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## **North Carolina Education News**

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### **NC NAEP Writing Scores at National Average; Charlotte-Mecklenburg Students Post Top Urban District Scores**

North Carolina 8th graders' writing scores were on par with the national average, and 87 percent of the students performed at the Basic level or better on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, according to results released today by the U.S. Department of Education and presented at the April State Board of Education meeting. At the same time, students' writing scores decreased when compared with results from 2002, the last time the national test was given.

NAEP is often referred to as "The Nation's Report Card" because it is the only common assessment used by all states.

The most recent administration of the test is the third time that NAEP has measured writing, in 1998, 2002 and 2007. In 1998 and 2002, fourth and eighth graders were tested; in 2007, NAEP tested only eighth graders. Twelfth grade

results are available at the national level only for each of the three years.

North Carolina's performance in 2002 placed it among the top performing states in the nation. While the 2007 performance is lower than five years earlier, it demonstrates an improvement over the state's 1998 performance.

In 2007, North Carolina's overall average scale score of 153 was not significantly different from that of students across the nation, 154. North Carolina's scale score did drop from 157 in 2002. Of the 39 states and jurisdictions that participated in the writing assessment in both 2007 and 2002, average writing scores increased for 19 states.

In 1998, North Carolina's average scale score was 150.

In general, North Carolina students performing at the 50th percentile or below maintained their performance level from 2002 to 2007, while students at the 75th or 90th percentile lost ground. Students at the 50th percentile decreased four points during this period, but this change was not statistically significant, according to the NAEP report.

Students taking the NAEP writing assessment are given two, 25-minute writing tasks, and students' essays are evaluated as first drafts in recognition of the short timeframe involved. A sample of students in each participating state takes the assessment. Because it is given to a sample of students, district or school-level results are not available, with the exception of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools participate in the NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment, which in 2007 included 11 major urban school districts in the nation. For this reason, Charlotte-Mecklenburg is the only North Carolina school district for which there is a district average NAEP score. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, with a scale score of 155, outperformed all of the TUDA districts and performed statistically the same as the nation and as North Carolina. Charlotte-Mecklenburg did not participate in the 2002 TUDA, so there is not a comparison score. In addition to Charlotte, TUDA districts include Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, New York and San Diego.

Details:

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assesses writing for three purposes identified in the NAEP framework: narrative, informative, and persuasive. The NAEP writing scale ranges from 0 to 300.

- In 2007, the average scale score for eighth-grade students in North Carolina was 153. This was lower than their average score in 2002 (157) and was not significantly different from their average score in 1998 (150).<sup>1</sup>

- North Carolina's average score (153) in 2007 was not significantly different from that of the nation's public schools (154).

- Of the 45 states and one other jurisdiction that participated in the 2007 eighth-grade assessment, students' average scale score in North Carolina was higher than those in 10 jurisdictions, not significantly different from those in 17 jurisdictions, and lower than those in 18 jurisdictions.<sup>2</sup>

- The percentage of students in North Carolina who performed at or above the NAEP *Proficient* level was 29 percent in 2007. This percentage was smaller than that in 2002 (34 percent) and was not significantly different from that in 1998 (27 percent).

- The percentage of students in North Carolina who performed at or above the NAEP *Basic* level was 87 percent in 2007. This percentage was not significantly different from that in 2002 (87 percent) and was not significantly different from that in 1998 (85 percent).

- In 2007, male students in North Carolina had an average score that was lower than that of female students by 22 points. This performance gap was not significantly different from that of 1998 (21 points).

- In 2007, Black students had an average score that was lower than that of White students by 24 points. This performance gap was not significantly different from that of 1998 (25 points).

- In 2007, Hispanic students had an average score that was lower than that of White students by 24 points. Data are not reported for Hispanic students in 1998, because reporting standards were not met.

- In 2007, students who were eligible for free/reduced-price school lunch, an indicator of poverty, had an average score that was lower than that of students who were not eligible for free/reduced-price school lunch by 22 points. This performance gap was narrower than that of 1998 (28 points).

- In 2007, the score gap between students at the 75th percentile and students at the 25th percentile was 46 points. This performance gap was not significantly different from that of 1998 (48 points).

