

ABCs

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69 percent to 62 percent. A similar trend occurred statewide.

Results would likely have sagged further, but the state board of education discarded sixth-grade reading scores after a second year of "unusually low" growth attributed to an outdated formula. A new formula will be used next year.

In New Hanover and the immediately surrounding counties, educators were still pleased with the results. About 71 percent of New Hanover schools met their goals. In Brunswick and Pender, more than 80 percent did.

The annual ABC tests measure reading and math proficiency in third through eighth grades. High school students are tested in the following eight sub-

jects: Algebra I, Algebra II, biology, chemistry, English I, geometry, physical science and physics.

What the scores mean depends on who is talking.

Supporters call them a vital indicator of student advancement and teacher performance that keeps educators accountable.

Critics say they exaggerate the importance of a single test, encouraging teachers to teach to the test at the cost of real learning.

The tests can be confusing to interpret with the complex growth formulas remaining a mystery to many. Each school has a specific goal based upon that formula. A school can meet its growth goal even if the number of students reaching proficiency declines or vice versa.

At Bradley Creek Elementary, for example, the level of proficient students dropped more

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than 6 percentage points, but the school still reached its growth goal. Blair Elementary School, on the other hand, increased its level of proficiency to above 90 percent but did not reach its target growth.

The state measures growth even if it doesn't result in proficiency. If a student made significant improvement but didn't reach grade-level performance, that would still count toward the school's progress goal.

Making growth goals means extra money in paychecks. A teacher at a school reaching its goal takes home between \$750 and \$1,500. Teacher assistants get half that. Statewide, the bonuses are expected to cost around \$94 million.

on year-end assessment tests in 2004-05 - the third year in a row that the rate hovered at about 81 percent.

"We've gotten to the point where it's going to be hard, and we knew it was going to be hard, to get all kids where they need to be," State Board of Education member Jane Norwood said.

Beginning several years before the decade-old ABCs program began, a growing percentage of students in grades three through eight has performed at or above grade level in reading and

Schools face hard road ahead on state tests

Associated Press

RALEIGH | Steady gains in tests that measure North Carolina students' math and reading skills have leveled off after a decade, signaling that educators now face the toughest phase in their efforts to improve school performance, state officials said Thursday.

Data from the ABCs of Public Education program show that 80.9 percent of elementary and middle school students performed at or above expectations

math, rising from 52.9 percent in 1992-93 to 80.8 percent in the 2002-03 school year.

In 2003-04, the rate inched up to 81.3 percent before falling a fraction of a point to this year's level.

The marginal recent changes indicate educators have effectively reached most students and now must work to help those who are either the toughest cases or who consistently hover at the fringe of acceptable performance, board members said.

"It's harder to pick the higher-

Date Pelsey-Becton, assistant superintendent for instruction for New Hanover County Schools, said the scores are just one indicator of school performance, but they are useful. The district's lead teachers use the data to target areas for improvement with individual teachers and schools.

"We are doing everything we can to show a year's worth of growth," she said.

The area's two charter schools also took the tests. The Roger Bacon Academy near Leland was nearly 92 percent proficient, surpassing its growth goals.

The Cape Fear Center for Inquiry in Wilmington was 83.9 percent proficient. It did not reach its growth target.

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ANNUAL ABC SCORES

Through the ABCs of Public Education, end-of-grade tests, measure student achievement in reading and math for grades 3-8. High school students take end-of-course tests in eight subjects. The following chart shows the percentage of students at or above grade level and whether each school met federal standards.

- Honor Schools of Excellence - 90 percent or more of students at grade level and made adequate yearly progress. Met or exceeded growth.
- ★ Schools of Excellence - 90 percent or more of students at grade level or proficiency. Met or exceeded growth.
- + Schools of Distinction - 80 percent or more of students at grade level. Met or exceeded growth.
- Schools of Progress - 60 percent or more of students at grade level. Met or exceeded growth.
- Priority Schools - 50 percent or more of students at grade level.
- Low Performing - Fewer than 50 percent of students at grade level.

BRUNSWICK COUNTY SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS	'05	'04	Federal Std.
Belville Elementary	76.0	76.7	No
Bolivia Elementary	91.0	89.1	Yes
Lincoln Elementary	78.1	N/A	No
Monroe Elementary	86.9	80.0	Yes
Southport Elementary	92.1	92.0	Yes
Supply Elementary	87.0	83.8	Yes
Union Elementary	90.7	90.7	Yes
Waccamaw Elementary	93.3	90.1	Yes
Williamson Elementary	93.0	92.1	Yes
Leland Middle	80.4	79.6	No
Shalotte Middle	85.2	83.7	No
South Brunswick Middle	90.0	88.3	Yes
North Brunswick High	64.8	68.2	No
South Brunswick High	73.6	77.7	Yes
West Brunswick High	75.8	72.7	No
Brunswick Learning Center	45.2	47.0	Yes

