

# RESEARCH BRIEF

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## FCAT Performance

### Comparing Miami-Dade Schools to Great City Schools

#### Introduction

In the fall of 2000 the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS), in collaboration with Harcourt Educational Measurement, conducted a study collecting baseline data on how students in urban districts perform on traditional norm-referenced assessments. Initial research conducted by the Council identified the Stanford Achievement Test version 9 (SAT-9) as the most common norm-referenced assessment among its member districts. Data were examined for each Council district that administered the SAT-9 during 1998-1999 school year. The report of the study focused on differences between the CGCS districts and the nation with respect to ethnic composition, overall test performance, and differences among ethnic groups.

The Miami-Dade County Public School (M-DCPS) system, while a member of the CGCS, did not participate in this study because the SAT-9 was not part of our district's testing program at that time. However, parts of the SAT-9 became the norm-referenced component of the FCAT assessments in the 1999-2000 school year.

**The focus of this paper:** If we allow for differences between times of testing and test versions, it now becomes possible to make tentative comparisons between M-DCPS and the other large districts across the nation participating in the CGCS study.

#### To Whom Are We Being Compared?

References to the national results and demographic characteristics are specific to the Spring 1995 Standardization Sample used by Harcourt Brace Educational Measurement in establishing the technical basis for the SAT-9.

Of the 55 district members of the Council of Great City Schools, only the following 16 districts had data available and participated in the study.

Birmingham Public Schools  
District of Columbia Public Schools  
Fort Worth Independent School District  
Fresno Unified School District  
Houston Independent School District  
Long Beach Unified School District  
Los Angeles Unified School District  
Norfolk Public Schools

Oakland Unified School District  
The School District of Philadelphia  
Richmond Public Schools  
Sacramento City Unified School District  
San Diego Unified School District  
San Francisco Unified School District  
St. Louis Public Schools  
Tucson Unified School District

## On What Are We Being Compared?

The FCAT norm-referenced test component used by the state is a secure form of the SAT-9. The two subtests utilized are the Reading Comprehension and the Mathematics Problem Solving sections. The commercial version of the SAT-9 used by the CGCS school districts is a different, but highly correlated, form of the test. The data for the matching subtests from the CGCS districts were provided directly by the CGCS research team.

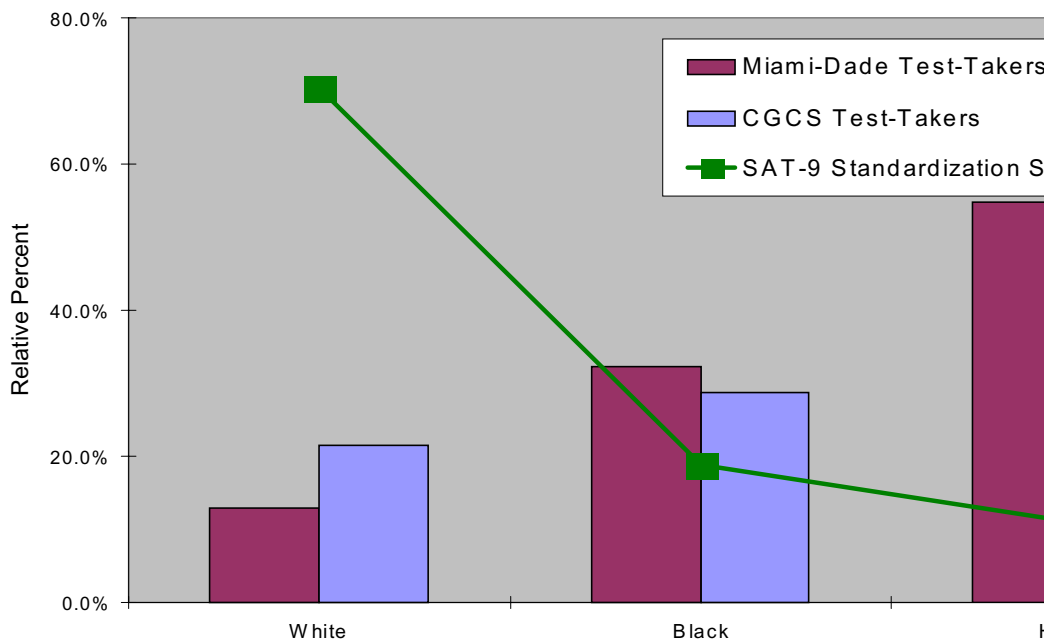
The performance comparisons are being made between the 1998-1999 administration for the CGCS districts and the 1999-2000 administration for M-DCPS. While meaningful comparisons across years are possible, the reader is cautioned to temper any conclusions according to data incongruities.

Test scores are reported by the CGCS in terms of normal curve equivalents (NCE's). These scores, derived from percentile scores, provide an equal-interval scale and are appropriate to use when averaging scores. The data from M-DCPS have been converted to NCE's to allow for direct comparisons.

