

**CAMDEN CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
ASSESSMENT INVESTIGATION AND REVIEW OF
RESULTS FOR 2005**

Lucille E. Davy
Acting Commissioner

Jay Doolan, Ed.D.
Acting Assistant Commissioner
Division of Educational Programs and Assessment

Brian D. Robinson, Ed.D.
Director
Office of Evaluation and Assessment
Division of Educational Programs and Assessment

New Jersey State Department of Education

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This report is based on a review and comparison of test results from 2004, 2005 and preliminary test results from spring 2006, as well as the findings from the Office of Compliance Investigation (OCI).

During the 2006 assessment cycle, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) had a greatly increased presence in the Camden City School District. Every school received a security visit by the NJDOE at least once during the testing cycle and some received two visits. The purposes of these visits were to help ensure that test materials remained secure until the appropriate time, to observe testing procedures in each school and to be sure that test materials were appropriately shipped to the testing vendors for scoring. In addition to those measures, each high school's testing materials were brought to a secured location and returned to the school daily by NJDOE personnel. NJDOE's interest was to be sure that test results for 2006 were as accurate as possible, given the allegations of inappropriate test procedures during and after the 2005 testing cycle.

High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)

In general, Camden's high schools have performed below the mean proficiency rates for schools in DFG A. This is true in both language arts and mathematics. The exception to this is the Brimm Medical Arts High School (See Appendix).

This year (2006), the Brimm Medical Arts High School tested 60 students. Language arts literacy (LAL) scores remained very high, with 95% of the students at the proficient or advanced proficient levels. This is fairly consistent with Brimm's past performance. In mathematics, the performance has been less consistent. Last year (2005), over 90% of the students were proficient or advanced proficient in math. That compares with fewer than 70% the year before (2004). This year's assessment (2006) showed that about 75% were at or above the proficient score. This is a drop from last year and more consistent with the performance of students in previous years.

One of the issues to consider when reviewing the scores for Brimm is that it has a relatively small student population. Because of that, each student's score can result in a more dramatic swing in the percentages than in Camden's larger high schools.

The sudden score increase in 2005 and subsequent score decline in 2006 cause serious questions about the validity of Brimm's 2005 results. The OCI investigation revealed that the former principal of Brimm, Joseph Carruth, alleged that assistant superintendent, Luis Pagan, directed Carruth to compromise established school test security procedures during the 2005 HSPA testing period. He claimed that Pagan suggested the following: that Carruth take specific measures to ensure that all Brimm students perform at or above proficiency on the 2005 HSPA, that Carruth use a razor blade to slice open a test booklet to use as a key for scoring the tests, that Carruth and another staff member develop an answer key that could be used to check student answers, and that Carruth's job with the district would be in jeopardy if his students' scores did not improve. OCI

could not verify Carruth's allegations regarding Pagan. Investigators interviewed Pagan, who denied asking Carruth to compromise the security and reliability of the test. As a result, OCI's investigation regarding the statements made by Pagan was inconclusive.

Carruth also alleged that Michelle Cloth-Quinones, the Brimm Math Chairperson and a test examiner for the 2005 testing cycle, copied a 2005 test booklet. OCI could not verify that Cloth-Quinones copied the HSPA test booklet for the 2005 testing cycle. However, OCI did confirm that Cloth-Quinones requested a copy of the 2005 HSPA test booklet. Cloth-Quinones admitted that she requested a copy of the test. She explained that she asked for a copy of the test because she wanted to ensure that she was covering the appropriate math subjects during instruction.

The Department's 2005 guidance regarding the administration of the HSPA prohibited school personnel from copying test booklets. See New Jersey HSPA, District/School Test Coordinator Manual, p. 19. Specifically, the Department directed school districts that "the HSPA test booklet and its contents are secure materials. It CANNOT be read, reviewed or discussed by staff, either orally or in writing, or copied either wholly in part, for any reason, for any purpose." HSPA Manual, p. 19. Cloth-Quinones, as a testing examiner, should have been trained in testing procedures. Accordingly, her attempt to obtain a test booklet raises questions regarding personnel training and the willingness of personnel to follow testing procedures.

Overall, given the sharp increase in test scores and the allegations regarding the actions of personnel, it is possible that irregularities occurred which may have caused the unusually high test results.

Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA)

None of the GEPA results showed unusual shifts in scores over the three-year period from 2004-2006. Performance in each school was poor on the GEPA. It is interesting to note that only one middle school (Coopers Point) had a higher percentage of students above proficient this year (2006) than the mean of DFG A, and that was by only 1.1 scale points in LAL and by 0.6 scale points in math. Generally, performance on the GEPA was lower throughout the district in 2006 than in previous years. District-wide performance on the GEPA was significantly lower than other schools in DFG A.

New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge for Grades 5, 6 and 7 (NJASK 5, 6&7)

Because 2006 was the first year of these assessments, meaningful analysis will be limited. As a whole, the performance of the schools for the assessments in grades 5, 6 and 7 was generally in line with performance on other state assessments within the city school system. Given that it was the first year of the test, fluctuations should be expected. Generally, students performed poorly on the assessments in grades 5, 6 and 7. District-wide results showed that nearly half (46.6%) of students in fifth grade were partially proficient in LAL (DFG A mean=33.7%) and more than half (53.5%) were partially proficient in math (DFG A mean =39.2). In sixth grade, results were worse. Seven out of ten students did not meet proficiency in language arts and nearly eight out of 10 (78.72%) did not meet proficiency in math. The percentage of students scoring partial proficient was far greater than the mean for DFG A. For these two grades, Veterans Memorial Middle School had the worst

performance in the district. Seventh grade results showed that 65.6% of students were not proficient in language arts and that an astounding 84.5% of students were not proficient in math. This meant that the math partial proficient scores at this school were twenty percentage points greater than the mean for the DFG.

New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge for Grades 3 and 4 (NJ ASK 3&4)

Several schools in Camden showed some remarkable variation in the three-year period from 2004-2006. Of special note was the performance of the H.B. Wilson and U.S. Wiggins schools. In both cases, the performance on last year's (2005) test was exceptionally high. This year (2006), the results were far lower. Although some fluctuation in proficiency rates is normal for a school in any given year, the dramatic shifts shown in these schools was far outside what would be expected.

Information obtained from OCI indicated that secure testing procedures were not followed at Wilson and Wiggins.

At the **U.S. Wiggins School**, teachers were directed to group students by ability. There was no practical testing purpose to be served here, and in fact, good testing procedures would have students taking tests in their most familiar environment. In addition, special education students, who can be tested with accommodations, were tested in classrooms with general education students. The 2005 manual specifically stated that general education students should not receive special education accommodations and accordingly, students requiring accommodations must be tested in a separate location from general education students. NJASK Manual, p. 11. Moreover, as a practical matter, this practice is not appropriate, since some test items can be read to some special education students. Because of this, it was possible for general education students to hear test items read aloud. In addition, if students who need scribes as an accommodation were in classrooms with general education students, it was possible for those general education students to overhear the special education students' answers, giving them an unfair advantage. In fact, the OCI investigation revealed that one teacher claimed that a particular student, who required a scribe, was tested in a classroom with other students. She explained that the other students within the classroom could hear the student recite his answers to the scribe. Again, such a practice compromises the reliability of the other students' test answers as they could have easily overheard the particular student's answers.

Further findings from OCI showed that the Wiggins test coordinator was absent during one of the testing days. The building test coordinator, apparently reassigned after 2005, indicated that he signed for the return of the test materials on that day, despite his absence. This was based on information from others who were present that day. Additionally, the times that the tests were signed back into the office were not accurate, since sign-in sheets indicate an afternoon return—several teachers stated that they were returned in the morning.

The above-noted practices are contrary to the Department's established testing procedures. The school test coordinators must maintain a record of the chain of transfer of the secure test materials to and from the test examiners. 2005 NJASK Manual, p. 19. The school and district coordinators must be available during testing to monitor all aspects of the test administration. NJASK Manual, p. 15. They are to correctly note the time and date of receipt of test materials on the security checklist.

NJASK Manual, p. 19. Here, the school test coordinator was absent on one day of testing but still signed for the receipt of the tests. Moreover, tests were signed as received one-half hour after their alleged return. Such practices violate the Department's testing procedures.

Though no person interviewed acknowledged tampering with student results, Wiggins lax security practices violated the Department's testing procedures and therefore, compromised test security. OCI also noted that school testing procedures were changed in 2006 to reflect state requirements, including the discontinuation of testing by ability groups. The presence of state monitors in the schools during testing likely contributed to these changes.