NEW HANOVER COUNTY SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS	'05	'04	Federal Std.	
Alderman Elementary	85.2	88.6	Yes	+
Bellamy Elementary	90.1	89.9	No	
Blair Elementary	90.7	88.5	No	
Bradley Creek Elem.	84.0	90.5	Yes	+
Carolina Beach Elem.	91.4	93.0	Yes	
Codington Elementary	98.7	99.0	Yes	○
College Park Elementary	89.0	85.8	Yes	+
Eaton Elementary	98.8	99.1	Yes	○
Forest Hills Elementary	85.5	88.2	No	+
Freeman Elementary	86.1	86.7	Yes	
Gregory Elementary	92.5	95.4	Yes	○
Holly Tree Elementary	97.8	96.8	Yes	○
Johnson Elementary	81.4	85.4	Yes	
Ogden Elementary	97.0	95.9	Yes	○
Parsley Elementary	96.2	92.7	Yes	○
Pine Valley Elementary	92.4	90.6	Yes	○
Snipes Elementary	85.0	86.2	Yes	
Sunset Park Elementary	84.1	85.3	Yes	
Williams Elementary	88.3	87.2	No	+
Winter Park Elementary	91.6	94.2	Yes	○
Wrightsboro Elementary	90.8	93.5	Yes	○
Wrightsville Beach Elem.	96.7	97.3	Yes	○
Murray Middle	90.9	88.0	Yes	○
Myrtle Grove Middle	92.2	90.4	Yes	○
Noble Middle	92.2	92.9	No	★
Roland-Grise Middle	90.5	88.8	No	★
Trask Middle	89.8	91.6	Yes	
Virgo Middle	79.5	84.1	No	
Williston Middle	82.9	88.5	No	+
Ashley High	74.5	73.7	No	●
Hoggard High	88.1	88.2	Yes	+
Lakeside High	41.9	35.1	No	
Laney High	78.3	78.3	No	●
New Hanover High	70.4	72.7	No	●

ONSLOW COUNTY SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS	'05	'04	Federal Std.	
Bell Fork Elementary	90.2	92.4	Yes	○
Blue Creek Elementary	86.4	89.6	Yes	
Carolina Forest Elem.	92.3	N/A	Yes	○
Clyde Erwin Elementary	82.3	81.4	Yes	
Dixon Elementary	89.4	90.3	No	
Hunters Creek Elem.	88.1	91.7	Yes	
Jacksonville Comm. Elem.	87.9	93.3	Yes	+
Morton Elementary	83.6	86.5	Yes	
Northwoods Elementary	84.2	92.6	Yes	
Parkwood Elementary	92.3	96.0	Yes	○
Queens Creek Elem.	89.0	90.5	No	+
Richlands Elementary	91.6	91.1	No	★
Richlands Primary	N/A	N/A	No	
Sand Ridge Elementary	88.1	91.9	Yes	
Silverdale Elementary	90.1	94.1	Yes	
Southwest Elementary	85.1	90.9	No	
Summersill Elementary	87.6	90.1	Yes	
Swansboro Elementary	92.6	89.4	Yes	○
Dixon Middle	87.4	89.8	No	
Hunters Creek Middle	92.1	92.7	Yes	○
Jacksonville Comm. Mid.	87.3	88.7	No	
New Bridge Middle	96.6	97.0	Yes	○
Northwoods Park Middle	91.2	89.1	Yes	○
Southwest Middle	86.5	87.3	Yes	
Swansboro Middle	86.6	88.9	No	
Trexler Middle	89.7	87.1	Yes	+
Dixon High	82.2	84.2	Yes	+
Jacksonville High	81.1	82.9	Yes	+
Northside High	82.1	87.8	No	+
Richlands High	84.5	82.9	Yes	+
Southwest High	79.8	82.4	Yes	●
Swansboro High	80.7	83.2	Yes	+
White Oak High	83.6	84.2	Yes	+

PENDER COUNTY SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS	'05	'04	Federal Std.	
Burgaw Elementary	77.6	80.0	No	●
Cape Fear Elementary	84.6	88.2	No	+
Malpass Corner Elem.	88.7	84.4	Yes	+
North Topsail Elem.	94.5	94.8	Yes	○
Penderlea Elementary	91.8	91.7	Yes	○
Rocky Point Primary	N/A	N/A	No	
South Topsail Elem.	93.3	92.1	Yes	○
Burgaw Middle	87.4	88.6	Yes	
Cape Fear Middle	88.5	87.6	No	+
Topsail Middle	94.7	95.5	Yes	○
West Pender Middle	83.6	86.2	Yes	
Pender High	74.3	71.7	Yes	●
Topsail High	94.0	91.0	Yes	○
Trask High	88.3	82.1	Yes	+
Pender Learning Center	54.3	38.8	N/A	