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# Students: Failure is no longer an option

## Middle-schoolers now required to pass core subjects

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All middle-school students now must pass all core subject area courses — English, math, social studies and science — to be promoted to high school.

"Last year's eighth-graders were the last group to be able to fail a course" and be promoted, said Steve Marcanio, Escambia County's director of middle-school education.

The change reflects an update statewide to the Student Progression Plan to align it with the two-year-old Florida law on middle-school promotion requirements.

It also requires that students pass a career course. Starting in 2009-10, they also will have to pass physical education.

"With the education budget being cut from the state, it's becoming a challenge to provide a well-rounded curriculum along with electives," said Conni Carnley, Santa Rosa County's director of middle schools.

Carnley said the school system is trying to be creative with the six-period day.

"We are looking at options of providing a seven-period day," she said. "But with budget constraints, it would be a challenge."

### Making the grade

Officials in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties are trying to identify struggling students and get them the help they need to pass.

Course recovery programs are offered before, during or after school, or in the summer. Students also can enroll in the Florida Virtual School and take courses at no cost.

"We had 417 students in summer school, and they attempted 615 Internet-based courses," Marcanio said. "Some had more than one course to recover."

Marcanio said the program is self-paced.

"Some students completed their course in three or four days," he said.

In Santa Rosa, Carnley said they check at each grading cycle's midterm for struggling students.

"We provide remedial academics instead of waiting until the end of the nine weeks so they do not fail the grading period," she said. "We want to try preventative measures to stave off failures."

Passing the test

Exceptional Student Education teacher Lea Anne Goble has had four to 10 students in each of her after-school course recovery classes at Central High School. She said the majority passed the final exam.

"The classes were fairly effective," she said. "However, I'm not really sure six hours of academic instruction is a fair substitute for nine weeks of instruction."

Goble would like to see the eligibility for course recovery participation be more structured and focused on academic need.

"There were some students who were in the class because of excessive absences that caused them to fail rather than difficulty with the curriculum," she said.

King Middle School eighth-graders and honor students Cara Scott and Ashley Pate said it should be necessary to pass all core subjects.

"It builds you up to high school," Cara said.

Dawn Walters of Milton, who has sons in fourth and sixth grades, said she does not have a problem with the requirements.

"If you set your expectations high enough, the child will rise to meet those expectations," she said. "My children have."