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Cobb Eighth Graders Show Big Gains on Writing Test

Cobb County middle schools are proving that proactive efforts to help students develop writing skills are paying off. Cobb eighth graders made significant gains on the 2008 state writing assessment with 84 percent of students meeting or exceeding standards – an increase of seven percentage points from 2007, the first year the assessment was administered. The district-wide average scale score also increased four points to 219. Both Cobb’s scale score and percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards were higher than those of other metro Atlanta school districts and students throughout Georgia (See Table I).

Two key student subgroups, Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners, showed marked improvement on the writing test. Students with Disabilities (SWD) showed an increase of 15 percentage points, from 40 percent to 55 percent, in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards. English Language Learners (ELL) saw a similar upward trend in student proficiency with a 12-point improvement from 30 percent to 42 percent. Scale scores increased for both groups of students by 7 and 5 points, respectively (See Chart I, II).

Superintendent Fred Sanderson said, “It is very good news to see this level of academic progress. It is a credit to our administrators and teachers that their efforts to help students improve their writing are working.”

Nearly every Cobb middle school increased the percentage of students proficient or better on writing standards and many also increased their scale scores. Barber Middle School in Acworth showed remarkable progress, with a 16-point increase in the school’s scale score and a 29 point gain in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards. A majority of Cobb schools topped the state scale scores, with scores ranging from 201 to 240. Highest scores were for Dickerson (240), Mabry (238), and Hightower Trail (236). Several schools had more than 90 percent of students who met or exceeded standards (Dickerson, Dodgen, Durham, Hightower Trail, Lost Mountain, Lovinggood, Mabry, Simpson).

The progress made on Cobb’s eighth grade writing assessment can be attributed to the proactive approach taken by each school in addressing the needs of its students. When Lovinggood Middle School principal Zinta Perkins and her staff discovered a gap between the scores of males and females in 2007, the school established a writing goal as part of its improvement plan. All teachers use a school-wide rubric to evaluate a writing assignment each nine-week period, providing a regular assessment tool to help students.

David Nelson, principal at Daniell Middle School, credits the flexibility of his teaching staff for the difference in his students' performance. Teachers at Daniell flexed their schedules to provide maximum availability to students for tutoring and after-school assistance. The staff collaborated early in the school year to improve its approach to writing instruction and developed a writing test simulation to help students learn how to efficiently manage their way through the timed assessment.

While Cobb's overall scores were strong, one remaining concern is the gap that continues to exist between the performance of regular education students and students in special populations (Special Education or English Language Learners). This same gap is apparent on other assessments at both the state and district levels. Although both groups made gains this year, the percentage of students meeting and exceeding standards in both groups was significantly smaller than that of students in the regular education program (Table II).

"This is still a new test, but it has provided us with good information," said Robert Benson, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. "I am proud of our students' performance, but it is also clear that we need to address the gap between the regular education students and certain subgroups. Addressing that issue will be critical for meeting No Child Left Behind standards on other assessments, as well. Writing is a cumulative skill and the more students write the better their writing becomes. Language Arts supervisors will work with the schools to evaluate the results from the new assessment and develop plans for improvement."

As a part of the statewide testing program, the Eighth Grade Writing Assessment was administered in January and requires students to write a composition on an assigned topic. The assessment provides eighth graders with a measurement of their writing performance. This information can help students, parents, and teachers understand areas where students may need to focus their efforts to improve writing skills before taking the writing portion of the Georgia High School Graduation Test in their junior year.

Each student paper is scored by professionals who have been trained to evaluate writing. Evaluators score student compositions on four domains, or qualities of effective writing, including ideas, organization, style, and convention. Domains are rated on a scale of 1 to 5. Performance of Cobb students was similar across all domains, ranging from 3.1 in organization to 3.2 in conventions. The scale score range for the new Grade 8 Writing Assessment is 100 to 350. Writing scores are reported in the following performance levels: *Does Not Meet* (100-199), *Meets* (200-249), and *Exceeds* (250-350).

More information about the Cobb County School District's testing programs is available on the District Web site at www.cobbk12.org.

