

**From:** Webster, Melinda  
**Sent time:** Thursday, November 10, 2011 4:17:11 PM  
**To:** Cari Miller (Cari@excelined.org) <Cari@excelined.org>  
**Subject:** RE: Opinion: Raising the bar is the only way Florida students will soar

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Lol... funny!

Melinda Webster

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**From:** Cari Miller (Cari@excelined.org) [mailto:Cari@excelined.org]  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 10, 2011 4:17 PM  
**To:** Webster, Melinda  
**Subject:** FW: Opinion: Raising the bar is the only way Florida students will soar

Okay so I just cut Kevin from our email chain!

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**From:** Smith, Kevin [mailto:Kevin.Smith@fldoe.org]  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 10, 2011 3:59 PM  
**To:** Cari Miller (Cari@excelined.org); Webster, Melinda; Lee, Laurie  
**Subject:** RE: Opinion: Raising the bar is the only way Florida students will soar

Cari,

Thanks for sharing. I saw this one in the news clips the other day and mentioned it in a meeting with Stu and Diana Bourisaw. I forwarded it to them.

Have a great weekend and thanks again!

Sincerely,

Kevin Smith,

Educational Policy Analyst,

Just Read, Florida! Office

Florida Department of Education

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**From:** Cari Miller ([Cari@excelined.org](mailto:Cari@excelined.org)) [<mailto:Cari@excelined.org>]  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 10, 2011 3:46 PM  
**To:** Webster, Melinda; Smith, Kevin; Lee, Laurie  
**Subject:** FW: Opinion: Raising the bar is the only way Florida students will soar

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**From:** Jaryn Emhof ([jaryn@afloridapromise.org](mailto:jaryn@afloridapromise.org))  
**Sent:** Monday, November 07, 2011 8:42 AM  
**To:** Patricia Levesque ([patricia@afloridapromise.org](mailto:patricia@afloridapromise.org)); Deirdre Finn ([dfinn@afloridapromise.org](mailto:dfinn@afloridapromise.org)); Joanna Hassell ([Joanna@afloridapromise.org](mailto:Joanna@afloridapromise.org))  
**Cc:** Alexis Franz ([Alexis@excelined.org](mailto:Alexis@excelined.org)); Cari Miller ([Cari@excelined.org](mailto:Cari@excelined.org)); Christy Hovanetz ([christyh@excelined.org](mailto:christyh@excelined.org)); Jaryn Emhof ([jaryn@excelined.org](mailto:jaryn@excelined.org)); Mandy Clark ([mandy@excelined.org](mailto:mandy@excelined.org)); Mary Laura Bragg ([MaryLaura@excelined.org](mailto:MaryLaura@excelined.org)); Matthew Ladner ([ladner55@gmail.com](mailto:ladner55@gmail.com)); Matthew Ladner ([Matthew@Excelined.org](mailto:Matthew@Excelined.org)); Nadia Hagberg ([Nadia@excelined.org](mailto:Nadia@excelined.org))  
**Subject:** Opinion: Raising the bar is the only way Florida students will soar

## Raising the bar is the only way Florida students will soar

By Patricia Levesque | Guest columnist

November 6, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/opinion/os-ed-oped-neap-scores-110611-20111104,0,1752042.story>

The results of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the Nation's Report Card, are a wake up call for Florida's leaders and lawmakers.

For the first time in a decade, Florida's students failed to make gains on the biennial assessment of fourth and eighth-graders in math and reading. Even more troubling is the drop in performance by poor and minority students – ending a 10-year trend of rising student achievement that started after bold reforms were enacted in 1999.

In evaluating the scores, Florida Education Commissioner Gerard Robinson declared the results will "help us further adapt classroom instruction to accommodate the needs of our students."

The problem?

We are celebrating a success story that has essentially stalled. Fact is, once students stop making gains, they start falling behind. If Florida leaders recognize these warning signs, we still have the opportunity to renew our commitment to reform and regain our momentum in raising student achievement.

When 75 percent of schools receive A and B grades, yet student performance is not improving, it is clear that the bar is too low.

In May, the Florida Board of Education voted to create an automatic trigger to raise the points required to achieve A and B school grades. Because of their actions, we will ensure we are continually raising the bar on our school performance.

This is a great first step.

Academic standards define what students are expected to learn in each grade, and two years ago Florida adopted more rigorous and focused academic standards. Students who achieve these standards each year will stay on track to graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills to succeed in college and challenging careers.

The FCAT is aligned to these academic standards. The annual assessment measures whether students have mastered the knowledge and skills for their grade. Again, grade level scores every year means a student is on track to earn a high school diploma that prepares them to succeed beyond the classroom.

This year, Florida will define success and failure on the new FCAT.

The Florida Board of Education has already adopted a sound scale for elementary and middle school tests. Florida can demonstrate its commitment to a quality education by requiring students in every grade to earn grade-level marks on the annual assessment before moving to the next grade.

Requiring students to demonstrate competency in reading and math ensures students are ready to build on that knowledge and learn more rigorous content in the next grade.

Since Florida adopted a literacy-based promotion policy for third-graders in 2002, illiteracy in that critical year has dropped by half.

For more than 30 years, Florida has required students to earn a passing mark on a high school exit exam to earn a diploma.

In 2002, Florida replaced the eighth-grade level exam with a 10th grade level exam. Starting this year, students will be required to earn a grade level score to earn a high school diploma.

Florida has yet to finalize the grading scale for the high school exam. When the Florida Board of Education establishes the grade level score, they will essentially determine who earns a high school diploma.

This is a significant decision, and the Board will face pressure, particularly in grades eight-10, to lower the bar so more students "pass" the FCAT and earn a high school diploma.

Lowering the scores will certainly look better in the short-term; however, the long-term impacts will be disastrous. More students may earn a high school diploma, but fewer will be prepared

to succeed in college and careers.

If we commit to raising the academic bar, investing in student achievement, awarding and recognizing success, and celebrating achievements, we will create and maintain the culture of high expectations and support that our students and schools need to thrive.

*Patricia Levesque is the executive director for the Foundation for Florida's Future, an organization that promotes quality education in Florida.*