

Report to the
Joint Legislative Education
Oversight Committee on
Senate Bill 1005 Section 28.17 (j)

February 2002



Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education • Department of Public Instruction
Office of Instructional and Accountability Services

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Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee
On
Senate Bill 1005 SECTION 28.17. (j)

Background

SECTION 28.17. (j) states that the State Board of Education shall develop and report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on its objectives for the Statewide Testing Program and on the implementation of that Program. The report shall include:

- (1) A statement of the relationship between these objectives and the tests currently administered under the Program;
- (2) An analysis of whether the current tests appropriately achieve these objectives;
- (3) A statement of any actions that may be needed to coordinate the objectives and the tests more effectively; and
- (4) Strategies for communicating the objectives of the Program, the tests administered under the Program, and the relationship between these objectives and tests to principals, teachers, parents, and students throughout the State.

Report

The State Board of Education Report is as follows:

The State Board of Education's objectives for the North Carolina Statewide Testing Program are consistent with the three purposes of the Statewide Testing Program specified in General Statute 115C-174.10.

Objective One

The first objective is to provide assurance that all high school graduates possess those essential skills and knowledge thought to be necessary to function as productive members of society. The Board believes that it has the responsibility to set forth specific, clear content standards that are measurable and send a clear message of what students should know and are able to do. The Board also believes that its required content standards are to provide assurances that every child completing a public education in the State has had ample opportunity to access and learn the basic skills that provide the foundation for learning and success at each level of schooling and especially upon graduation from high school. Although the Board focuses its emphasis on the content standards in the basic skills areas of reading, writing, and mathematics, it expects that specified content standards in other areas such as science, social studies including citizenship and history, computer skills, health, physical education, workforce development, and the arts be integrated into the delivery of the high priority disciplines.

The Board believes that it must provide the appropriate checkpoints at each level along each student's educational career. Its emphasis on administering end-of-grade (EOG) tests in the areas of reading and mathematics at the end of each grade in grades 3-8 provides such checkpoints and assurance that students are progressing through the grades appropriately and are learning the required competencies. A check of student writing skills in primary school at grade 4, again in middle school at grade 7, and again in high school at grade 10 provides additional assurance in the students' ability to communicate their ideas and thoughts in written form.

The Board has adopted and implemented the Student Accountability Standards (SAS) to provide a level of assurance that this objective is being met. By implementing the SAS, the Board uses the EOG tests to check and monitor student progress in primary school, in middle school, and it uses graduation tests in high school. These State checks using the EOG tests in reading and mathematics in grades 3, 5, and 8 ensure that students who are not progressing appropriately can be identified early so that the appropriate intervention can be implemented to assist students in realizing their potential and making progress toward acquiring the essential skills. In addition, the Board has expanded the State graduation requirements to include demonstration of computer skills proficiency and demonstration of proficiency in reading and mathematics on the high school competency tests. In response to General Statute 115C-12 (9b), the Board is in the process of developing an eleventh grade high school exit exam that is scheduled for initial implementation at the end of the 2003-04 school year as a graduation requirement for the graduates of 2005. The exit exam, a higher level test of essential skills acquired by the end of the eleventh grade, will replace the current competency tests in reading and mathematics.

Objective Two

The State Board of Education's second objective is also consistent with the second purpose of the Statewide Testing Program as specified in the General Statute 115C-174.10 which is to provide a means of identifying strengths and weaknesses in the education process in order to improve instructional delivery. The Board has chosen to continue to use the end-of-grade, end-of-course, and other North Carolina-developed curriculum-based tests to ensure that the assessments are aligned to state mandated content standards and yet at the same time provide some level of alignment with national standards as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The Board's process for test development ensures that specialists in key department areas such as content, testing, English as a Second Language (ESL), and students with disabilities specialists are involved in the process along with classroom teachers. This group of experts works collaboratively to ensure that the tests are valid for the purposes of measuring the specified competencies for all students regardless of their program of study. The tests are designed using a test blueprint that provides as broad a breadth of coverage of the content standards at the specified grade and subject as the tests can measure.