## Technology Counts 2008

*Technology Counts* is a joint project of *Education Week* and the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. As in previous years, the EPE Research Center surveyed the states to assess the status of K-12 educational technology across the nation in the areas of access, use, and capacity. The report assigns grades to the states for their technology performance overall and in those three categories. The state report assembles key findings from the survey and other sources.

North Carolina's scores:

Access to technology C  
Use of technology A  
Capacity to use technology D  
Overall grade B-

Complete North Carolina report:

[http://www.edweek.org/media/ew/tc/2008/30NC\\_STR2008.h27.pdf](http://www.edweek.org/media/ew/tc/2008/30NC_STR2008.h27.pdf)

### **Kannapolis City Schools' Principal Named, Wachovia Principal of The Year**

A.L. Brown High School Principal Debra Morris was named the 2008 Wachovia North Carolina Principal of the Year during a luncheon ceremony held in Raleigh. The Kannapolis City Schools' principal succeeds Craig Hill, who is currently an assistant superintendent with Wilson County Public Schools.

As A.L. Brown High's principal, Morris has implemented a number of special projects/programs that have had a positive effect on student character and academics. These include a school dress code that embraces uniforms, a Freshman Academy that helps ninth graders acclimate to high school by working with a group of core teachers and making connections with upperclassmen who mentor the students, an afterschool computer class called NovaNet that enables students to work toward credits or credit recovery in order to graduate, and a book study with football players that has shown the school community that football players are more than just "about football."

Morris attributes her success as a principal to her experiences as an athlete and high school coach. "When you're a coach, you're a motivator. My staff, who are my team, must all be committed to reaching common goals through hard work

and dedication," Morris said.

Morris received her Bachelor of Arts in English with a Minor in Political Science from Appalachian State University, a Master of Arts in English from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, a Master of Arts in School Administration from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and her Doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She is a member of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the North Carolina Association of School Administrators, the North Carolina Principals' and Assistant Principals' Association, the Greater Cabarrus Reading Association, and Phi Delta Kappa.

Morris has received a number of honors including being named the National Association of Secondary School Principals' and Met Life's Principal of the Year for North Carolina for 2007, Kannapolis City Schools' Principal of the Year for 2007, a regional and state winner in the adult poetry division of the North Carolina Reading Association 2007, and was one of 10 American educators selected to represent the United States as a delegate to study civics education in Saratov, Russia by the Partners in Education Program in 2000.

The other regional finalists were: North Central Region: Cathy Moore, Sanderson High (Wake County Schools); Northeast Region: Arty Tillett, First Flight High (Dare County Schools); Northwest Region: Danny Cartner, South Davie Middle (Davie County Schools); Southeast Region: Lori Howard, Clyde Erwin Elementary (Onslow County Schools); Sandhills/South Central Region: Vicky Kirby, Pate Gardner Elementary (Scotland County Schools); Piedmont-Triad/Central Region: Nakia Hardy, Broadview Middle (Alamance-Burlington Schools); and West Region: Thomas Keever, Valley Springs Middle (Buncombe County Schools). Each regional finalist received \$1,500 for their school and \$1,500 for personal use.

Morris will receive an additional \$3,000 for her school and \$3,000 for personal use. She also will serve a one-year term as advisor to the State Board of Education.

## **State-Funded Preschool Enrollment Passes One Million Mark, Yet Most 3- and 4-Year-Olds are Denied Access to Public Preschool Programs**

*Survey Shows 12 States Offer No Programs, Others Falter; Gains are Threatened by Possible Recession*

State-funded preschools served over one million children last year, yet public pre-K was unavailable for most 3- and 4-year-olds, according to the annual survey released by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, *The State of Preschool 2007* (<http://nieer.org/yearbook/>) ranks all 50 states on the percentage of children served and spending per child. It also compares the number of quality benchmarks each state meets for the 2006-2007 school year. The survey found that enrollment, quality and state spending per child increased.

Yet, 12 states offered no state-funded preschool education and others faltered in their commitment to the quality of their early education programs. The report showed that nationally less than half of all 4-year-olds were enrolled in government-supported preschool education programs and one quarter received no preschool. For 3-year-olds the situation was worse, with only 15 percent enrolled in public programs and 50 percent receiving no early education.

Children from wealthy families can attend expensive private preschools while the federal Head Start program and most state-funded preschool education is targeted at lower income families.

