

What guidelines might govern a Writing Assessment Consortium?

- A Writing Assessment Consortium would be formed by a group of volunteer schools to administer and score a writing test at regional sites in Montana, lead by certified holistic scoring trainers. OCHE, OPI and Planning Committees would ensure consistency and quality control of prompts, training, scoring, and reporting processes.
- Test booklets would be designed for blind scoring, so that scorers could not know the names of the students, teachers, or schools of the essays they score. In order to ensure reliability, the percentage of tests from one district scored at a site could be limited.
- Prompts would come from the pool of MUS field-tested prompts or follow the pattern developed during the MUS field test. Students could select from two prompts.
- The scoring rubric would be holistic, based on the MUS Writing Assessment rubric, and any modifications would require approval by the MUS and other Writing Assessment Consortia.
- Training and scoring would take place at regional sites. Training would consist of a minimum of five hours of reading and discussing anchor sets, scoring practice sets, and passing a calibration set. Scoring would begin on the training day or on the following day. Each essay would be scored twice; or three times for discrepant scores.
- Data from the tests, including mean scores and distributions, correlations with student plans, instructional methods, etc., would be shared among districts, the Office of Public Instruction, the Montana University System, and other interested parties. Individual student scores would be made available to the student, the teacher, the school, and college admissions offices only.

How much would a Writing Assessment Consortium cost and who would fund it?

The direct costs of printing, scanning, reporting, training and scoring, including estimated school district expenditures for substitute teachers and travel, currently run about \$6.50 per test. Schools have not paid for the test or professional development and OCHE has not paid the scorers. However, renewal units and no-cost college credits have been available to scorers. The Board of Regents is committed to fiscal support at current levels with the expectation that school districts and colleges continue to support teachers for training and scoring.

Currently several district budgets include funding for writing assessments. Many districts consider a writing assessment to be an important component of a comprehensive system. Some districts believe that by working together, they can alleviate concerns about reliability and validity. Participating in a Writing Assessment Consortium may not cost more than districts are currently spending for writing assessment and professional development in evaluating writing.

Comparing SAT and ACT to a Montana Writing Assessment Consortium

Factors	Montana Writing Assessment	National Admissions Exams
Cost	Districts and OCHE share costs	Students pay additional \$14 for optional ACT Writing Test SAT cost slated for increase
Student Choices	Choice of two prompts Choice to word process	No prompt choice Handwritten only
Timing	40-minutes	ACT: 30 minutes SAT: 25 minutes
Relevancy	Montana-developed prompts; Rubric tied to Montana standards	National prompts National rubric
Scoring	Montana teachers and professors	National, professional scorers
Professional Development	Prompt-writing, scoring, websites, workshops	Information available on Websites

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Beyond 2004: the Future of Writing Proficiency in Montana

Montana is one of the few states without a state-level writing assessment. Since 2001, the University System Writing Assessment has filled that void for over half of Montana's high schools.

Members of the Writing Proficiency Steering Committee believe that the foundation is now in place to begin instituting a Montana Writing Assessment.



Writing Proficiency

Sustaining the Montana Writing Assessment

In 2000, the Montana Board of Regents (BOR) directed the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) to study the writing proficiency of Montana's high school juniors. Since March of 2001, 130 Montana high schools have participated in field tests, 416 teachers have learned to score essays, and a tremendous amount of data about writing practices has been collected, analyzed, and reported.

Initially, ACT played an important role in the development of the Montana University System Writing Assessment. The field test provided the opportunity to experiment with timing, prompts, writing modes, and scoring processes. In 2005, both ACT and SAT will add writing tests to their national admissions exams.

What steps are being taken to sustain a Montana Writing Assessment?

In August 2003, representatives from interested school districts, the Board of Public Education, the Office of Public Instruction, and OCHE met to consider the challenge of sustaining a Montana-based writing assessment as an alternate to the new SAT or ACT Writing Tests for Proficiency Admissions. This ad-hoc committee proposed the formation of a **Montana Writing Assessment Consortium** to build on the Montana University System's field tests.

To set the stage for sustainability, OCHE hosted a training of trainers who served as leaders at six regional scoring sites in 2004. These 37 teacher-leaders earned certification as Holistic Scoring Trainers. OCHE hopes to reconvene trainers to learn prompt-writing skills.

When Higher Education Works with K-12, Admissions Standards Can:

- *Clearly define a continuum of standards and assessments across levels*
- *Coordinate state content standards and high school curricula with typical college freshman coursework*
- *Engage educators, K-16, in conversations about standards, curriculum and instruction*
- *Provide prospective students with opportunities to test their college readiness skill*
- *Direct professional development resources to offerings that promote college awareness and preparation.*

In January of 2004, the Board of Regents authorized implementation of the Montana Writing Assessment, which will serve as an alternative admissions standard to writing portions of national tests such as AP and CLEP, as well as SAT and ACT once they become available.

Each fall, all Montana high schools are invited to participate in testing, scoring, and planning for future tests. The formation of a Writing Assessment Consortium is one way to ensure that writing instruction and testing are truly a joint effort, creating a seamless education system across all educational

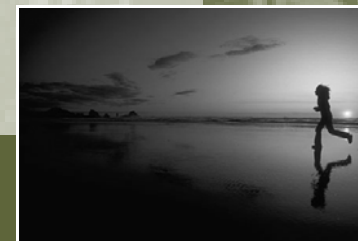
Office of the Commissioner
of Higher Education

levels.

What are the benefits of district collaboration for a college admissions writing assessment?

- *Although applicants to the Montana University System must submit ACT or SAT scores, some may not be able to pay the additional fee for the optional writing assessment.*
- *A state assessment could allow students more time to write and to word process. Both ACT and SAT samples must be written in 30 min. or less*.*
- *Teachers who score believe the experience helps them prepare students for college writing, develop ties with the University System, and "recalibrate" their own grading practices on a yearly basis.*
- *Whereas Montana educators have no input into the prompts, rubric, and scoring procedures of ACT and SAT, in a consortium assessment they could select prompts, use the rubric based on Montana content standards, and score with teachers representing a variety of school sizes and cultures.*
- *By collaborating with local colleges or universities to examine student work, teachers get professional development while generating data useful to both K-12 and higher education, not only for admissions, but also for improving and aligning instruction and as one of the "multiple measures" required by state standards. Unlike ACT and SAT, a Montana Writing Assessment could be given to all students at the junior and/or senior level.*
- *This assessment provides practice for students applying to colleges that require ACT or SAT scores and for schools designing curriculum for the transition to college.*

** Montana students scored significantly higher on 40 minute samples than in 30 minutes, and higher on word processed than handwritten.*



Writing Proficiency in the
Montana University System