

NEWS



Connecticut Department of Education

Dr. Betty J. Sternberg
Commissioner

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2003 CMT Results Show Gaps Beginning to Close

(HARTFORD, CONN.) Results of the 2003 Connecticut Mastery Test in Grades 4, 6 and 8 show that the achievement gaps between students in Connecticut's wealthiest and poorest communities are beginning to close. While performance in our poorest cities (Education Reference Group I) is still low, it is improving, particularly when compared to towns that have more advantages (the rest of the state, ERGs A-H).

Performance in Grade 8 mathematics provides a good example of this trend. In 2000, 82.8 percent of students in ERGs A-H achieved proficiency on the mathematics test; in 2003, 83.1 percent did, for an increase of 0.3 percentage points. In ERG I over the same four years, the increase in the percentage of students scoring in the proficient range was from 41.4 to 45.5 or 4.1 percentage points. Thus, the gap in performance on the Grade 8 mathematics test closed by 3.8 percentage points.

There were comparable reductions in gaps of 3.9 percentage points in reading and 2.1 in writing in Grade 8 from 2000 to 2003 in the percentage of students reaching proficiency. In Grade 6, there were reductions in the gaps of 2.0, 0.3 and 0.5 percentage points in mathematics, reading and writing, respectively. In Grade 4, the gap reductions were 2.7, 3.7 and 0.5 percentage points, respectively. (Please see the attached table for more detailed data on the comparisons between ERGs A-H and ERG I.)

"Our most important educational goal is to close the achievement gaps between subgroups of students," said Commissioner of Education Dr. Betty J. Sternberg. "Most of the students in our biggest cities, which we include in Education Reference Group I, are poor, members of minority groups, or both. Traditionally, ERG I is the lowest-performing of these groups. This gap in performance is what educators must focus on relentlessly. We are excited to see the fruits of efforts that have already been made. ERG I students in each grade and subject area became proficient at greater rates than their counterparts in ERGs A-H.

"However, this improvement is just the beginning," Dr. Sternberg added. "We have a long way to go before the gaps close significantly, so we need to continue our intense focus on this goal."

Notably higher percentages of students in ERG I took the CMT than ever before. A comparison of data from 2000 to 2003 shows increases in participation in all nine tests, up to 13.1 percentage points (Grade 8 mathematics). Overall, approximately 10 percent more Grade 4 students, 11 percent more Grade 6 students and 12.5 percent more Grade 8 students took the CMT in 2003 than in 2000.

Students in ERG I increased their performance and closed the gaps while taking the test in greater numbers. These achievements are contrary to the “conventional wisdom” that higher participation leads to lower scores.

“These results are energizing,” Commissioner Sternberg said. “They demonstrate that the hard work of the students themselves, parents and educators is paying off. We know that all of our students can achieve, we know that providing all of them with access to challenging tests demonstrates our high expectations, and we know that curriculum and instructional changes can help increase achievement. Clearly, we are all on the right path.”

Statewide, from 2002 to 2003, Grade 6 CMT mathematics performance (percentage of students at or above state goal, one level above the proficiency level) increased from 61.1 percent to 62.0 percent; in Grade 8, the increase was from 56.1 percent to 56.3 percent. There were increases in all grades in writing performance: in Grade 4, from 61.5 to 65.8 percent; in Grade 6, from 60.8 to 62.2; and in Grade 8 from 60.0 to 61.8. There were decreases in the statewide percentages reaching state goal in Grade 4 mathematics and reading in all three grades.

There were significant increases in the number of students taking the test (participation rate) for all key subgroups of students (students receiving special education, limited-English-proficient students, students receiving free or reduced-price lunches, and African American and Hispanic students). In addition, there was improvement in writing performance statewide in all grades and subgroups of students except special education students in Grades 6 and 8.

Increased participation in the CMT by students in a wide range of subgroups is important to closing the gaps throughout the state.

“The fact that higher – in some cases dramatically higher – percentages of students in certain subgroups are taking the CMT is critical,” said Commissioner Sternberg. “When we expect students to take the test, it means we expect them to be able to meet the standards represented by the test. When we don’t, it means we think there is no hope for them to achieve. That is unacceptable.