## Racial/Ethnic Proportions

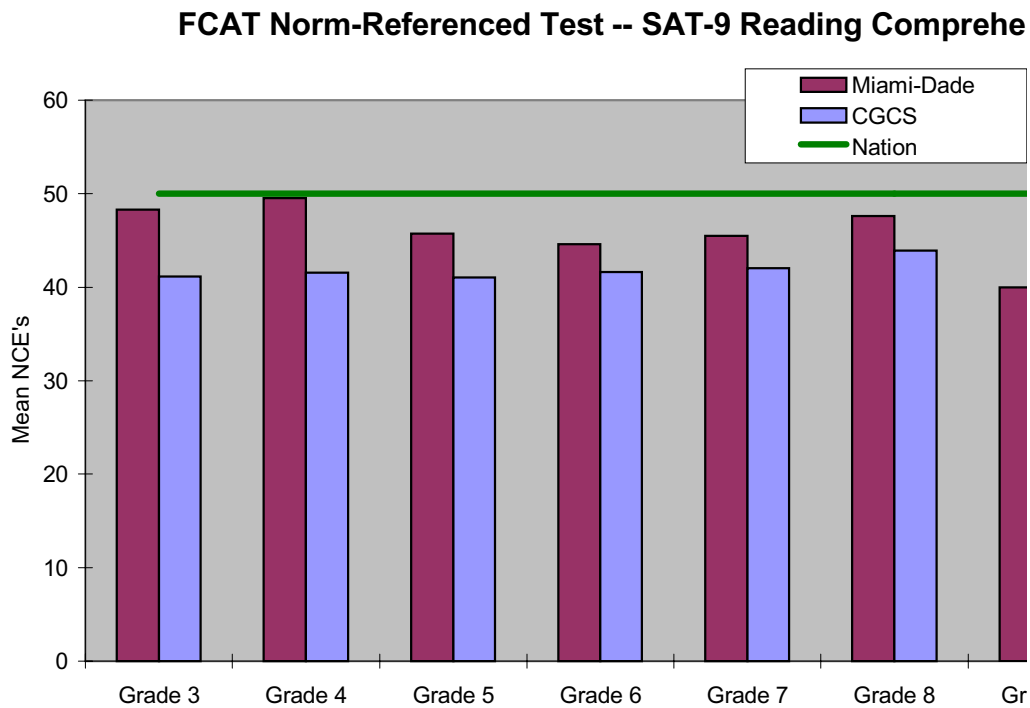
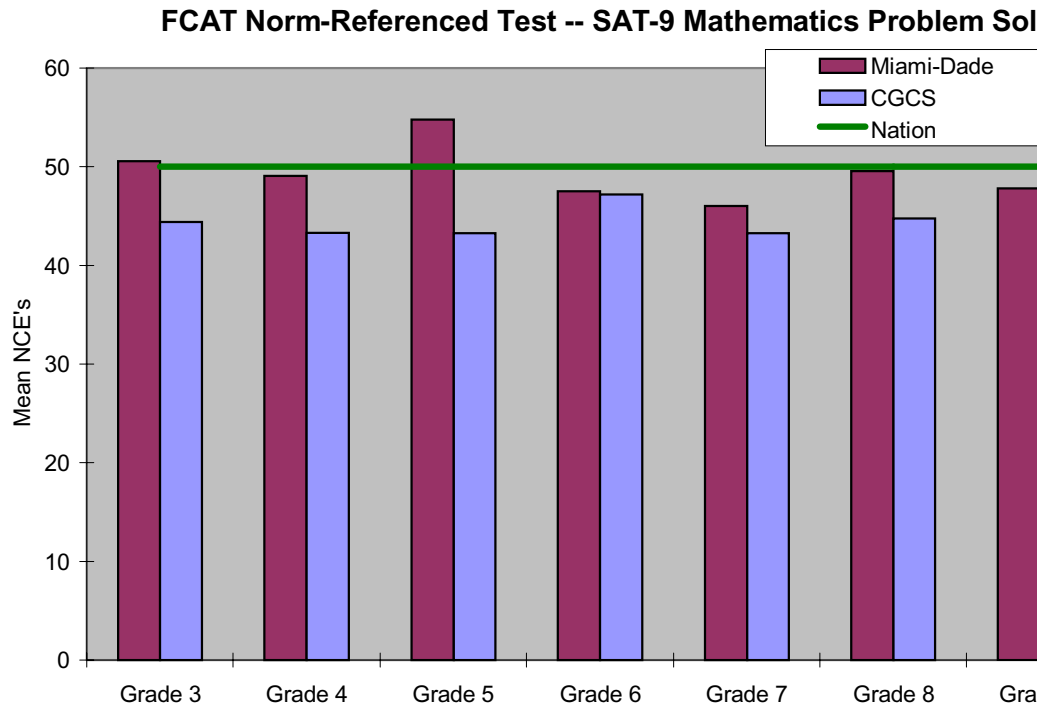
The CGCS study is quick to point out that the ethnic composition of the major urban schools that are Council members is quite different from the national standardization sample to whom they are most commonly compared. The graph below, depicting the proportions of the major ethnic groups in the CGCS and M-DCPS with an overlay of the proportions of the national sample used for the FCAT norm-referenced test, emphasizes these differences.

