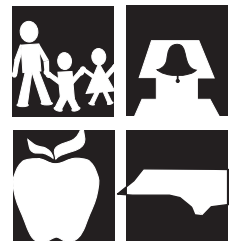


# Assessment Brief



## Public Schools of North Carolina

State Board of Education • Howard N. Lee, Chairman • North Carolina Department of Public Instruction • Michael E. Ward, Superintendent

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## Understanding the North Carolina Competency Tests of Reading and Mathematics

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### Public School Law 115C-174.11

Public School Law 115C-174.11, passed in 1977 by the North Carolina General Assembly, states: “The State Board of Education shall adopt tests or other measurement devices which may be used to assure that graduates of the public high schools and graduates of nonpublic schools ... possess the skills and knowledge necessary to function independently and successfully in assuming the responsibility of citizenship.”

### The Competency Standard

In 1995, the State Board of Education adopted the end-of-grade reading and mathematics tests for the eighth grade as the competency requirement and established Achievement Level III or above as the standard for each test. The end-of-grade tests at grade 8 measure the goals, objectives, and competencies described in the North Carolina *Standard Course of Study* for the eighth grade. These are fundamental skills comparable to national standards in reading and mathematics and reflect the knowledge that students need in order to be successful and productive citizens in the twenty-first century. The grade 8 end-of-grade tests and the competency tests are statistically equivalent forms of the same tests.

The current competency standard is effective for students who entered the ninth grade beginning with the 1994–1995 school year and beyond. Students who meet the standard by achieving Level III or above when administered the end-of-grade tests at the end of the eighth grade have met the competency standard and do not have to take the North Carolina Competency Tests

in grades 9 through 12. The standard for the competency tests of reading and mathematics is equivalent to Achievement Level III on the eighth grade end-of-grade reading and mathematics tests. The standard identifies students who consistently demonstrate mastery of eighth-grade competencies.

### Test Design

There are two separate competency tests: reading comprehension and mathematics. The reading test contains nine to ten reading passages/selections with three to eight associated questions per selection. The passages/selections include four to six literary selections (drawn from short stories, novels, dramas, essays, poetry, and non-fiction), two to four content-based selections (topics such as art, science, health, mathematics, social studies), and one or two consumer and/or human interest passages/selections. The associated questions address reading strategies, the acquisition of information, and critical analysis.

The mathematics test assesses student achievement in areas such as (1) number sense, numeration, and numerical operations; (2) spatial sense, measurement and geometry; (3) patterns, relationships, and functions; and (4) data, probability, and statistics. The mathematics test consists of two parts. The mathematics applications/calculator-active part of the test assesses the broad areas of mathematics, and problem solving is emphasized. Students may use calculators (not keyboarding or symbol manipulation), and NCDPI-issued mathematical formulas in addition to NCDPI-issued/approved rulers and protractors during the test administration. Students may not use calculators on the mathematics computation/calculator-inactive part of the test.

### Number of Items and Test Administration Time

The number of items and test administration time for the competency tests are located at [www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/testing/competency](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/testing/competency). It is important that all students have the opportunity to complete the competency tests. School

systems are required to provide a plan to accommodate any student who needs additional time to complete the test.

### **Screening Measures**

For students who do not have grade 8 end-of-grade test scores, scores from a standardized, nationally-normed test, normed on a sample representative of the public school population in 1995 or later, may be used for the competency screen. The school system test coordinator should be contacted for additional information regarding competency screening. Competency tests from other states are not accepted as a replacement for the North Carolina Competency Tests of Reading and Mathematics.

### **Focused Instructional Intervention**

Students who perform below the competency standard shall receive focused, extended instructional opportunities that are different from and supplemental to regular high school course work. The focused instructional intervention must be specifically designed to improve the students' performance to at least eighth-grade proficiency and assist them in passing the competency test(s). These students are to be given multiple opportunities to take the competency tests in the area(s) not previously passed. Beginning at grade 9, students who have not met the competency standard must receive at least one opportunity annually to retake the test(s). School systems may choose to offer the competency tests as many as three times each year: once in the fall, once in the spring, and once during summer school session. Seniors who have not passed the requirement must be allowed to retake the tests once during the last month of school.

### **Accommodations**

On a case-by-case basis where appropriate documentation exists, students with disabilities and students identified as limited English proficient may receive testing accommodations. The use of accommodations must be documented, and they must be used routinely during instruction. Accommodations must be in accordance with the most recent publication of *Testing Students with Disabilities* (published February 2003) or *Guidelines for Testing Students With Limited English Proficiency*. The results of the test may be declared invalid for students, including students with disabilities and students identified as limited English proficient, if the competency reading test is read aloud or signed/cued (in English), or if students use a calculator during the administration of the mathematics computation (calculator inactive) part of the test.

If the IEP Team or Section 504 Committee determines that a student who is following the Career Preparation, College Technical Preparation, or College/University

Preparation course of study will not participate in the administration of the North Carolina Competency Tests of Reading and Mathematics, the decision must be documented in the current IEP or Section 504 Plan. The parent(s), guardian(s), or surrogate parent(s) or student (age 18 or older) must sign a statement indicating that the consequences of not participating (i.e., the student must pass all parts of the competency tests in order to receive a North Carolina high school diploma) have been fully explained and are understood. The signed statement shall become a part of the student's permanent educational record. Additional information is located in *Testing Students with Disabilities* (published February 2003).

All students classified as limited English proficient must participate in standard test administrations or standard test administrations with the use of accommodations no later than 24 months after initial entry into the school system regardless of language proficiency. Students following the Occupational Course of Study (OCS) are not required to pass the competency tests in order to earn a high school diploma.

### **Resource Materials**

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Division of Accountability Services/North Carolina Testing Program prints and ships copies of the publication *The North Carolina Competency Tests: A Handbook for Students* to each system. The handbook is also available on the North Carolina Testing Program web site at [www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/). Each student who is to be administered the competency test(s) must receive a free copy. The handbook includes the competency requirements, frequently asked questions, an overview of the tests, test-taking strategies, and practice items.

*The North Carolina Competency Test: Instructional Materials for Remediation of Students Who Have Not Passed the Competency Requirements for Graduating in 1998 or Later* is one available resource. Recently, this notebook was updated and divided into two separate notebooks: *The North Carolina Competency Test of Mathematics Instructional Materials Notebook, Second Edition* (published 2003) and *The North Carolina Competency Test of Reading Instructional Materials Notebook, Second Edition* (set for publication in early 2004). The notebooks include: (1) policy information and frequently asked questions regarding the competency tests, (2) reading or mathematics instructional materials that are aligned with the competency tests, and (3) sample test items. Teachers use the notebooks to assist in the focused intervention.