

# The Blackshear Times

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## 8th graders top area, state in writing

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Pierce County Middle School eighth graders have topped students in this area, and statewide, in Georgia Writing Assessment scores.

Local students had an average score of 223, compared to 210 in the area. Statewide, the average was just 212. The assessment is part of Georgia's standardized testing. Students write an essay on an assigned topic and are graded on ideas, organization, style and conventions (rules of grammar).

Not only did local eighth graders score well - a greater number of them did so than in other areas. Eighty-eight percent of PCMS eighth graders passed, or exceeded, the state writing standards, compared to a 79 percent passing rate in the area and 77 percent in the state.

The percentage of local students who actually exceeded the state writing standards is especially encouraging to educators. While Pierce County had 15 percent who exceeded the standard, the state had only six percent and the area had 5 percent.

School officials are jubilant at the performance by local students.

"I have outstanding, excellent, effective writing teachers," says Terri DeLoach, PCMS principal. "Our eighth grade teachers worked diligently to prepare, and our students rose to the occasion."

"Our students are obviously going beyond the basics in their skills," says Superintendent Dr. Joy Williams. "I am very proud and pleased with these scores. They demonstrate the excellent efforts of our teachers, and of our students."

Instructors made use of some high-tech assistance to boost the scores, according to eighth grade English teacher Amanda Gay. She says a new software program, called My Access, helped teachers and students improve their skills.

The program doesn't replace "good old teaching," though, Gay believes.

"Students are given writing topics and teachers work with them before we even go to the computer labs and type the finished assignments into My Access," explains Gay.

"The program gives instant feedback. In two or three seconds, students know where their strengths and weaknesses are. The feedback tells students where they have made errors and the grammar rule that applies, - but they have to figure out how to fix it," she says.

Seventh grade teachers are also using the program, and high school teachers have just begun to use it.

This is the second year this particular test has been administered, and Pierce County improved its average score by 13 points, 210 to 223, and its percentage passing or exceeding by 14 points, 74 to 88 percent.

Pierce students scored slightly better than the area and state averages last year as well. The average state score was 207 last year and 204 for the area. Sixty-seven percent of state students passed or exceeded standards on the exam, and 63 percent of area students.



Language arts teacher Amanda Gay works with eighth grade student Dillon Turner.