**Comparison of Ethnicity of Test-Takers**



## Overall Test Performance

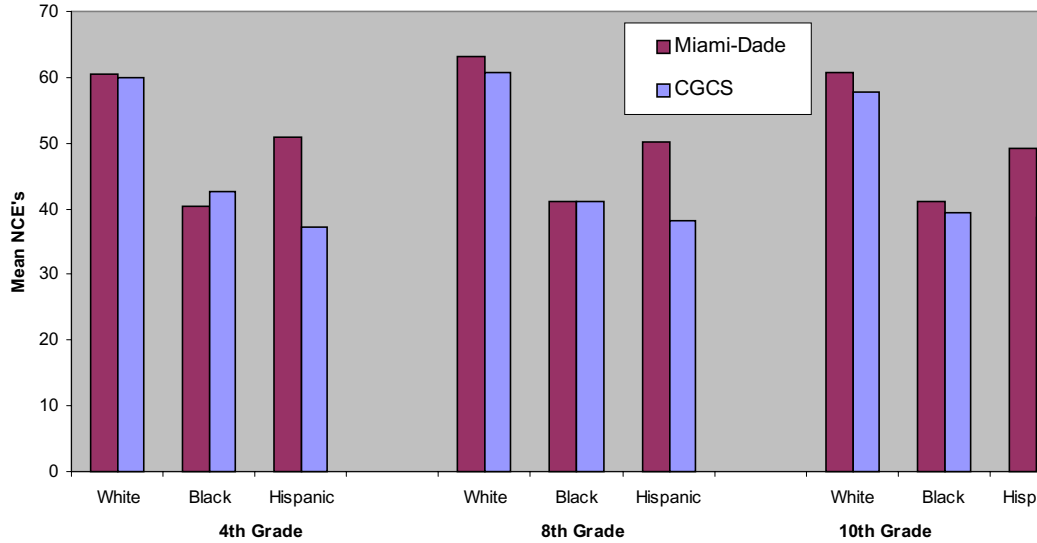
When comparing the test performance by grade level, the average of the M-DCPS students is equivalent or only slightly less than the national average and, in all instances, greater than the average from the CGCS members.



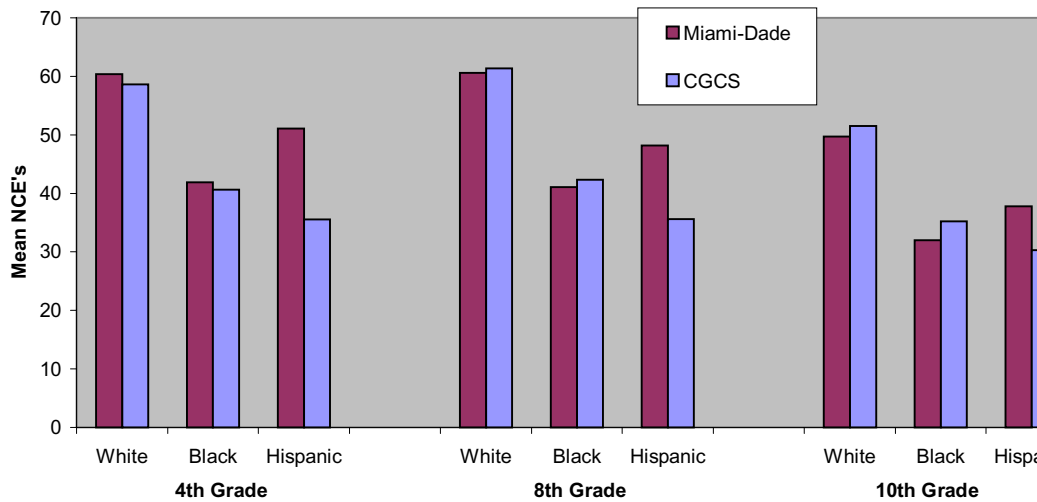
## Test Performance Disaggregated by Ethnicity

When the data are broken down by ethnicity, M-DCPS students are roughly equivalent to the other CGCS students with the marked exception of higher performance of Hispanics at all grade levels and both subject areas. Below are graphs which show 4th, 8th, and 10th grade level comparisons. National averages for the different ethnic groups are not made available by the test publisher.

**FCAT Norm-Referenced Test -- SAT-9 Math Problem Solving  
Grade Level by Ethnicity**



**FCAT Norm-Referenced Test -- SAT-9 Reading Comprehension  
Grade Level by Ethnicity**



## Conclusions

Although we are not using the exact same form of the test or the same testing period, some qualified generalizations are possible when comparing the Miami-Dade schools to the other major urban districts of the Council of Great City Schools. In both the reading and mathematics areas, M-DCPS outperforms the Council districts at all grade levels. To a large degree this is because of the superior performance of the Hispanic subgroup. Other differences among the major ethnic groups in Miami-Dade, while significant, generally mirror the differences found in other large urban school districts.