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Georgia Education News
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Independent Audit Gives State Tests High Marks

An independent audit of the Georgia's grade 3-8 science and mathematics tests shows that the exams were well-aligned with state's curriculum.

The study was conducted by edCount, LLC in order to determine how well the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests in science and mathematics, grades 3-8, were aligned to the state's new curriculum, the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS).

"The findings for the GPS and the Georgia statewide assessments in Mathematics and

Science in grades 3 through 8 can be described as excellent and indicate that the state has established clear expectations for its assessments via its Content Descriptions, blueprints, and item-writing specifications," reads the report, authored by Dr. Ellen Forte and Dr. Pamela Paek.

Validation that assessments are aligned to the state curriculum is required under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The State Board of Education approved a \$62,075 contract with edCount LLC in June.

Full report:

http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/GA_alignment%20report.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6E4C7B8C1D37CB694E9991FF868A9814298885AE29E5904AF&Type=D

Georgia's Graduation Rate Jumps to 75.4 Percent

Georgia's graduation rate has jumped to over 75 percent, the highest level ever. The state's final graduation rate for 2008 is 75.4 percent, an increase of more than three points from last year.

"Georgia continues to make great progress in getting more students to graduate on time with a meaningful diploma," said State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox. "In 2008, we had more than 83,000 students who graduated on time, which is 27,000 more than we had just five years ago. That's a testament to focus, collaboration and a lot of hard work by our teachers and students."

Governor Sonny Perdue said: "The progress we have made in our graduation rate has been nothing short of remarkable. Rising from just barely over 60 percent in 2002 to now over 75 percent reflects the commitment of our teachers, students, parents and graduation coaches."

All groups of students saw significant increases in their graduation rate in 2008. Georgia's African-American students had a graduation rate of 69.2 percent, up nearly four points from 2007. The state's Hispanic students had a graduation rate of 65.5 percent, up more than five points from 2007.

And Georgia's economically-disadvantaged students raised their graduation rate four points to 67 percent.

"The improvement in our graduation rate is happening across the board for all students in every subgroup," Superintendent Cox said. "We still have a lot of work to do, but we are making steady progress by focusing on what works for all students."

AYP Numbers Improve

In 2008, it was harder for all schools to make AYP.

First, the percentage of students that had to pass state tests in math, reading and English went up for all grade levels. Secondly, students were doing more rigorous work and taking more rigorous tests in 2008, especially in mathematics.

Superintendent Cox emphasized that in 2007–2008 the state's more rigorous curriculum and tests in mathematics were implemented in all grades considered for AYP in elementary schools.

"Our new curriculum definitely sets higher expectations and some students simply needed a little more time to master the work," Superintendent Cox said. "Once the results of summer retests were added we saw the AYP numbers improve dramatically."

Among the improvements:

- The percentage of elementary schools making AYP jumped to 90 percent, up from 76 percent in July.
- The percentage of middle schools making AYP jumped to 80 percent, up from 65 percent in July and 65 percent in 2007.
- There were 56 schools that came out of Needs Improvement status in 2008.
- The number of Needs Improvement schools dropped to 307, the lowest number ever and down from 323 in 2007.

Schools that came out of Needs Improvement due to retest results, summer graduates or appeals must continue to offer public school choice and/or tutoring to students who have already taken advantage of these options. So, for instance, a student who transferred to another school based on the initial AYP results will remain at the school to which he or she transferred.

Online Education Ratchets Up for Georgia Students: Georgia Virtual School Joins National Repository of Online Courses Network

Taking classes in cyberspace just got better for Georgia high school students. Since its inception in 2005, Georgia Virtual School (GAVS) has been improving its online offerings to serve a growing number of students each year. As part of this effort, GAVS has become a supporting member of the National Repository of Online Courses (NROC), making this library of top notch online courses available to students and educators across Georgia.

"It's good, accurate and very rigorous," said GAVS program coordinator Stephanie Dunbar about NROC's course content.

Selected as the best of their kind, NROC courses utilize a vast array of digital media options to engage students in dozens of subjects, ranging from algebra to U.S. history. Interactive simulations, flash objects and iPod downloads are among the digital

technologies forming the multimedia platform that bring online learning to a new level and gives educators flexibility in using all or part of the material as teaching tools.

NROC content will allow us to expand the multimedia components of our online courses and provide alternative avenues for different learning styles. It will benefit both our students and the teachers who are using it," said GAVS program coordinator for course development Jay Heap.

