

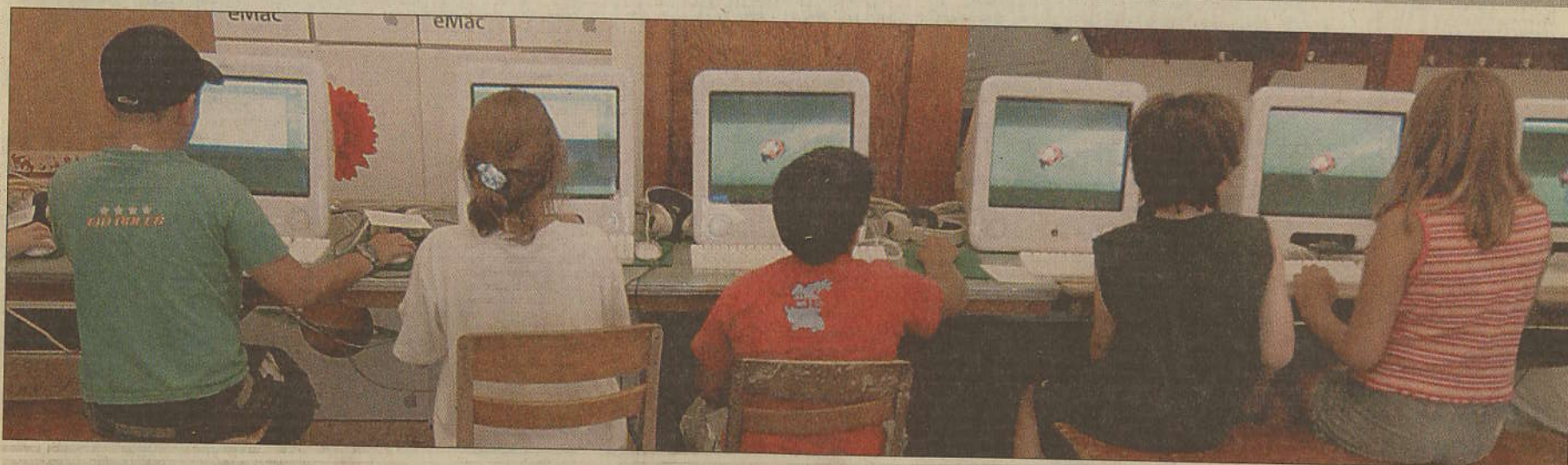
# The Oregonian

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2001 PULITZER PRIZE WINNER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

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Oregon City School District elementary students work on their reading and writing skills during summer school. Statewide, about 80 percent of third- and fifth-graders met or exceeded Oregon's reading standard, far surpassing the achievement of middle and high schoolers.

BOB ELLIS/THE OREGONIAN

## Lackluster scores disappoint



# Middle and high schoolers stumble in state tests, where only elementary math scores rise

By **BETSY HAMMOND**  
THE OREGONIAN

Mediocre achievement in Oregon's middle and high schools demands urgent, proven fixes to raise teenagers' reading and math skills, state Superintendent Susan Castillo said Wednesday after seeing the latest round of state test scores.

Test scores among eighth- and 10th-graders worsened slightly from the previous year, results being made public today show. More than half of Oregon's sophomores and 40 percent of eighth-graders cannot read and do math at

## Test scores

- ◆ See today's Metro section for school-by-school test scores in your area.
- ◆ Go to [Oregonlive.com/education](http://Oregonlive.com/education) for all metro-area scores.

levels educators set nearly a decade ago, the tests found.

"We have a real problem here, and we are not going to make excuses or try to spin it that this is not as bad as it looks," Castillo said. "It's bad. We are very disappointed and very concerned."

She added: "We are going to fix this."

In contrast, elementary schools remained a bright spot, with about 80 percent of pupils meeting state reading and math benchmarks.

Many educators and parents had expected scores to rise this year because of pressure from the federal No Child Left Behind law. More than 300 schools — including 60 percent of the state's high schools — were on notice that they would make a federal troubled schools list, and possibly face sanctions, if they didn't boost scores.

But elementary reading scores did not budge and middle and high school scores fell. Only elementary math

scores rose.

Castillo and others said they think poor performance was caused partly by budget-cutting measures taken in most Oregon school districts during the past two school years: shortened school years, growing class sizes, reduced teacher planning time.

Large class sizes hurt middle and high schools more than elementaries because a typical secondary school teacher now faces 130 to 160 students a day, she said.