“The year-to-year (2002-03) data and trend (2000-03) data show that we have reinforced our expectations of all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic designation, or disability,” Dr. Sternberg continued. “This is the first step toward closing the achievement gaps, and it is an important one.”

For example, in Grade 4, the participation rate of students with limited English proficiency increased from 46.1 to 92.9 percent on the mathematics test from 2000 to 2003 (the rate was 76.6 percent in 2002). In reading, from 2000 to 2002 to 2003 the percentage rose from 44.3 to 76.0 to 89.6; in writing, participation for this group increased from 43.7 to 73.1 to 84.0. Similar, though less dramatic, increases are seen for the four-year trend (2000-03) and yearly change (2002-03) for students receiving special education, students receiving free or reduced-price lunches (an economic indicator), and African American and Hispanic students.

In general, higher percentages of test takers mean lower scores; however, this is the case in only four of the nine CMT test areas from 2002 to 2003. “It is very important that in some areas – but not enough – our students have defied the ‘expectation’ of lower scores with higher participation rates,” Dr. Sternberg said.

This trend extends to subgroups. Looking again at Grade 4, the percentage of students performing at or above the state goal in writing increased for all key subgroups from 2000 to 2002 and again to 2003 (students receiving special education, limited-English-proficient students, students receiving free or reduced-price lunches, African American and Hispanic students). *[Please note that these are examples; similar increases are seen for some subgroups in Grades 6 and 8, while decreases are seen in some test areas for some subgroups in all three grades.]*

Why the success and improvement in writing? “Connecticut districts and schools are offering a more consistent approach to the teaching of writing,” Commissioner Sternberg said. “This includes writing for many purposes and audiences, and providing students and parents with tools to assist them in evaluating students’ writing – in understanding what is going to be measured; in understanding what good writing is.”

Students’ success on the CMT writing assessment isn’t surprising. On the last National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) [2002], Connecticut students in Grades 4 and 8 (the two grades tested) scored first in the nation. All subgroups whose results were disaggregated (white, black, Hispanic, female, male, eligible and not eligible for free and reduced-price lunches) also outscored subgroups across the country.

COMPARISON OF STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT FOR 2000-2003: GRADE 8

	Year	Mathematics			Reading			Writing		
		Percent Taking Standard CMT	Percent Within Goal Range	Percent Within Proficient Range	Percent Taking Standard CMT	Percent Within Goal Range	Percent Within Proficient Range	Percent Taking Standard CMT	Percent Within Goal Range	Percent Within Proficient Range
ERG A-H	2000	94.3	61.3	82.8	94.2	72.6	82.7	93.9	65.6	83.9
	2001	95.6	62.3	82.8	95.7	73.0	82.9	95.4	64.0	82.9
	2002	96.5	63.2	82.7	96.5	74.6	83.9	96.3	65.2	82.8
	2003	97.1	63.8	83.1	97.1	73.3	82.5	96.9	67.6	85.0
	Change 2000 to 2003	+2.8	+2.5	+0.3	+2.9	+0.7	-0.2	+3.0	+2.0	+1.1
ERG I	2000	79.2	18.2	41.4	79.3	31.0	45.5	79.3	31.9	57.4
	2001	85.6	20.3	43.7	85.8	31.5	46.0	84.8	32.1	58.8
	2002	89.2	22.1	47.5	88.8	35.7	50.1	88.0	34.8	59.5
	2003	92.3	21.0	45.5	92.1	35.2	49.2	90.8	35.2	60.5
	Change 2000 to 2003	13.1	+2.8	+4.1	+12.8	+4.2	+3.7	+11.5	+3.3	+3.1
Decrease in Gap		10.3	0.3	3.8	9.9	3.5	3.9	8.5	1.3	2.1

COMPARISON OF STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT FOR 2000-2003: GRADE 6

