

Board of Regents Information Item: Status of Writing Proficiency Initiative

The Writing Proficiency Steering Committee and OCHE recommend that a fourth field test of the Montana University System Writing Assessment be administered for these reasons:

- 1) To provide continuity of writing assessment data for Montana's high schools.
 - a. National ACT and SAT writing assessments will become available in 2005. However, in 2004, the only multi-district writing assessment available in Montana is the Montana University System field test, which is fully developed and has documented reliability and validity.
 - b. At least 70 schools use this data as part of their school improvement planning and curriculum development processes.
- 2) To build capacity for state and district writing assessments
 - a. A fourth test will increase the number of teachers, pre-service teachers, and college instructors trained to score holistically.
 - b. This year, we plan to develop a cadre of trainers who can teach others to score holistically.
 - c. This test will gauge the level of support for a "Writing Assessment Consortium."
- 3) To give current juniors the opportunity to practice for 2005 ACT Writing Test and assess their academic preparation

Conducting a "training of trainers" in early 2005 has several benefits:

- 1) Professional development that enhances instruction and assessment will be offered.
- 2) Teachers will learn how ACT and SAT essays are scored.
- 3) Trainers can teach holistic scoring of writing assessments at the local or curriculum-consortium level.
- 4) One step will be in place to form a Writing Assessment Consortium.

OCHE is exploring the level of support for a Montana Writing Assessment Consortium in several ways:

- 1) Test participation response forms sent to Montana high schools in September included the question "Would your district be interested in the formation of a voluntary organization of school districts and post-secondary institutions to continue a writing assessment for proficiency admissions to the Montana University System?" Thus far, 75% of the respondents are interested.
- 2) Participation in the Board of Public Education's CSPAC Assessment Advisory Group has widened assessment discussions to include a Montana Writing Assessment.
- 3) Representatives from school districts, the Small Schools Alliance, a curriculum consortium, OPI and the Board of Public Education have met to draft approaches to this effort.
- 4) Input is being sought at K-12 educator meetings: Board of Public Education, Montana Association of School Superintendents regional meetings, the Montana Conference of Educational Leadership, MEA-MFT Annual Convention, the A-Z Curriculum Directors meetings.

The Writing Proficiency Steering Committee and OCHE are taking steps to help the Regents make a decision about Writing Proficiency:

- 1) Pros and cons of these approaches and the level of support from campuses will be discussed among the Chief Academic Officers on November 19 and shared with the BOR before the January meeting.
- 2) Members of the Writing Proficiency Steering Committee and ad hoc Consortium Exploratory Committee will present to the BOR in January.
- 3) Complete data from Writing Assessment Response Forms will be shared with the BOR in January.
- 4) Information will be shared and input sought from the Board of Education meeting in January.