabro, President and Chief Executive Officer, Florida TaxWatch, and President of the Florida Education Foundation, asked Grace Williams, the Florida Teacher of the Year, to write this Ideas in Action as a part of the ongoing effort to bring to the forefront new and creative ideas in education. This Ideas in Action comes from the "front-lines" of education and demonstrates that everyone in the state of Florida must take a more active role in the education of our future leaders and workforce.

About the Author

Grace Williams is the 1998 Florida Teacher of the Year. Ms. Williams is an elementary school teacher at North Shore Elementary School in Jacksonville. She is also the Christa McAuliffe Ambassador for Education and has traveled extensively throughout the state and the nation representing the best in Florida teachers. Ms. Williams was also a nominee for National Teacher of the Year. The opinions expressed in this Ideas in Action are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those held by the members, staff or the distinguished Board of Trustees of Florida TaxWatch.

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