	Year	Mathematics			Reading			Writing		
		Percent Taking Standard CMT	Percent Within Goal Range	Percent Within Proficient Range	Percent Taking Standard CMT	Percent Within Goal Range	Percent Within Proficient Range	Percent Taking Standard CMT	Percent Within Goal Range	Percent Within Proficient Range
ERG A-H	2000	94.7	63.8	84.2	94.3	68.9	80.8	94.1	66.7	87.2
	2001	96.0	67.4	87.0	95.6	70.8	81.3	95.7	66.0	85.8
	2002	96.7	68.0	87.0	96.5	71.6	80.9	96.3	66.9	87.1
	2003	97.3	69.2	87.0	97.1	69.7	81.0	96.9	68.5	87.7
	Change 2000 to 2003	+2.6	+5.4	+2.8	+2.8	+0.8	+0.2	+2.8	+1.8	+0.5
ERG I	2000	83.6	26.0	52.7	82.9	27.5	42.8	83.3	32.4	63.4
	2001	88.9	30.3	57.8	88.3	29.0	43.5	87.4	31.3	59.9
	2002	91.5	29.2	57.7	91.4	29.8	43.1	89.7	32.9	64.5
	2003	94.8	31.1	57.5	94.3	28.0	43.3	92.9	34.7	65.3
	Change 2000 to 2003	+11.3	+5.1	+4.8	+11.4	+0.5	+0.5	+9.6	+2.3	+1.9
Decrease in Gap		8.7	-0.3	2.0	8.6	-0.3	0.3	6.8	0.5	1.4

COMPARISON OF STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT FOR 2000-2003: GRADE 4

	Year	Mathematics			Reading			Writing		
		Percent Taking Standard CMT	Percent Within Goal Range	Percent Within Proficient Range	Percent Taking Standard CMT	Percent Within Goal Range	Percent Within Proficient Range	Percent Taking Standard CMT	Percent Within Goal Range	Percent Within Proficient Range
ERG A- H	2000	95.6	66.6	87.0	94.7	64.0	77.3	94.4	62.1	83.3
	2001	97.0	68.4	87.0	96.2	65.8	78.6	95.9	67.2	86.4
	2002	97.3	67.2	86.1	96.9	63.3	76.0	96.6	67.3	85.6
	2003	98.1	63.9	84.8	97.4	61.0	74.9	96.9	71.2	86.3
Change 2000 to 2003		+2.5	-2.7	-2.2	+2.7	-3.0	-2.4	+2.5	+9.1	+3.0
ERG I	2000	84.9	29.5	58.3	83.7	22.2	38.5	83.0	35.2	61.3
	2001	92.0	29.4	57.4	90.2	22.9	37.6	89.1	34.8	63.5
	2002	93.1	30.6	57.7	92.3	22.7	36.4	91.1	35.7	62.7
	2003	95.1	29.4	58.8	93.9	23.4	39.8	91.8	41.2	64.8
Change 2000 to 2003		+10.2	-0.1	+0.5	+10.2	+1.2	+1.3	+8.8	+6.0	+3.5
Decrease in Gap		7.7	2.6	2.7	7.5	4.2	3.7	6.3	-3.1	0.5

Comparison of Participation, Percent of Students Meeting Goal the State Goal, and Percent Proficient for 2002 and 2003

Content Area	Grade	2002			2003		
		Participation	Percent at or above State Goal (Level 4 + Level 5)	Percent at or above Proficient (Level 3+ Level 4 + Level 5)	Participation	Percent at or above State Goal (Level 4 + Level 5)	Percent at or above Proficient (Level 3+ Level 4 + Level 5)
Mathematics	4	96.5	60.4	80.8	97.4	57.6	80.1
	6	95.8	61.1	81.8	96.8	62.0	81.5
	8	95.1	56.1	76.7	96.1	56.3	76.6
Reading	4	96.0	55.9	68.7	96.7	54.3	68.7
	6	95.6	64.1	74.1	96.5	61.9	74.0
	8	95.1	68.1	78.2	96.1	66.7	76.8
Writing	4	95.6	61.5	81.3	95.9	65.8	82.5
	6	95.1	60.8	83.1	96.0	62.2	83.6
	8	94.8	60.0	78.8	95.7	61.8	80.6