Through its NROC membership, GAVS can adapt NROC content to align with Georgia's educational standards and meet the needs of individual schools throughout the state. Over 450,000 Georgia high school students can now surf over to the specially designed GAVS website at <http://www.hippocampus.org/myHippo/?user=myGVS> where they can access NROC course content tailored to work in conjunction with popular textbooks and the state's curriculum.

"One of our goals is to support classroom teachers across Georgia, so we are very excited that we can offer the NROC materials as a resource for them," said Dunbar.

Online classes serve a broad spectrum of students by providing increased access to core curriculum, elective and advanced placement coursework, as well as greater flexibility in scheduling.

Collaboration among NROC Network members adds a unique dimension to online course development. Educators, administrators, technologists and designers from around the globe use the NROC social authoring network to combine their skills and experience to develop and refine existing course materials and forge new content.

This collaboration method, within a non-profit structure, creates high quality courses for a very reasonable cost, according to Gary Lopez, executive director of the Monterey Institute for Technology and Education (MITE), the organization that launched NROC. He said this is valuable "because it frees up resources for other infrastructural needs in educational systems, and because it's supported by a community of educators – scholarship is back in the hands of scholars."

NROC is an open educational resource (OER) project of MITE, supported by a grant from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The OER movement is fueled by the belief that everyone is entitled to an education no matter where they live or what their circumstances are. By joining NROC, educational institutions support OER and receive a variety of benefits including customizable content, specialized support and professional development resources. NROC's content is also accessible to individual learners free of charge at <http://www.hippocampus.org> .

The Monterey Institute for Technology and Education is a non-profit educational organization committed to helping meet society's need for access to effective, high-quality educational opportunities in an era of rapid economic, social and personal change. The Monterey Institute for Technology and Education was founded in 2003 as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Learn more at <http://www.montereyinstitute.org/nroc> .

Georgia Virtual School is part of the Georgia Department of Education's office of technology services. GAVS is fully accredited and offers middle and high school level classes including a full high school curriculum with Advanced Placement (c) and college

preparatory courses taught by certified teachers. Additionally, GAVS offers students a chance to retake classes they were not previously successful in as part of Georgia DOE's credit recovery program. Learn more at <http://www.gavirtualschool.org/>

Eight National Blue Ribbon Schools Named

Blue Ribbon Schools are chosen in one of three categories:

- **TOP 10%:** Schools that scored in the top 10 percent in student achievement.
- **TOP 10%: (40% Disadvantaged):** Schools that scored in the top 10 percent in student achievement AND have at least 40 percent of its students considered economically disadvantaged.
- **GREATEST GAINS:** Schools with at least 40 percent economically disadvantaged students that have dramatically improved student achievement to high levels.

The Eight National Blue Ribbon Schools are:

TOP 10% (40% Disadvantaged)

East Central Elementary School
Rome City Schools
Tonya Wood, Principal

Centralhatchee Elementary School, Franklin
Heard County Schools
Carol Thomas, Principal

GREATEST GAINS

Appling County Primary, Baxley
Appling County
Scarlett Copeland, Principal

F.L. Stanton Elementary, Atlanta
Atlanta Public Schools
Dr. Marlo Barber, Principal

Futral Road Elementary School, Griffin
Griffin-Spalding County
Larry Jones, Jr. Principal

TOP 10%

Mabry Middle School, Marietta
Cobb County Schools
Merrilee Heflin, Principal

Livsey Elementary School, Tucker

DeKalb County Schools
Dr. Melanie Castelle, Principal

Milton High School, Milton
Fulton County Schools
Mr. Ronald Tesch, Principal

State Policies and Procedures and Selected Local Implementation Practices in Response to Intervention in the Six Southeast Region States

This study describes how six state education agencies and three local education agencies in the Southeast Region are adopting and implementing Response to Intervention, an education approach designed to provide effective, evidence-based interventions for struggling learners.

Response to Intervention has garnered recent interest from policymakers, researchers, and educators. Studies of its effectiveness have found it promising (Compton et al. 2006; McMaster et al. 2005; Speece and Case 2001; Torgesen et al. 1999). And state education agencies are increasingly interested in the approach. Yet few published studies describe the experiences of states as they plan and implement Response to Intervention.

This report helps address that need. It supplies basic information about state planning and implementation of the approach in Alabama, Florida, **Georgia**, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Although the report focuses chiefly on states, it also illustrates implementation of Response to Intervention with examples from three local education agencies.

http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southeast/pdf/REL_2008063.pdf