Comparing the performance of fourth grade students in 2005 at the Wiggins school with the performance of fifth grade students in 2006 (roughly the same cohort) shows a dramatic drop in performance (See Appendix). A comparison of fourth grade students in 2005 and in 2006 shows the same decline in performance in LAL and mathematics. Last year, 98% of the students in fourth grade were proficient or advanced proficient in math. This year (2006), only 55.6% of fifth grade students showed the same performance. Compared with a 98% proficiency rate for fourth graders in 2005, the 2006 fourth grade cohort only had a 55% proficiency rate in LAL. Mathematics scores shifted from 98% proficient or above in 2005 to 57% proficient or above in 2006, with the mean scale score dropping by an incredible 47 points from 253 to 206.3.

A comparison of third grade students in 2005 and fourth grade students in 2006 in Wiggins School showed similar results. In 2005, 90.8% of the students in third grade were above proficient. The 2006 results for fourth grade students showed that only 55% were proficient and none were advanced proficient. A review of third grade cohorts in 2005 and 2006 showed the same type of discrepancies shown in fourth grade. In 2005, over 90% of the students were deemed proficient or above in LAL, compared to just 59.7% in 2006. In mathematics, the proficiency rates moved from 98% in 2005 to 49.3% in 2006. The mathematics mean scale shifted from 241.6 to 198.3 in those same years respectively.

Information obtained from OCI about the **H.B. Wilson School** is also disconcerting. Of particular concern was the finding that the school facilitator directed staff to ignore established test security procedures. It was reported that she directed that special education students be tested with general education students (similar to what occurred at Wiggins), a violation of the appropriate use of accommodations as outlined by the NJDOE. This allowed all students to receive accommodations.

Furthermore, at the school facilitator's direction, students were allowed to use calculators for all parts of the math test, instead of only the parts allowed as per the instructions. The school facilitator told teachers to allow educational prompts to remain visible in the classroom during testing, which allowed students to view these aides when answering questions.

Again, such a practice violates the NJDOE's established testing procedures. Special education students are to be tested separately from general education students. NJASK Manual, p. 11. The

NJASK Manual specifically stated that “**General education** students receive no special testing accommodations other than the standard room setup and materials distribution described in the *Examiner Manual*.” NJASK Manual, p. 11. Additionally, educational prompts were to be removed or covered during the testing. NJASK Manual, p. 26. OCI found that these security violations were egregious and invalidated the reliability of the standardized tests in these schools.

Overall, although OCI could not verify specific comments made by school principal, Michael Hailey, it appears as though there was a general sense, based on interviews with teachers, that teachers felt a great deal of pressure to improve test results.

Moreover, the OCI investigation revealed that testing procedures were not followed. Inappropriate test booklet security prior to, during and after testing compromised the reliability of the students’ scores.

Results for the H.B. Wilson School were also out of the ordinary (See Appendix). There is no fifth grade in the H.B. Wilson School, therefore this report will look at comparisons by grade level from year to year. In 2005, 100% of the fourth grade students were proficient or above in mathematics, with 92.5% being advanced proficient. This means that all students, irrespective of their educational ability, correctly answered most of the items on the assessments, including the more challenging ones. Even in New Jersey’s wealthiest and highest performing districts, this is not a normal occurrence. Those percentages in themselves were remarkable. However, it was also notable that the performance of this year’s fourth grade class dropped to only 23.3% of the students scoring proficient, and only 2.3% (approximately one student) scoring advanced proficient. Third grade results, while not as dramatic, were also out of the ordinary. In 2005, 76.1% of third grade students were above proficient in math. In 2006, that percentage dropped to 52.5%.

Such unusual changes in performance at the Wiggins and Wilson Schools were more than anomalies. The rapid rise and fall of proficiency levels was far greater than changes for the mean scores in DFG A and for the state as a whole (See Appendix). The change in proficiency rates is far outside the normal range even for schools of this size within DFG A. If true instructional change had been the cause of last year’s exceptional performance in both schools, this year’s results would not have changed so dramatically. Such drastic change indicates that last year’s success was the result of adult interference at one or more points of the assessment process.

