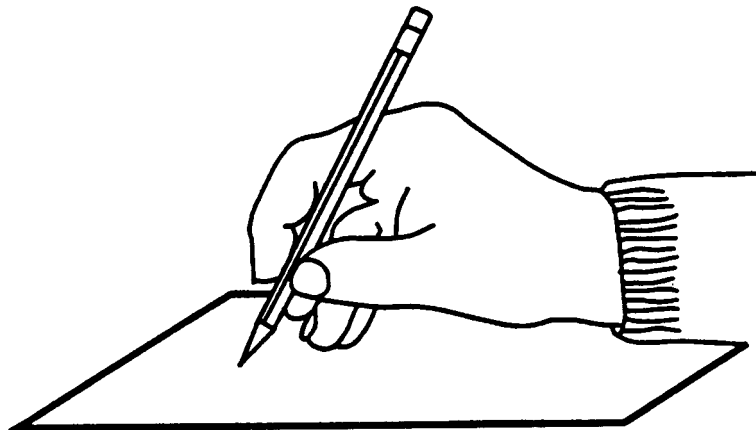


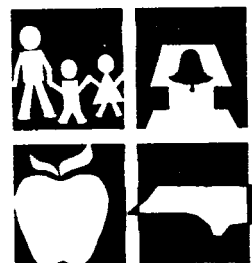
**North Carolina
Testing Program**

**Report
of
Student Performance
in
Writing
2000 – 2001**



Grades 4, 7, and 10

Public Schools of North Carolina
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State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction
Office of Instructional and Accountability Services
Division of Accountability Services / Testing Section
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The 2000-01 North Carolina

Report of Student Performance in Writing

Grades 4, 7, and 10

November 2001

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Introduction

The 2000-01 Report of Student Performance in Writing provides information on student performance on the North Carolina Writing Assessment at grades 4, 7, and 10 (English II). The annual writing assessment, a component of the North Carolina Testing Program, is also a component of the ABCs Accountability Program at grades 4 and 7 (growth and performance composites) for the 2000-01 school year. Writing at grade 10 is also included in the ABCs Accountability Program in the Index Model and the Performance Composite. The measurement of writing in North Carolina and its inclusion in the ABCs ensure that writing as a basic skill is emphasized in every classroom throughout each student's academic experience. Such an emphasis provides each student with a solid foundation in written communication in preparation for the competitive and global marketplace of the twenty-first century.

The writing assessment was first added to the North Carolina Testing Program in 1983-84 to place a greater emphasis on writing statewide. Initially, writing was measured in grades 6 and 9. In 1985-86, the writing assessment at grade 9 was moved to grade 8. English II, an end-of-course writing assessment that focuses on world literature other than literature from the United States and Great Britain, was added to the statewide testing program in 1991-92. In 1992-93, the annual assessment of writing was expanded again to include the measurement of narrative writing at grade 4. In response to the reorganization of public education in North Carolina and the ABCs, in 1995-96 the statewide testing program was reduced. The assessment of writing was reduced from grades 4, 6, 8, and 10 (English II) to grades 4 (narrative), 7 (expository or point-of-view), and 10 (expository), the grades in which writing was assessed in

North Carolina during the 2000-01 school year.

The 2000-01 Report of Student Performance in Writing provides a longitudinal, comprehensive compendium of student performance data in the area of writing. The report was generated using aggregate student data from North Carolina public schools, including charter schools, and provides information regarding student performance at the state level at each of the score points for grades 4, 7, and 10. In addition, state-level performance is reported by the percentages of students scoring at or above 2.5 in grades 4 and 7 (student performance standard) and at or above 3.0 in grade 10 (student performance standard), by gender, ethnicity, and category of exceptionality. State-level results are also reported showing how well students are able to apply standard language conventions in their writing at grades 4 and 7 using +’s and –’s and in English II using an analytical score scale (1 – 3) in the areas of sentence formation, usage, mechanics, and spelling. Also included in the report are results by LEA (stem and leaf) and charts providing the percentages of students scoring at each of the score points, the percentages of students scoring at or above 2.5 for grades 4 and 7, and the percentages of students scoring at or above 3.0 for grade 10. The specific focused holistic score scales and sample student responses representing each of the score points are also included in this report.