Research shows that high-quality preschool education for disadvantaged children improves later high school graduation rates and college attendance, employment opportunities and earnings, even marriage rates. It lessens future crime, delinquency and teenage pregnancy. In economic terms, high-quality preschool education returns to the individual and the public up to \$17 for each \$1 invested. New studies find educational benefits for middle-income children as well.

**Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming** have no state-funded programs. Serious problems also exist in four states – **California, Texas, Florida, and Ohio** – that are home to one-third of all American preschoolers."

On a more positive note, the yearbook reported that in 2006-2007:

- Average state spending per child was \$3,642, halting a trend of declining per-child commitments that had persisted since at least the 2002-2003 school year.
- More than one million 3- and 4-year-old children attended state-funded preschool education programs.

- Thirty states increased enrollment. Nationally, enrollment was up by 80,000.
- Eight states met higher quality standards. Yet, some states still require preschool education teachers to have little more than a high school diploma.
- Of the 26 states that served 3-year-olds, enrollment increased in all but five states. Overall enrollment of 3-year-olds was up 10 percent, mostly due to increases in **Illinois**, which became the first state to commit to serving all 3-year-olds.

Pre-K funding could be attached to state funding formulas for K-12 education to ensure that funds increase proportionally with enrollment as it expands and that funding per child is more dependable the authors say. They also said the federal government could play a vital role by providing an inducement to states to expand enrollment, particularly at age 3, by offering matching funds.

The 2007 *Yearbook* pointed out that one-quarter of all 4-year-olds and half of all 3s had no access to preschool education. State and federal regular preschool education, special education and Head Start combined served 39 percent of the country's 4-year-olds, and some attend private programs, leaving one-quarter of 4-year-olds with no preschool program at all. At age 3, state and federal programs combined to serve only 15 percent. Even with some others attending private programs, 50 percent of 3-year-olds had no access to a preschool education.

Other key findings in the yearbook include:

**Access:**

- Enrollment increases in most states tended to be modest, but some states made large gains. Enrollment increased by 52 percent in **Tennessee**, 33 percent in **Pennsylvania**, and 17 percent in **Illinois**, **Florida**, and **New York**.
- State pre-K programs served 22 percent of 4-year-olds and 3 percent of 3-year-olds nationwide.
- Three states with "Pre-K for All" served more than half of their 4-year-olds: **Oklahoma** (68 percent), **Florida** (58 percent), and **Georgia** (53 percent). When Head Start and preschool special education enrollments are taken into account, **Oklahoma** served 90 percent of all 4-year-olds; **Florida**, 71 percent; and **Georgia**, 65 percent.

*The State of Preschool 2007* is available at  
<http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf>

State Profiles are available at:  
<http://nieer.org/yearbook/states/>

North Carolina's profile:

<http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf#page=110>

## **North Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey**

North Carolina high school students have improved their health habits in some areas, but still need to focus on others, such as maintaining a healthy weight, according to the recently released 2007 North Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).

Since 1993, fewer students have tried alcohol for the first time before age 13, have drunk alcohol and have driven or ridden in a car with a driver who had been drinking. In addition, fewer students say they've used tobacco, marijuana and other types of drugs, or carried a weapon, such as a gun, knife or club, or were threatened with one. There also has been a significant decline in the number of students who attempted suicide, were involved in a physical fight, or who had their first experience with sexual intercourse before age 13.

The prevalence of some health risk behaviors measured by the YRBS, however, remains high. Since 2005, an increased percentage of high school students appear to be at-risk for becoming overweight as measured by body mass index calculations. Use of cocaine and injected illegal drugs increased, as did the percentage of students who say they have avoided school due to safety concerns. There also was an increase in the percentage of students who say they feel alone in their life.

The 2007 YRBS was produced by the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to assess health risk behaviors that contribute to some of the leading causes of death and injury among children and adolescents. The NC Department of Public Instruction and the NC Department of Health and Human Services have administered the voluntary survey at the state level since 1993. Data is reported statewide and regionally in the aggregate and cannot be traced back to the school district or student. In 2007, the YRBS was completed by 3,506 high school students in 71 public high schools in North Carolina.

The 2007 YRBS data are available at [www.nchealthyschools.org/data/yrbs](http://www.nchealthyschools.org/data/yrbs)