

NEWS RELEASE

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Mississippi students increase performance on state and national tests

JACKSON - State Superintendent of Education Dr. Henry Johnson announced today that Mississippi students are continuing to improve their performance on national and state tests.

“Our students continue to show us that Mississippi’s investment in education is paying off,” said Johnson. “The efforts of teachers and administrators to raise student achievement have been tremendous, and the result is that students are achieving at higher levels than ever before.”

“We are pleased with student performance in all areas,” added Johnson. “The trend line looks good. We are moving up in every subject area at every grade level.”

Governor Ronnie Musgrove, who serves as chair of the Southern Regional Education Board and as a member of the National Assessment Governing Board, is proud of the improvement in student achievement in Mississippi. He commended students, teachers and the entire community for achieving these results.

“These scores prove what we already know, that Mississippi is able to compete with anyone. By putting our schools first, we are creating better jobs and building better communities. We congratulate the students, the teachers, and the Department of Education on this tremendous achievement,” said Musgrove.

Mississippi Curriculum Test

In May 2003, Mississippi public school students in grades 2 through 8 took the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT). The MCT is a criterion-referenced test aligned with the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks 2000 and national standards. The MCT results are reported in terms of the student performance standards that were established in September 2001. The test produces scores in three content areas - reading, language, and mathematics. This was the third year that this test was administered in the state.

The 2003 MCT scale scores for Mississippi students were higher than the scores in 2002 in all

content areas at all grade levels except for grade 6 reading where the mean scale score was 1.6 points lower.

Another important way of assessing student performance is determining the percentage of students in the state that met or exceeded certain student performance standards. Every student's score falls into one of four proficiency levels on the MCT. The proficiency levels are (from lowest to highest) "minimal," "basic," "proficient," and "advanced." Students at the "basic" level demonstrate partial mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade level. Students at the "proficient" level demonstrate solid academic performance and mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade level.

The percentage of students scoring at the "basic" level or higher increased at all grade levels in reading except for grade 2 where the percentage remained constant. In language, the percentage increased at every grade 2-8. In mathematics, the percentage increased at grades 4-8, dropped by one point at grade 2 and remained constant at grade 3.

The percentage of students scoring at the "proficient" level or higher increased at all grade levels in all content areas except for grade 6 mathematics where the percentage remained constant.

Writing Assessment

In March 2003, Mississippi public school students in grades 4 and 7 took the Mississippi Writing Assessment. The Writing Assessment is aligned with the Mississippi Language Arts Framework 2000 and assesses the student's ability to produce writing that reflects increasing proficiency. This is a goal for all Mississippi students. This was the fourth year that the Writing Assessment was administered in the state.

Each student's writing is assigned to one of five score points (0-4) based on a scoring rubric. The average grade 4 writing score on the Spring 2000 Writing Assessment was 2.0. The average increased to 2.1 in Spring 2001 and to 2.5 in Spring 2002. In Spring 2003, the average score was 2.2. At grade 7, the average writing score for 2000 was 2.0. The average score increased to 2.3 in 2001 and remained the same in 2002 and 2003.

Subject Area Testing Program

During the 2002-2003 school year the Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) was administered to students in Algebra I, Biology I, U.S. History from 1877, and English II. This was the second year that results from the SATP counted as a graduation requirement for most of the students taking the test.

Each test yields a scale score in the range of 100-500. The passing score on each test is a scale score of 300. Another measure of student performance on the SATP is the percentage of students who pass each test.

The following results are for the Algebra I, Biology I, and U.S. History tests and for the reading/language (multiple choice) component of the English II test.

The average scale score for students taking each of the tests during the 2002-2003 school year

was higher than it was for students taking the tests during 2001-2002. Algebra I scores increased from 335.9 to 339.5, Biology I scores from 347.4 to 350.8, U.S. History scores from 359.7 to 363.0 and scores on the English II reading/language test increased from 321.4 to 328.9.

The percentage of students passing the tests on the first attempt in 2002-2003 was higher than the percentage of students who passed the tests in 2001-2002. The percentage of students passing the Algebra I test increased from 79.0% to 81.5%; in Biology I, the percentage increased from 82.4% to 85.7%; in U.S. History, the percentage increased slightly from 93.7% to 94.2%, and the percentage passing the English II reading/language test increased from 69.2% to 77.4%.

The following results are for the English II Writing Assessment.

The average writing assessment score in 2002-2003 was 2.2 for both the narrative writing prompt and the informative writing prompt. The percentage of students passing both writing prompts on the first attempt increased from 83.9% in 2001-2002 to 91.7% in 2003-2003.

Terra Nova

In May 2003, Mississippi public school students in grade 6 took the Terra Nova. The Terra Nova is a commercial achievement test that compares the performance of students in Mississippi to students nationwide. The test produces scores in three content areas - reading, language, and mathematics. This was the fourth year that the norm-referenced test was administered in the state.

The Terra Nova results for Spring 2003 indicated that Mississippi sixth graders are performing at or above the national average in all three content areas based on the 1996 norm group.

In comparing the same students across two years (grade 5 in 2002 and grade 6 in 2003) results were slightly higher in reading and mathematics, and about the same in language.

** Local school district and school level data will be released on August 15.*

*** This press release and tables showing the test results can be found at www.mde.k12.ms.us.*

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