Several other schools experienced unusual shifts in scores from 2005 to 2006. These must be further explored by the district and explained. **Coopers Poynt Elementary School** dropped from 72% of its fourth grade students scoring proficient or above for LAL in 2005 to 44% in 2006. Similarly, math scores in those two years showed 80% of the students scoring proficient or above in fourth grade compared with 53.3% in 2006.

Cramer Elementary School showed a shift in fourth grade math scores from 2005 to 2006. In 2005, 66.7% of the students were proficient or above in mathematics. In 2006, only 50% of the students were proficient or above. The scale score dropped from 215.1 to 195.7. Whether or not this was due to some form of adult interference was difficult to determine. The cohort of students moving from third grade to fourth grade did not experience a dramatic change in results.

Cream Elementary School also experienced a dramatic change in results. Last year, 82.1% of third grade students were above proficient in mathematics. This year, only 47.1% of third grade students were above proficient. The mean scale score for third grade mathematics fell from 227.3 to 200.2. Fourth grade math results also showed a drop, but not as dramatic as the third grade changes.

McGraw Elementary School showed sharp declines in LAL and mathematics for both third and fourth grade. Third grade language arts scores declined from 64.3% scoring proficient or above in 2005 to 41.3% achieving at the same levels in 2006. Mathematics showed a drop from 78% proficient or above in 2005 to 51% in 2006. Similarly, fourth grade scores showed the same type of declines. In 2005, 78.4% of students were proficient in LAL compared to 60% in 2006. In mathematics, proficiency levels shifted from 83% in 2005 to 60% in 2006. The cohort size was reduced by about one-third from 74 students in 2005 to 50 students in 2006. This may account for some of the shifts in performance.

Sumner School also experienced rather large shifts in proficiency from 2005 to 2006. In 2005, 62.7% of third grade students had a proficient score in reading compared with 45.6% in 2006. The mean scale score fell from 201.4 to 193.5. Mathematics proficiency rates for the same cohorts declined from 77% in 2005 to 68% in 2006. Mean scale scores for those students dropped from 220.8 to 212.4. Similarly, LAL proficiency rates for fourth grade students fell from 81.8% in 2005 to 40% in 2006. During the same period, the cohort size was reduced from 66 students to 50 students. The scale score mean changed from 212.8 to 189. Overall, mathematics proficiency rates did not show a significant change, in fact they improved.

Although there were no reports of adult actions which may have influenced student results from these schools and no formal review by OCI, the large change in student performance over the three year period must be reviewed by the district in concert with the department to determine why these fluctuations occurred.

Conclusions

Determining whether or not adult actions affecting the results occurred, based on statistics, is very difficult. The Office of Evaluation and Assessment consulted with Educational Testing Service to review elementary test results for signs of adult interference. The ETS experts were very circumspect in what statistics say about inappropriate test procedures in the school district. Statistics themselves do not prove the case for test breaches, but can indicate some real problems regarding adherence to testing protocols. An analysis of the test results coupled with the findings of OCI provided compelling information from which conclusions could be drawn.

Several things became apparent when reviewing these results. At the high school level, Camden has performed poorly. The Brimm Medical Arts School results had significant change in results from 2005 to 2006 in mathematics. Given the relatively small number of students, it is difficult to say that the change indicated adult actions affecting the results in 2005. The results were unusual,

but by themselves, present no hard evidence of inappropriate test procedures. The OCI review did not determine the validity of Mr. Carruth's allegations.

In the middle schools, the results remained consistently poor. No accusations came forth from these schools, and test results indicated that no significant breach occurred.

In the elementary schools (**H.B. Wilson and U.S. Wiggins**), unusually large shifts in test results and inappropriate testing procedures raised concern that adult interference in the testing situation occurred.

The OCI review of the **U.S. Wiggins School** made several conclusions supported largely by the incredible test results in 2005 and subsequent drop in 2006. Established testing procedures were not followed. Those responsible for the security of the test documents relinquished that control to other school personnel. School security checklists were falsified and did not reflect accurate return times. On one test day, the individual responsible for the tests signed for them even though he was absent. Although no one acknowledged dishonest behavior on the test, actions were taken to compromise established testing procedures so that Wiggins students would achieve at high levels regardless of ability. The Office of Evaluation and Assessment also found the practice of grouping elementary school students for the test by ability instead of by homeroom to be unusual and undesirable. There is no legitimate reason to use such practices, since only special education students, English language learners, and those students who have an established "504" plan are permitted any kind of modifications. It must be noted that when state monitors were present in 2006, appropriate procedures were used, and ability groups for testing were discontinued. Test results at this school plummeted.