Cobb County School District
Eighth Grade Writing Assessment: 2008
All Students

Table I

	# Tested	Mean Scale Score	% DNM	% M	% E	% M+E	WRITING DOMAINS**			
							Ideas	Organization	Style	Conventions
Cobb	7,886	219	15.0	73.0	11.0	84.0	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.2
Metro Resa*	na	215	19.0	72.0	9.0	81.0	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.0
Georgia	119,716	212	22.0	71.0	6.0	77.0	3.0	2.9	3.0	2.9
Awtrey	271	208	26.0	71.0	3.0	74.0	2.7	2.7	2.9	3.0
Barber	300	219	12.0	78.0	11.0	89.0	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.1
Campbell Middle	298	204	31.0	68.0	1.0	69.0	2.8	2.7	2.8	2.7
Cooper	314	211	19.0	77.0	4.0	81.0	2.9	2.8	3.0	2.9
Daniell	308	220	11.0	79.0	10.0	89.0	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.1
Dickerson	448	240	3.0	68.0	29.0	97.0	3.8	3.7	3.8	3.8
Dodgen	349	230	5.0	79.0	16.0	95.0	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.5
Durham	390	224	9.0	78.0	13.0	91.0	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.3
East Cobb	366	218	19.0	70.0	12.0	82.0	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.0
Floyd	290	210	25.0	70.0	5.0	75.0	2.9	2.8	2.9	2.8
Garrett	284	211	22.0	73.0	5.0	78.0	3.0	2.9	2.9	2.8
Griffin	329	206	24.0	72.0	3.0	75.0	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.7
Hightower Trail	323	236	4.0	73.0	24.0	97.0	3.7	3.6	3.6	3.6
Imagine Intl Acad of Mableton	11	203	36.0	64.0	0.0	64.0	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.6
Lindley	402	201	32.0	66.0	2.0	68.0	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.6
Lost Mountain	391	230	6.0	74.0	20.0	94.0	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.5
Lovinggood	356	223	8.0	80.0	12.0	92.0	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.3
Mabry	323	238	4.0	69.0	28.0	97.0	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.7
McCleskey	247	219	13.0	79.0	9.0	88.0	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.2
McClure	390	220	12.0	79.0	9.0	88.0	3.2	3.1	3.3	3.3
Palmer	370	216	19.0	73.0	8.0	81.0	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.1
Pine Mountain	240	215	18.0	75.0	7.0	82.0	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.1
Simpson	267	232	10.0	66.0	24.0	90.0	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.5
Smitha	296	205	31.0	67.0	2.0	69.0	2.8	2.6	2.8	2.7
Tapp	317	215	18.0	78.0	4.0	82.0	3.1	3.0	3.0	3.0

*RESA: Atlanta, Buford, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fulton, Forsyth, Gwinnett and Rockdale Counties, Decatur, and Marietta City systems

DNM = Did Not Meet Standards (Score of 100 - 199)

M = Met Standards (Score of 200 - 249)

E = Exceeded Standards (Score of 250 - 350)

% M+E = Percentage of students meeting and exceeding standards

**Scoring Information for Domains
Range 1 (low) to 5 (high)

**Cobb County School District
Eighth Grade Writing Assessment: 2008
Percentages of Students in Performance Levels by Program Type**

Table II

	# Tested	Average Scale Score	Percentages		
GEORGIA			DNM	M	E
All Students	119,716	212	22	71	6
Regular Program Students		222	18	75	7
Limited English Proficient	2,604	184	60	40	0
Special Education	12,617	185	60	40	1
COBB COUNTY			DNM	M	E
All Students	7886	219	15	73	11
Regular Program Students	7040	222	12	76	12
Limited English Proficient	262	186	58	42	0
Special Education	846	196	45	53	2
AWTREY			DNM	M	E
All Students	271	208	26	71	3
Regular Program Students	248	210	20	76	4
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	23	179	87	13	0
BARBER			DNM	M	E
All Students	300	219	12	78	11
Regular Program Students	270	222	8	80	12
Limited English Proficient	11	198	36	64	0
Special Education	30	197	43	57	0
CAMPBELL			DNM	M	E
All Students	298	204	31	68	1
Regular Program Students	272	206	27	71	1
Limited English Proficient	21	172	76	24	0
Special Education	26	183	65	35	0
COOPER			DNM	M	E
All Students	314	211	19	77	4
Regular Program Students	280	213	16	80	4
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	34	196	47	53	0
DANIELL			DNM	M	E
All Students	308	220	11	79	10
Regular Program Students	263	223	7	81	12
Limited English Proficient	12	190	50	50	0
Special Education	45	200	36	64	0
DICKERSON			DNM	M	E
All Students	448	240	3	68	29
Regular Program Students	409	242	2	67	32
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	39	219	13	82	5

TFC = Too Few To Report (If a school had fewer than 10 students scores are not listed.)