The purpose of this report is to provide information about the level of student performance in the area of writing based on results from the annual on-demand writing sample required during the North Carolina Writing Assessment at grades 4, 7, and 10 (English II).

2000-01 Report of Student Performance in Writing

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Part I

North Carolina Writing Assessment

Grades 4 and 7

North Carolina 2000-01 Report of Student Performance in Writing Grades 4 and 7

Overview

- The North Carolina Assessment of Writing was administered statewide on March 6, 2001 to all students in grades 4 and 7. The writing assessment at grade 4 measured students' composing skills in the narrative mode while the assessment at grade 7 measured the expository mode. Student responses at both grades were scored using a four-point scale.

Findings

- Student performance in writing increased this year at grades 4 and 7 when compared to student performance in 1999-00. Although scores improved statewide at both grades, there was variation in student performance in writing between schools and school districts.
- At grade 4, approximately 68.8 percent of all students tested statewide achieved a score of 2.5 or greater (the standard) compared to 57.6 percent in 1999-00. At grade 4, the percent of students achieving 2.5 or greater increased by 11.2 percentage points. Overall, student performance in writing statewide at grade 4 has shown a substantial increase since the assessment began in 1992-93 (see Figure 1, page 13).
- At grade 7, approximately 73.2 percent of all students tested statewide achieved a score of 2.5 or greater (the standard) compared to 71.9 percent in 1999-00. At grade 7, the percent of students achieving 2.5 or greater increased by 1.3 percentage points. This is the sixth year of the writing assessment at grade 7, and this year's performance showed an increase over the five previous years (see Figure 2, page 13).
- Across both grades, higher percentages of female students than male students received the top writing scores.
- At grade 4, generally, a somewhat greater percentage of White students (75.8%) achieved a score of 2.5 or higher, followed by the percentage of Asian students (70.9%), Multi-racial students (69.8%), Other students (66.7%), American Indian students (66.4%), Hispanic students (58.0%), and Black students (56.1%).
- At grade 7, the proportion of Asian students (82.4%) receiving higher writing scores was slightly greater than the proportion of White students (80.3%). Multi-racial students (75.1%) had the next largest proportion receiving higher scores, followed by the proportions of Other students (68.3%), Hispanic students (63.6%), American Indian students (62.6%), and Black students (59.3%).

- While schools are diligently preparing students to meet more rigorous academic standards in reading, mathematics, and writing, there still is variation in performance among students, classrooms, and ethnic groups.
- Our continuing challenge is to emphasize and focus more on communication skills in the classroom. Whether oral, visual, or written, effective communication skills are the results of active learning and frequent use of higher level thinking skills. The State Board of Education has reaffirmed its belief that writing is a basic skill that must continue to be emphasized in every classroom by including the assessment of writing as a component of the ABCs Accountability Program.
- *Table 3 on page 14 depicts percentages of students in the state scoring at or above the standard of 2.5 at grades 4 and 7 for the 1996-97, 1997-98, 1998-99, 1999-00 and 2000-01 school years. A disaggregation by ethnicity and gender is also provided.*
- The annual writing assessment, a component of the North Carolina Testing Program, is a state-mandated on-demand assessment of student performance in writing at grades 4 and 7.
- The writing assessment was added to the North Carolina Testing Program in 1983-84 to place a greater emphasis on writing statewide. The revised North Carolina *Standard Course of Study (SCS)* emphasizes writing as a basic skill that can be improved with appropriate emphasis. The measurement of writing ensured that ample time and resources are allotted for the development in the classroom.
- The writing assessment measures students' skills in two different modes of writing. Students in grade 4 are asked to write a narrative composition (personal or imaginative), and students in grade 7 are asked to write an expository (clarification or point-of-view) composition.
- On the day of testing the teacher removes from a sealed envelope individual copies of a writing prompt. At each grade the writing prompt provides instructions that set forth the task. Each student has sixty-five minutes to write a composition in response to the prompt. Scheduled extended time may be allotted to students with special needs or students with limited language proficiency, if appropriate.

