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Understanding Testing: North Carolina High School Comprehensive Test

This publication is an update to the Spring 1998 Assessment Brief “Understanding Testing: North Carolina High School Comprehensive Test” (Vol. 4, No. 1).

Background

The North Carolina High School Comprehensive Test—Reading and Mathematics was approved by the State Board of Education at its March 1997 meeting as a component of the ABCs accountability model for high schools effective with the 1998-99 school year. Because the ABCs of Public Education emphasizes performance in the basic skills, the high school comprehensive test focuses on the assessment of reading and mathematics. This multiple-choice test was developed to measure growth in student achievement in reading and mathematics from grade 8 to grade 10 for the purpose of high school accountability.

The high school comprehensive test is an end-of-grade curriculum-based test that assesses the reading strand of the English language arts competencies and the mathematics competencies the typical student should have mastered by the end of the tenth grade. The content measured is not course specific. The results of the test can also be used to make norm-referenced interpretations with the state norms which were established the first year of the test administration (1998).

The test was first administered to all students in grade 10 during the 1997-98 school year. The test is administered each year within the final three weeks of April. Three forms of the test are administered at each testing site (e.g., classroom). All students officially classified as tenth-graders by the school principal participate in the test administration unless specifically exempted. All exemptions must be documented in the student’s Individualized Education Program, Section 504 Plan, or

limited English proficiency plan. An answer sheet is coded for each student classified as a tenth-grader, including all exempt students and students absent from makeup test sessions. Off-level testing is not allowed (i.e., administering the test to students not classified as tenth graders).

Both parts of the test (i.e., reading and mathematics) may be administered on the same day or on different days. The LEA may stagger the test administration schedules for both parts of the test by school. The test should be administered as early in the school day as possible. For example, the test administration could occur in an extended block of time during homeroom or first period. The mathematics part of the test may be administered within a school in back-to-back sessions on the same morning in order to accommodate equal access to graphing calculators. There is no flexibility within a school for the administration of the reading part of the test, which must be administered on the same day at the same time.

Reading

The North Carolina High School Comprehensive Test—Reading assesses a student’s ability to read, understand, and critically analyze printed material. It measures (1) the reading strand of the English Language Arts curriculum at grade 10 and (2) the reading that students performing at or above grade level are expected to achieve by the end of grade 10. The test specifications were officially adopted by the State Board of Education and are described in the *Standard Course of Study* and the *Teacher Handbook* (1992).

Reading is assessed in the same manner as the end-of-grade test of reading comprehension and is similar to the Textual Analysis part of the English I end-of-course

test. The reading passages for the test are selected based on several criteria. They must be:

- Interesting to read;
- Complete (have a beginning, middle, and end); and
- Be from sources students might actually read.

By adhering to these criteria in the selection of passages, the passages tend to be longer than those typically found on standardized achievement tests. On each form of the test there will be eight passages—three literary, three content-based, and two consumer/human interest.

Because the reading part of the high school comprehensive test is designed to measure reading skills, (1) students with disabilities and students identified as limited English proficient may *not* use the modification/accommodation “Test Administrator Reads the Test Aloud (in English)” and (2) students with disabilities may *not* use the accommodation “Interpreter/Transliterator Signs/Cues the Test.” This includes reading aloud or signing/cueing the reading frames, passages, test questions, and answer choices.

The North Carolina High School Comprehensive Test contains 72 reading items and requires 100 minutes to administer.

Mathematics

The North Carolina High School Comprehensive Test—Mathematics assesses a student’s ability to apply mathematical knowledge to solve real-world problems. It measures mathematics competencies that students performing at or above grade level are expected to achieve by the end of grade 10. The test specifications were presented to the State Board of Education as part of the North Carolina Mathematics Framework (K-12). The framework consists of the following three competencies and four content strands:

Competencies

- Problem-solving
- Reasoning
- Communication

Content Strands

- Number Sense, Numeration, and Numerical Operations
- Spatial Sense, Measurement, and Geometry
- Patterns, Relationships, and Functions
- Statistics, Probability, and Discrete Mathematics

Mathematics is assessed in the same manner as the mathematics applications part of the end-of-grade test of mathematics and the Algebra I and Geometry end-of-course tests. Students may use formulas (located on the back of the test book), rulers, and protractors to solve the mathematics applications questions.

The expectation is that each student will use a graphing calculator during the administration of the mathematics part of the test. All students must have access to calculators during the administration of the mathematics portion of the test. Students who use scientific calculators will be at a disadvantage. Students are not allowed to use calculators with keyboards or the operations card which may come with some calculators. The calculator memory must be cleared before and after the test administration.

The North Carolina High School Comprehensive Test contains 70 mathematics items and requires 85 minutes to administer.

Reporting Student Performance

Student performance in reading and mathematics is reported on developmental scales like student performance on the end-of-grade tests at grades 3-8. Students receive individual student reports after the answer sheets are scanned and scored locally.

The state provides descriptive information about the average scale scores obtained by all students and specific groups of students. In addition to providing a score based on equivalent sets of items for all students, schools, and school systems, the high school comprehensive test provides schools and school systems with some curricular information to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses to compare group performance to the performance of other schools, other school systems, and the state.

For additional information regarding scale scores and achievement levels for the high school comprehensive test, please refer to the Spring 1999 Assessment Brief “Understanding End-of-Grade Testing: Achievement Levels” (Vol. 5, No. 2).