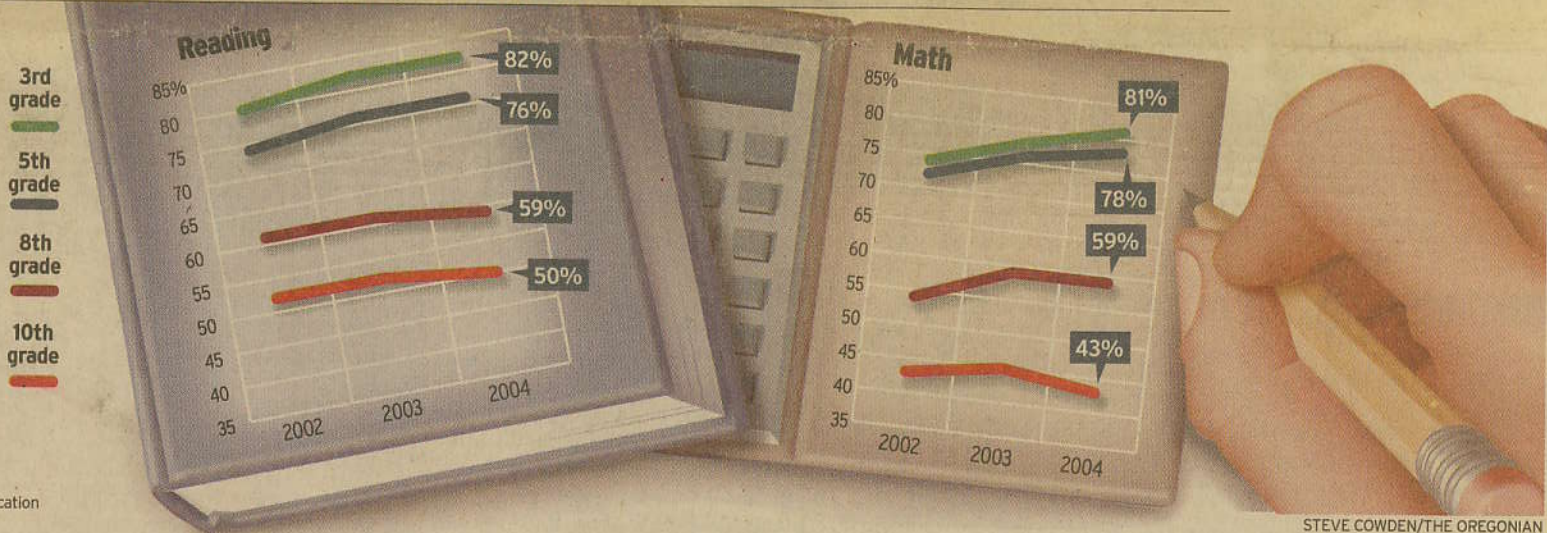
Scores didn't fall in 2002-2003 because school districts mainly lopped off

Please see **TEST SCORES**, Page A9

## ELEMENTARY PUPILS OUTPERFORM MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLERS

The trend is clear across Oregon: Reading and math scores peak in early grades and decline dramatically by high school. While educators emphasize that test scores are a snapshot of total achievement, the scores are key factors in ratings of schools, including the performance ratings to be released next week under the federal No Child Left Behind law. Shown is the percentage of students who reached state benchmarks.

Source: Oregon Department of Education





# Test scores: As numbers in classes climb, scores drop off

Continued from Page One

days that came after the tests were given, officials said. But the lost teaching time was felt during 2003-04, educators say.

And the problem was compounded by what an analysis by The Oregonian showed were the largest class sizes in a generation. Statewide, class sizes averaged about 27, and in most suburban middle and high schools, they pushed into the 30s.

The budget cuts put obstacles in teachers' way, Castillo said. But Oregon schools must do better with the resources they have, she said: "I don't want to make excuses. We need to make laser-like decisions about how to focus every dollar."

Associate Superintendent Bill Auty said he will comb scores and other statistics to pinpoint which parts of the tests proved most difficult; whether schools that cut days or increased class sizes had the biggest losses; how these students' performance differed from previous classes', and whether certain courses led to higher or lower scores. He plans to report to principals and teachers by November so they can make changes based on hard facts, he said.

Cathy Brown, the state's math assessment specialist, said she doesn't need more research to tell her one step schools should take: More students should start into algebra and geometry as eighth-

graders so that they are finishing algebra II or a similar course when they take the test as sophomores. Too many Oregon districts restrict students from entering rigorous math courses, she said.

"To be successful, students need algebra concepts under their belts and geometry concepts under their belts. Not allowing students to enter into more rigorous mathematics until they have mastered computation is unfair," Brown said. "We have high schools that allow students not to take mathematics every year and that allow students not to be in advanced courses, even when the standards Oregon has adopted suggest that students should be."