DNM = Did Not Meet Standards

M = Met Standards

E = Exceeded Standards

Cobb County School District
Eighth Grade Writing Assessment: 2008
Percentages of Students in Performance Levels by Program Type

Table II

	# Tested	Average Scale Score	Percentages		
DODGEN			DNM	M	E
All Students	349	230	5	79	16
Regular Program Students	293	235	2	79	19
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	56	208	23	77	0
DURHAM			DNM	M	E
All Students	390	224	9	78	13
Regular Program Students	348	227	5	80	14
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	42	199	36	64	0
EAST COBB			DNM	M	E
All Students	366	218	19	70	12
Regular Program Students	325	221	16	71	13
Limited English Proficient	34	199	38	62	0
Special Education	41	193	41	59	0
FLOYD			DNM	M	E
All Students	290	210	25	70	5
Regular Program Students	257	214	18	76	5
Limited English Proficient	13	182	62	38	0
Special Education	33	181	76	24	0
GARRETT			DNM	M	E
All Students	284	211	22	73	5
Regular Program Students	249	214	16	78	6
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	35	191	66	34	0
GRIFFIN			DNM	M	E
All Students	329	206	24	72	3
Regular Program Students	288	209	21	76	3
Limited English Proficient	49	180	67	33	0
Special Education	41	186	49	49	2
HIGHTOWER TRAIL			DNM	M	E
All Students	323	236	4	73	24
Regular Program Students	280	238	1	74	25
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	43	222	21	65	14
IMAGINE INTL ACAD OF MABLETON			DNM	M	E
All Students	11	203	36	64	0
Regular Program Students	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC

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Cobb County School District
Eighth Grade Writing Assessment: 2008
Percentages of Students in Performance Levels by Program Type

Table II

	# Tested	Average Scale Score	Percentages		
LINDLEY			DNM	M	E
All Students	402	201	32	66	2
Regular Program Students	370	204	28	70	2
Limited English Proficient	36	182	69	31	0
Special Education	32	170	78	22	0
LOST MOUNTAIN			DNM	M	E
All Students	391	230	6	74	20
Regular Program Students	356	233	4	74	22
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	35	202	23	77	0
LOVINGGOOD			DNM	M	E
All Students	356	223	8	80	12
Regular Program Students	324	226	5	82	13
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	32	196	38	63	0
MABRY			DNM	M	E
All Students	323	238	4	69	28
Regular Program Students	288	241	2	68	30
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	35	216	17	74	9
McCLESKEY			DNM	M	E
All Students	247	219	13	79	9
Regular Program Students	213	222	8	82	10
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	34	196	38	62	0
MCCLURE			DNM	M	E
All Students	390	220	12	79	9
Regular Program Students	349	224	7	82	11
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	41	193	49	51	0
PALMER			DNM	M	E
All Students	370	216	19	73	8
Regular Program Students	343	219	16	75	8
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	27	187	52	48	0
PINE MOUNTAIN			DNM	M	E
All Students	240	215	18	75	7
Regular Program Students	221	217	14	79	7
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	19	183	68	32	0

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Cobb County School District
Eighth Grade Writing Assessment: 2008
Percentages of Students in Performance Levels by Program Type

Table II

	# Tested	Average Scale Score	Percentages		
SIMPSON			DNM	M	E
All Students	267	232	10	66	24
Regular Program Students	235	236	6	68	26
Limited English Proficient	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC	TFC
Special Education	32	204	41	50	9
SMITHA			DNM	M	E
All Students	296	205	31	67	2
Regular Program Students	264	208	25	72	2
Limited English Proficient	18	181	72	28	0
Special Education	32	178	75	25	0
TAPP			DNM	M	E
All Students	317	215	18	78	4
Regular Program Students	283	218	13	83	5
Limited English Proficient	10	199	50	50	0
Special Education	34	193	59	41	0