In response to the 1997 revised federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Board implemented a system of alternate assessments for students with disabilities effective with the 2000-01 school year. The alternate assessments ensure access and participation of all students in the Statewide Testing Program. The system includes a portfolio for students with serious cognitive deficits and an academic inventory (checklist) for students who are being taught competencies specified in the content standards in the areas of reading and mathematics and writing regardless of whether the student is working on or off-grade level in the specified content area.

The reports of student performance on the tests provide information about the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional delivery at each level—classroom, school district, and subgroups such as ethnicity and gender. This information is not only used for program evaluation but is also used by school improvement teams and other state and local curriculum staff as one of the strategies in working with schools identified as low performing or not making adequate annual progress. Due to the test administration time constraints, the curriculum-based tests are not sufficient in length (number of test questions) to provide extensive diagnostic information at the individual student level. However, individual student reports for students and parents are provided that give the student's scale score achieved in each content area, the student's general performance on the content strands for each content area, and the student's overall achievement level performance in each content area.

Objective Three

The State Board of Education has as its final objective for the Statewide Testing Program a means for making the education system at the State, local, and school levels accountable to the public for results. This objective is also consistent with the purpose of the Statewide Testing Program as specified in the General Statute 115C.174.10. Per General Statute 115C-105.20 (School-Based Management and Accountability Program), all tests included in the North Carolina Statewide Testing Program currently are included in the ABCs Accountability Program or plans are underway to include the tests in the accountability program once sufficient data are available. Locally-generated accountability reports are required in which schools report their performance on the tests in The Statewide Testing Program along with other indicators to their local community in addition to the state-generated reports issued annually reporting each school's ABCs accountability status.

Other Pertinent Information

- (1) The relationship between the State Board of Education objectives and the tests currently administered under the Statewide Testing Program is as follows:

Objective	Tests in Statewide Testing Program
1. Assurance That Graduates Have Necessary Skills	End-of-Grade Tests Grades 3-8 <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Reading▪ Mathematics End-of-Course Tests <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Algebra I▪ English I▪ Physical Science▪ Biology▪ U. S. History▪ Economics, Legal, and Political Systems (ELPS)

	<p>Computer Skills Proficiency Tests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multiple-choice ▪ Performance <p>Alternate Assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic Inventory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading ▪ Mathematics ▪ Writing ▪ Portfolio <p>Writing Assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grade 4 ▪ Grade 7 ▪ Grade 10 <p>High School Competency Tests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading ▪ Mathematics
2.Improve Instructional Delivery	<p>End-of-Grade Tests Grades 3-8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading ▪ Mathematics <p>End-of-Course Tests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Algebra I ▪ English I ▪ Physical Science ▪ Biology ▪ U. S. History ▪ Economics, Legal, and Political Systems (ELPS) ▪ Algebra II ▪ Geometry ▪ Chemistry ▪ Physics <p>Writing Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grades 4 ▪ Grade 7 ▪ Grade 10 <p>Alternate Assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic Inventory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading ▪ Mathematics ▪ Writing ▪ Portfolio <p>Computer Skills Proficiency Tests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multiple-choice ▪ Performance
3. Accountability	<p>Grade 3 Pretests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading ▪ Mathematics <p>End-of-Grade Tests Grades 3-8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading ▪ Mathematics <p>End-of-Course Tests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Algebra I ▪ English I ▪ Physical Science ▪ Biology ▪ U. S. History ▪ Economics, Legal, and Political Systems (ELPS) ▪ Algebra II ▪ Geometry

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chemistry ▪ Physics <p>Writing Assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grade 4 ▪ Grade 7 ▪ Grade 10 (When data are available) <p>Alternate Assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic Inventory (Effective 2001-02) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading ▪ Mathematics ▪ Writing ▪ Portfolio <p>Computer Skills Proficiency Tests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multiple-choice ▪ Performance <p>Competency Tests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading ▪ Mathematics
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The Board has observed significant gains in student performance since the initial implementation of the current structure of the North Carolina Statewide Testing Program and the ABCs Accountability Program. The percent of students statewide performing at level III and above in both reading and mathematics has increased from 52.9 percent in 1992-93 to 71.7 percent in 2000-01.