Oregon has tested students in reading and math for more than a decade. In 1997, it spelled out what students must score to meet standards.

## Other results due next month

Both tests are multiple-choice. In reading, students read long passages, ranging from poems to a page from the index of the phone book, and answer questions about each. In math, students are asked to solve problems and pick one right answer from four choices. Using calculators is encouraged.

The state also tests students' writing, science and problem-solving abilities. Those results are scheduled to come out later this month.

Jim Jamieson is principal of Willamette High near Eugene, and he also is president of the statewide school administrators association. He cautioned that high schools should not be blasted for this year's low and declining scores. The state's expectations of 10th-graders are sky high, he says, while the resources given to high schools are too low.

## SAMPLE MATH QUESTIONS

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Here are sample test questions from Oregon's math tests for eighth- and 10th-graders. These questions reflect the difficulty level and variety of topics that students are expected to master.

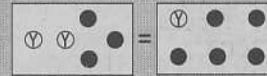
### EIGHTH GRADE

1) During a week in January in Anchorage:  $15^\circ, 6^\circ, -2^\circ, 2^\circ, -6^\circ, -7^\circ, -12^\circ$   
Alaska, the following high temperatures were recorded: Juneau:  $13^\circ, 10^\circ, -4^\circ, -2^\circ, -2^\circ, 2^\circ, -4^\circ$

Which of the following is the best symbol to use to compare the mean high temperatures of Anchorage and Juneau?

- A) Mean in Anchorage = Mean in Juneau
- B) Mean in Anchorage  $\geq$  Mean in Juneau
- C) Mean in Anchorage  $>$  Mean in Juneau
- D) Mean in Anchorage  $<$  Mean in Juneau

2) Use these objects to find the value of each Y variable:



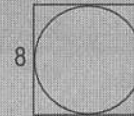
- A.  $Y=0$
- B.  $Y=1$
- C.  $Y=2$
- D.  $Y=3$

### 10TH GRADE

1) If the length and width of a rectangle are doubled, what is the effect on the area? It becomes:

- A) two times as great
- B) three times as great
- C) four times as great
- D) eight times as great

2) A dart hits a random point inside the square. What is the probability it will hit the target outside of the circle?



- A.  $\frac{\pi}{16}$
- B.  $\frac{64-16\pi}{64}$
- C.  $\frac{16-8\pi}{16}$
- D.  $\frac{\pi}{4}$

Answers: Eighth-grade questions: 1) D; 2) C; 10th-grade questions: 1) C; 2) B

Source: Oregon Department of Education

PAT MCELLELAND/THE OREGONIAN

Big class sizes are the killer, he says. "My average class size in English and math is 33 or 34 kids," he said. Across the state, "We don't have the resources to help the most needy kids, kids who are falling further behind year after year."

His school, for example, is doubling the number of freshmen taking geometry this fall. But he's worried some who are shaky in algebra will fail geometry because, in big classes, teachers cannot help every weak student catch up, he says.

Among high schools, Beaver-

ton's Sci & Tech magnet school had the highest scores in the state again this year. Performance at Portland's Lincoln High was up sharply, with 83 percent of its students meeting benchmarks in each subject — second best in the state.

Lake Oswego and Riverdale high schools, however, saw their numbers plunge. And in schools ringing the Portland suburbs, including Canby, Oregon City, Sandy, Centennial, Hillsboro, McMinnville and Beaverton high schools, fewer than half their students meet benchmarks.

Ralph Riden, who was principal at Beaverton's Aloha High last year, said large, impersonal high schools are partly to blame. This school year will be the second that Aloha will use a federal grant to forge a small school environment within the school of nearly 1,900 students.

Ten other Oregon high schools will begin using \$1 million grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to break into four or more separate small schools — each with its own principal, faculty, curriculum and schedule — to personalize learning and raise achievement.

## Two charter schools falter

Among schools with eighth grade, two new Lincoln County charter schools — Siletz Valley and Eddyville — had the lowest scores. A quarter or fewer of their eighth-graders met standards.

In the Portland area, Tubman, Ockley Green and Reynolds middle schools performed the worst, with about one-third of their students meeting benchmarks.

Jamieson, the Willamette High principal, hailed Castillo's call for more research into what's working and what's not in Oregon middle and high schools. Nationally, he said, research outlines precisely what works in elementary reading instruction. But high schools have no proven pathways like that.

Said Castillo: "It's not about people working harder; everybody is working hard already. It's about how do we work differently and in a way that is going to net us the results that we want."

David Anderson, Aimee Green, Catherine Trevison and Tom Quinn of The Oregonian staff contributed to this report.

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