What is the Writing Assessment?

How is the Writing Assessment Administered?

How is the Writing Assessment administered? (continued)

- The prompt requires students to apply their knowledge and skills in language to demonstrate their ability to communicate information in writing. In response to the prompt, and students in grade 4 must write a narrative composition, students in grade 7 are required to write an expository or point-of-view composition.

How are scores reported?

- Each year students' scored compositions, student and classroom scores, and scoring guides are returned to all fourth and seventh grade teachers several weeks after scoring. Teachers are encouraged to use the scoring guides along with the student responses to acquire a better understanding of the scoring criteria and to interpret scores to students and parents.
- Each year summary scores are returned to each school and school system in the state.

What is the expected standard for writing?

- The expected standard for writing at grades 4 and 7 is the mid-point score of 2.5 or above on a four-point scale. This standard represents an achievable level and quality of writing that can be reached with effective instruction.
- By achieving a score of 2.5 or above, a student has demonstrated a reasonable command of the particular mode of writing assessed.
 - The score of 2.5 is the current grade level standard that is also reported as the accountability indicator.

How are the compositions scored?

- Each student composition is scored by two independent readers. The composition is assigned either a 1-4 or Non-Scorable score by each reader. For responses where the two scores are discrepant by a single score point, a mid-point score is assigned to the student's response. For example, a student may receive a 2.5 as a score.

There were 100,930 fourth grade public school student papers which were scored by two readers and rescored by the scoring director if the readers differed by more than one point on the four-point scale. The agreement rate of the readers is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1
Fourth Grade Reader Agreement Status

<u>Total Public School Papers</u>	<u>Perfect Agreement</u> <u>Percent</u>	<u>Adjacent Agreement</u> <u>Percent</u>	<u>Resolution Required</u> <u>Percent</u>
100,930	75.9	24.0	0.1

The 70 percent criterion rate for perfect agreement required by the State Board of Education was exceeded and the resolutions required were few.

There were 98,178 seventh grade public school student papers which were scored by two readers and rescored by the scoring director if the readers differed by more than one point on the four-point scale. The agreement rate of the readers is shown below in Table 2.

Table 2

<u>Total Public School Papers</u>	<u>Seventh Grade Reader Agreement Status</u>		
	<u>Perfect Agreement</u> Percent	<u>Adjacent Agreement</u> Percent	<u>Resolution Required</u> Percent
98,178	79.6	20.3	0.1

The 70 percent criterion rate for perfect agreement required by the State Board of Education was exceeded and the resolutions required were few.

- The assigned score point reflects each student’s performance with respect to a set of predetermined criteria for each score point (focused holistic scoring). The score points define the student’s command of the mode of writing required. A generic score scale follows that is applied across modes and grades:
 - NS = Student response is not readable or composition is otherwise unscorable.
 - 1 = Student response exhibits a lack of command of the mode of writing.
 - 2 = Student response exhibits a weak command of the mode of writing.
 - 3 = Student response exhibits a reasonable command of the mode of writing.
 - 4 = Student response exhibits a strong command of the mode of writing.
- The quality of each composition is determined by considering the following characteristics: (1) main idea, (2) supportive details, (3) organization, and (4) coherence. A focused holistic score is assigned to each student’s response based on these characteristics.
- A second, independent score evaluates the student’s performance with respect to the use of standard English conventions (i.e., grammar, spelling, usage, and sentence formation). This score is reported as a “+” or “-”. The “+” response exhibits an acceptable level of skills in sentence formation, usage, and mechanics; the “-” response does not exhibit an acceptable level.

**Results of the
Writing
Assessment at
Grade 4**

- Each year the same scoring criteria and score point scale or standards are used as were used in previous years. However, the scoring guides are tailored to fit a particular prompt and the anchor papers (i.e., papers used to exemplify score point standards) are selected to correspond to the prompt administered for a given year.
- Students in the fourth grade were asked to write a personal narrative composition in response to the following prompt:

Think about a time when you had a great day at school. Write a story about a time you had a great day at school.

