

Schools' test scores rise, but racial disparity persists

By KEVIN O'BRIEN
Staff Writer

Charlotte-Mecklenburg students posted encouraging gains on a key set of national and state tests in 1992, a trend officials attributed to a renewed emphasis on aggressive and creative teaching.

On the whole, scores on the national California Achievement Test and a set of mandatory N.C. exams rose from the previous year, although a wide gap in achieve-

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ment persisted between black and white students.

Supt. John Murphy, who has made student test scores the bottom line in his drive to reform the Carolinas' largest public system, said the gains were the "result of

our staff focusing more clearly on teaching and learning and the creative delivery of education."

"We are beginning to see early signs of positive movement, and for that I thank our community for their helpful influence and support," Murphy said.

School officials plan to make the results public on Wednesday. The Observer obtained a copy of the test results.

For the first time since 1989,

Charlotte-Mecklenburg third- and sixth-grade students exceeded the state average on the CAT, a national multiple-choice exam that is being phased out in North Carolina after this year.

Middle-grade students also recorded impressive gains on the state's major writing exam, the N.C. Writing Assessment. And students of all grades scored higher

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Scores

Murphy plans return to teaching phonics

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than ever on 10 state end-of-course tests in math, science, history, English and political science.

The optimism of the latest batch of test scores was tempered by a persistent, and often widening, gap in racial achievement on almost all fronts. On average, white students in most grades continued to out-score their black peers by nearly 2 to 1 on the CAT.

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In grades three and eight, black students generally scored below the state average for black students in reading, language and mathematics on the CAT. Only in sixth-grade math did Charlotte-Mecklenburg black students score above the state average for N.C. black students.

In many categories, such as the overall third-grade scores on the CAT, the racial gap actually widened, from 42 percentage points in

1991 to a full 49 percentage points this year between whites and blacks.

There were two positive notes: Sixth- and eighth-grade black students, as well as whites, made gains in both categories measured on the state writing exam. And black students' scores improved in grades three and six on the math portion of the CAT.

Murphy said an analysis of all test results suggests black students aren't slipping in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, but that white students are making more rapid gains in achievement.

Even so, he deemed black students' performance on the CAT's reading and language arts tests "unacceptable and disappointing."

In a recent poll, Charlotte-Meck-

lenburg first- and second-grade teachers rated 79% of white students but only 49% of black students as possessing the needed reading and writing skills to perform work at the next grade level, Murphy said.

"Our challenge is to figure out how to better accelerate the performance of our lower-achieving students," Murphy said.

An initial emphasis is being placed on early-childhood reading. To improve minority student reading scores, Murphy plans to partially restore the phonetic approach to reading for all students in kindergarten, first and second grades.

He also plans to send 12 specially training reading teachers into the 10 elementary and two middle schools with the lowest reading test scores.

Schools' test scores up, but racial gap remains

Charlotte-Mecklenburg students made encouraging gains on most key national and state tests, according to results that will be released this week. Here are some of the results of those tests.

Despite the gains, the gap in achievement between white and black students continued and, in some cases, grew.

To combat the racial disparity, which was especially great in reading and language skills, Supt. John Murphy said he plans to send 12 specially trained reading teachers into the 12 schools with the lowest reading scores. He also plans a partial return to the phonetic approach to teaching reading in all schools.

— Kevin O'Brien

California Achievement Test scores, 1992

Here are Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) results for the CAT over three years and N.C. results this year:

	1990 CMS	1991 CMS	1992 CMS	1992 N.C.
Grade 3				
Reading	54	54	56	56
Language	62	64	66	66
Math	70	68	77	73
Overall	62	62	67	66
Grade 6				
Reading	52	51	56	53
Language	56	58	64	61
Math	66	66	74	67
Overall	57	58	66	60
Grade 8				
Reading	55	56	54	54
Language	55	55	54	57
Math	59	63	61	59
Overall	56	58	56	57

Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Note: Although only required to test grades 3, 6 and 9, Charlotte-Mecklenburg gave the CAT to grades 3 through 9 in 1992. State comparisons possible only for these three grades.

Racial gap remains, or widens

Here are Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools results by race on the California Achievement Test:

	1991 Black	1991 White	1992 Black	1992 White
Grade 3				
Reading	32	68	30	75
Language	39	77	37	81
Math	46	81	52	87
Overall	36	78	35	84
Grade 4				
Reading	32	68	34	72
Language	36	71	38	75
Math	45	76	49	82
Overall	34	71	37	78
Grade 5				
Reading	34	70	31	70
Language	36	70	36	72
Math	45	77	48	83
Overall	36	73	36	77
Grade 6				
Reading	30	69	34	71
Language	38	72	44	77
Math	45	80	53	86
Overall	36	75	42	80
Grade 7				
Reading	32	66	30	68
Language	38	68	36	71
Math	42	76	41	80
Overall	37	69	35	74
Grade 8				
Reading	35	70	33	70
Language	36	67	35	69
Math	40	76	40	77
Overall	36	71	35	73
Grade 9				
Reading	32	68	35	71
Language	34	67	36	70
Math	39	71	43	76
Overall	33	69	36	73

Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Note: Scores represent median percentiles ranging from possible zero to 100.

Social studies, science tests

Here are Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) and N.C. results on state social studies and science tests:

	1991 CMS	1991 N.C.	1992 CMS	1992 N.C.
Grade 3				
Science	53	57	59	63
Social Studies	51	59	58	62
Grade 6				
Science	48	55	52	56
Social Studies	50	53	54	54
Grade 8				
Science	60	57	61	61
Social Studies	56	53	55	55

Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Note: Scores represent median percentiles ranging from zero to 100.

Writing test score results

Here are Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) and N.C. results for the state Writing Assessment test:

	1990 CMS	1990 N.C.	1992 CMS	1992 N.C.
Grade 6				
Composition	60	51	66	57
Basic skills	68	66	72	70
Grade 8				
Composition	58	60	61	58
Basic skills	59	63	68	71

Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

Note: Versions of this test vary by year. 1990 was the last year N.C. students took the same version of the writing assessment.