More importantly, testing general education students within the same classroom as special education students directly violated the Department's testing procedures. As seen within OCI's investigation, such a practice permitted general education students to receive testing accommodations. Such a practice compromised the reliability of the general education students' scores.

A review of open-ended items in these schools by the Office of Evaluation and Assessment, especially at the **H.B. Wilson School**, showed that students wrote similar responses to open-ended math items. It is unlikely that such similar responses would be the result of individual student work. More likely, it resulted from the use of directions or step-by-step instruction about how to respond to each item. A large number of the responses seemed unusually sophisticated and organized for fourth grade students. Moreover, the OCI review concluded that the school facilitator had directed several staff members to act in ways that compromised instructions given by NJDOE on its statewide testing programs. Overall, the test results, the review of the open-ended test questions, and the security violations compromised the security of the tests and accordingly, the reliability of test scores.

Coopers Poynt, Cramer, Cream, McGraw and Sumner Schools remain a cause for concern, despite the fact that no accusations came from these schools. Their results are unusual, and it is

unlikely that they reflect student performance accurately. The score discrepancies from 2005 to 2006 in each of these schools were out of the ordinary and outside expectations, given the performance of schools across the state and in DFG A.

Recommendations

The Camden School District must develop a Corrective Action Plan which addresses all deficiencies in test protocols and procedures. The Corrective Action Plan must include, at minimum, each of the items below. If, in the course of discussions, other deficiencies or improprieties are identified, they should also be addressed in the plan. This plan must be submitted to the Commissioner of Education no later than November 1, 2006, for review and approval.

1. The district should determine whether any individual in any Camden school has behaved inappropriately by violating established testing procedures and then take disciplinary action against these individuals. This includes individuals who falsified security documents, directed personnel to use actions contrary to established testing procedures, and those school principals who allowed such misconduct in their schools. Recommended disciplinary actions could include suspension or tenure hearings by the school district. Full and complete security of the state's testing system is imperative in order to maintain fair and accurate measures for all of New Jersey's students. NJDOE will closely monitor testing in Camden during the 2007 testing cycle to ensure that appropriate testing procedures are followed.
2. The district test coordinator and building test coordinators must attend appropriate training sessions offered by the NJDOE for each assessment given. Personnel attending these sessions must stay for the entire session and make use of the training materials provided.
3. All school personnel must be well-versed in appropriate testing procedures for state tests. NJDOE provides training materials that can be used by the district for this purpose. Records, such as sign-in sheets, must be kept to demonstrate who received the training. Even teachers who are not administering the assessments should receive training in secure testing procedures, so that they do not inadvertently breach security.
4. The district test coordinator, principals, and school test coordinators must be in district and/or on-site during any testing that is occurring in each school. If unforeseen circumstances occur, a person must be designated, prior to testing, to fulfill these key roles.
5. All established testing procedures as outlined in the NJDOE's manuals and trainings must be adhered to by all district personnel. This includes procedures for receiving, disseminating and returning test materials, appropriate use of accommodations, classroom settings, test procedures and timing, and use of calculators.
6. The district leadership team must provide close oversight and monitoring of assessment and take appropriate action, including disciplinary action, when violations of the state's testing

rules are discovered. The district leadership team must ensure that teachers and other personnel understand that violations to secure testing practices will not be tolerated.

7. Building principals and leaders must take responsibility for the actions of their staff and ensure that established and appropriate testing procedures are being used. Those principals who fail to take this responsibility should be disciplined by the district..
8. A test security plan must be developed and/or updated for each school prior to implementation of the 2007 assessments. The requirements for such a security plan are part of the training provided each spring. If a testing security issue arises, the security plan must be followed. If the security issue requires investigation by NJDOE, the security plan will be a primary document in determining appropriate responses.
9. The district's leadership must work closely with the Abbott Division and the Camden intervention team to ensure that appropriate assessment of student learning is occurring, not only during statewide testing, but throughout the year.