- Readers scored 100,930 public school responses for grade 4. The scores show that 68.8 percent of the fourth graders wrote well enough to score at or above the standard of 2.5. This represents a dramatic increase of 11.2 percentage points from the 57.6 percent who achieved this level in 1999-00. About 4.8 percent of the fourth graders received the highest scores of 3.5 and 4.0 in comparison to 4.7 percent last year, and 3.1 percent received the lowest scores of 1.0 and 1.5 compared to 2.8 percent in 1999-00. In 2000-01, less than one percent (0.1) of the papers had problems which made them non-scorable.
- *Figure 3 on page 15 depicts the distribution of narrative composition scores for grade 4 across the years of administration (see also Table 4, page 17).*
- For conventions, 41.9 percent of fourth-graders received a double-plus (+ +) rating in comparison to 56.7 percent in 1999-00, while 31.0 percent obtained a plus-minus rating (+ -) in comparison to 27.6 percent last year. About 27.1 percent were assigned a double-minus rating (- -). In 1999-00, 15.6 percent of fourth-graders received a double-minus rating.

**Performance of
Subgroups at
Grade 4**

- **Gender.** Approximately 73.9 percent of the female students scored at or above the standard of 2.5 compared to 63.9 percent for male students.
- **Ethnicity.** About 75.8 percent of White students scored at or above 2.5 compared to 70.9 percent of the Asian students, 69.8 percent of Multi-racial students, 66.7 percent of Other students, 66.4 percent of American Indian students, 58.0 percent of Hispanic students, and 56.1 percent of Black students (see Figure 5, page 19).

- *Table 3 on page 14 shows the percentages of students at or above the standard of 2.5 for each subgroup.*
- *Table 6 on page 20 shows the percentages of students at each score point, by Exceptionality and Limited English Proficient.*

**Assessment
Observations at
Grade 4**

- At grade 4, scores dramatically increased compared to student performance in 1999-00. Students had little difficulty choosing a time when he/she had fun with a friend or a relative. The majority of responses demonstrated the students' abilities to compose narratives that established a progression of ideas and events, although minor lapses in focus and progression may have occurred. The responses also contained less forced formulaic strategies than had been seen in previous administrations.
- Common weaknesses among responses scored 1 or 2 were 1) major breaks in the progression of ideas and events presented, or 2) flawed elaboration, especially the listing of ideas or events with little or no elaboration.

**Results of the
Writing
Assessment at
Grade 7**

- Seventh graders were asked to write a well-organized point-of-view composition on the topic below.

Take a position on whether wild animals should or should not be kept in zoos. State your position and explain why you think wild animals should or should not be kept in zoos.

- The 2000-01 school year is the sixth year that the writing test has been administered in grade 7. The readers scored 98,178 seventh-grade expository compositions. The scores showed that 73.2 percent of the seventh graders wrote well enough to score at or above the 2.5 standard compared to 71.9 percent who scored at this level on an expository composition in 1999-00. About 7.3 percent of the seventh graders scored 4.0 and 3.5 while 5.8 percent of seventh graders obtained these scores in 1999-00. About 3.4 percent scored 1.0 or 1.5 this year, and 2.6 percent received these scores in 1999-00. In the 2000-01 school year, less than one percent of the papers had problems which made them non-scorable.
- *Figure 4 on page 16 depicts the distribution of grade 7 composition scores across the years of administration (see also Table 5, page 18).*
- About 74.1 percent of seventh graders were assigned a double-plus (+ +) for their use of standard English conventions, and 80.2 percent of the students received the same rating in 1999-00. The plus-minus rating (+ -) was assigned to 18.2 percent of the papers in comparison to 14.2 percent in 1999-00. Almost 7.7 percent were rated with the do

double-minus (– –). In 1999-00 about 5.6 percent of seventh-grade students received the same rating.