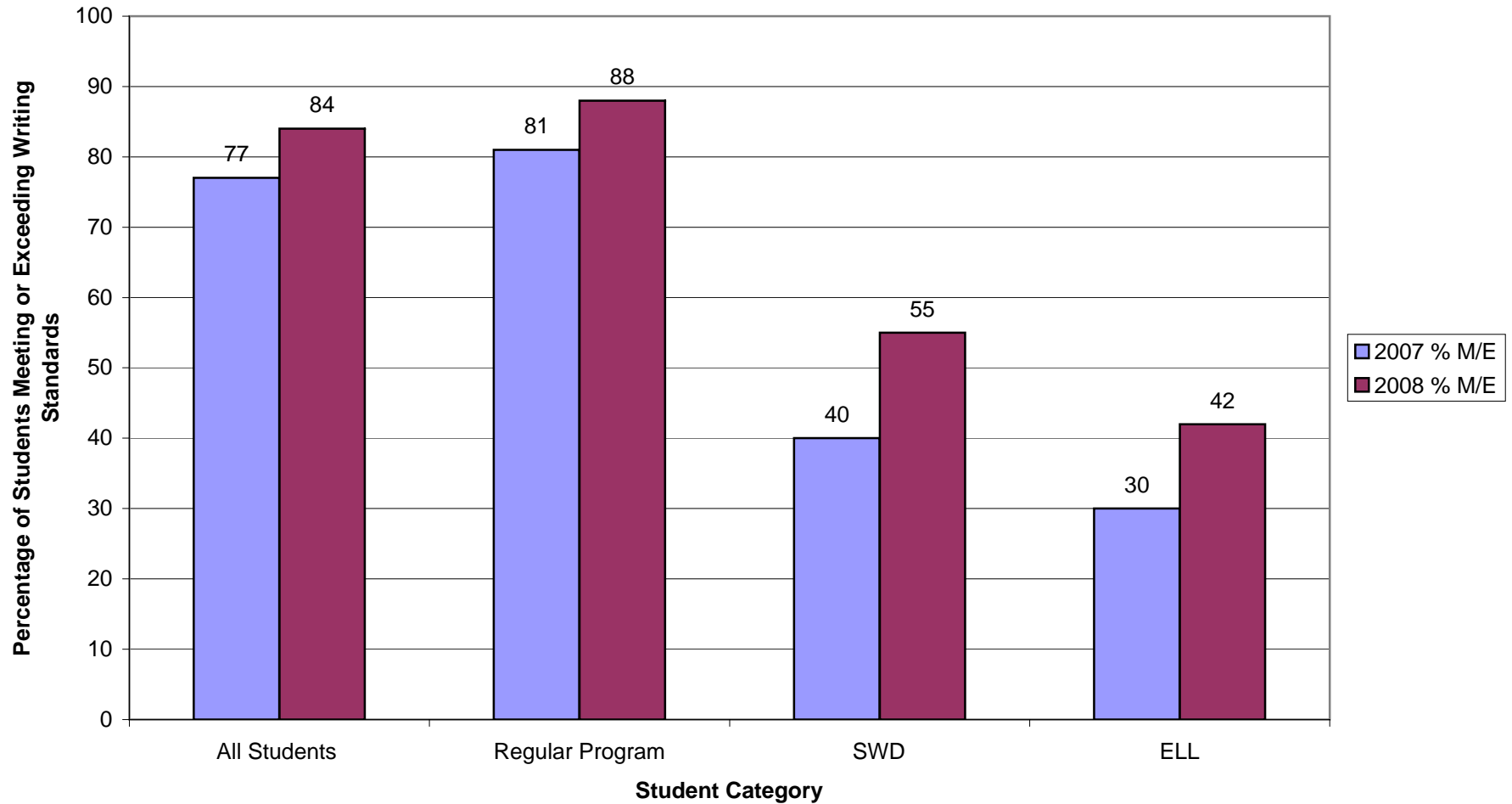
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M = Met Standards

E = Exceeded Standards

**Cobb County School District
Eighth Grade Writing Assessment (2007, 2008)
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards in Writing**



**Cobb County School District
Eighth Grade Writing Assessment (2007, 2008)
Mean Scale Score Comparison**