- (2) The Board believes that the current tests serve to achieve the objectives of the Statewide Testing Program. The writing assessments at grades 4, 7, and 10, which are presently undergoing revision, will be included in the school-based accountability program first, in the performance composite and later, in both the growth and performance composites as sufficient data become available to support a data-based accountability algorithm. The assessments included in the Statewide Testing Program are constantly undergoing evaluations and revisions to ensure that they are appropriate for the established objectives and legislated purposes. The Board has also supported the implementation of a state-sponsored classroom assessment initiative to enhance information gathering at the building level and to provide a means of more frequent checks at the classroom level, as appropriate, to ensure that students are learning. A classroom assessment item bank has been developed for grades 3, 5, and 8 and selected high school courses. The assessment items are aligned with the content standards in reading and mathematics and are designed to provide teachers with formative and summative information on individual student performance as well as groups of students.
- (3) The Board believes that no actions are needed at this time to coordinate its objectives and the tests more effectively. Recent reductions in the Statewide Testing Program due to budget constraints reduced some tests that had been implemented to support the Board objectives such as the high school comprehensive test in reading and mathematics at grade 10 (high school growth in reading and mathematics for the purpose of school accountability) and the open-ended assessments at grades 4 and 8 (to improve instructional delivery). The Board believes the existing tests currently included in the program and the objectives of the program are aligned.

The Board is concerned, however, about the actions that may be needed at this time and in the future to coordinate the objectives and the tests in the Statewide Testing Program with objectives and mandates of the federal reauthorization of the ESEA (No Child Left Behind) legislation. The ESEA legislation mandates that by 2005-06 states develop and annually administer reading and mathematics assessments for grades 3-8 which we are well-positioned to do since the current end-of-grade testing component of the Statewide Testing Program fulfills this requirement.

Among the other requirements of the ESEA bill that concerns the Board is the requirement to administer academic assessments in reading and mathematics in one grade in each grade span 3-5 (EOG tests do this), 6-9 (EOG tests do this), and 10-12 (our area of concern). Previously, the high school comprehensive test in reading and mathematics fulfilled this requirement; but, the general use of this test was discontinued as a statewide grade 10 assessment effective with the 2001-02 school year due to budget constraints.

In addition, the ESEA bill requires that states implement science assessments by the 2007-08 school year in one grade in each grade span of 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12 (the Biology EOC test may meet this requirement.). Currently the objectives and requirements of the North Carolina Statewide Testing Program **do not** include end-of-grade tests in science in any of the grade spans 3-8. This presents an area of concern for the Board due to constrained resources. Although the ESEA bill provides funding to the states, a continuing concern is the need for additional staff in the area of testing and accountability.

- (4) The Board's objectives for the Statewide Testing Program are widely communicated to principals, teachers, parents, and students throughout the State using every possible medium. Although department staff cutbacks of recent years have severely limited the resources available in this area, the Board, supported by the department's staff, has been resourceful in its efforts to disseminate the Board's objectives for the Statewide Testing Program. The Board uses the State Board of Education and Department of Public Instruction Websites, printed documents such as test administrators manuals, ABCs reports, testing results reports, superintendent's weekly messages, electronic announcements such as informationals for principals and teachers are used to convey messages about the Board's objectives for the Statewide Testing Program.

The Board believes that student learning has been enhanced and supported by the focus and thrust of the North Carolina Statewide Testing Program.