Performance of Subgroups at Grade 7

- **Gender.** Approximately 79.8 percent of the female students scored at or above the standard (2.5) compared to 66.9 percent of the males.
- **Ethnicity.** About 82.4 percent of the Asian students scored at or above the standard of 2.5 compared to 80.3 percent of the White students, 75.1 percent for Multi-racial students, 68.3 percent of the Other students, 63.6 percent of the Hispanic students, 62.6 percent of the American Indian students, and 59.3 percent of the Black students (see Figure 6, page 19)
- *Table 3 on page 14 shows the percentages of students at or above the standard of 2.5 for each subgroup.*
- *Table 6 on page 20 shows the percentages of students at each score point, by Exceptionality and Limited English Proficient.*

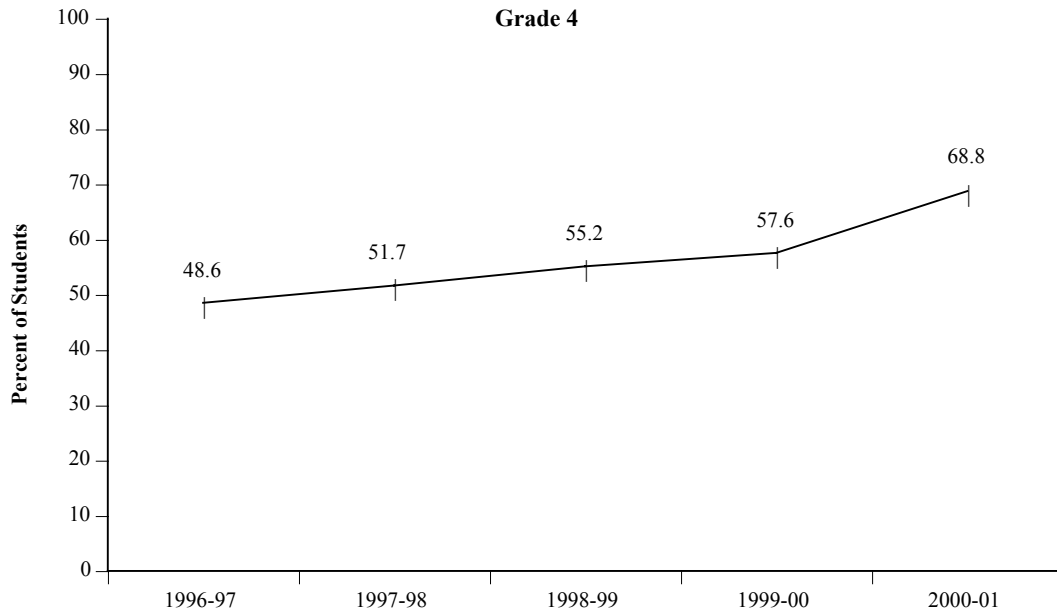
Assessment Observations at Grade 7

- At grade 7, scores increased compared to student performance in 1999-00. Students had little difficulty taking a position on whether wild animals should or should not be kept in zoos. The majority of responses were focused on the subject matter and provided relevant reasons to support the positions taken. Common weaknesses seen among the responses that were not successful were the forced usage of statistical evidence and personal examples. When these techniques were applied, students tended to lose focus on their main ideas. This resulted in breaks in the progression of ideas which affected the coherence of the compositions.

2000-01
North Carolina
Writing Assessment
Grades 4 and 7
State-Level Summary Statistics

The following charts provide state-level summary statistics. The number tested at each grade level and the percentage of students scoring at each of the focused holistic score point values are provided. Longitudinal data of performance by gender and ethnicity, the performance of students with exceptionalities, and the performance of students identified as Limited English Proficient are also provided. The percent of students achieving the accountability standard of 2.5 is provided for all categories.

**Figure 1. North Carolina Testing Program
Annual Writing Assessment, 1996-97 to 2000-01
Percent of Students Scoring at or above the Standard of 2.5
Grade 4**



**Figure 2. North Carolina Testing Program
Annual Writing Assessment, 1996-97 to 2000-01
Percent of Students Scoring at or above the Standard of 2.5
Grade 7**

