

## Informational Paper 32

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# Pupil Assessment

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This paper provides information on testing programs for elementary and secondary school pupils that are administered or coordinated by the Office of Educational Accountability within the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The first section of this paper provides background and definitions on assessment alternatives; the following sections outline current assessment programs, previous and current assessment initiatives and federal requirements; and the final section discusses funding for assessment initiatives.

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## Background

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In recent years, pupil assessment has become the focus of broader educational reforms in response to national reports that the academic performance of U.S. pupils has fallen behind that of other countries, particularly in areas requiring more complex thinking skills. There is evidence of persistent gaps in performance between whites and minorities, economically advantaged and disadvantaged pupils, and males and females. As a result, greater emphasis has been placed on the purposes and content of pupil assessments and the consequences of test results for teachers, pupils, schools, and school districts.

There are three primary purposes of pupil assessment: (1) to evaluate the quality and level of pupil achievement and indicate what pupils, teachers, schools, districts, and states can do to improve their performance; (2) to provide accountability information (the relationship between public investment in education and pupil achievement); and (3) to provide information that

can be used by teachers and pupils in decisions relating to remediation, program placement, career paths, and ranking. Different types of assessments are administered depending on the kind of information sought. Below is a description, based on information provided from DPI, on the most widely used types of assessment instruments.

**Standardized tests.** Narrowly defined, standardized tests are tests given to a large number of pupils with identical directions, time limits, and questions. Most standardized tests are purchased from commercial publishers. In the past, multiple-choice and true/false questions have been associated with standardized testing. However, recent developments in the field of educational testing have allowed test vendors to include short answer and essay questions in the standardized test as well. Standardized tests are used to measure knowledge of a particular subject or basic aptitude.

While standardized tests are available in a variety of skill levels and formats, two types of decisions are commonly made with their result: normative decisions and criterion-based decisions. Normative decisions measure a pupil's performance in relation to a norm group. Tests used to make normative decisions or norm-referenced tests (NRTs) compare the rankings of all pupils taking the test. Results from this type of exam are used to determine where pupils score in comparison to all other pupils. Test statistics such as percentiles, norm-equivalent scores, and standardized scores are used to make normative decisions.

The second type of decisions made with standardized tests is criterion-based decisions. Tests used to make criterion-based decisions or criterion-referenced tests (CRTs) measure how well

pupils have learned specific curricular material. Unlike NRTs, a pupil's score is not compared to that of other pupils, but to a minimum standard or criterion. Statistics commonly used with CRTs are pass/fail rates and percent of mastery. Proficiency categories, like those used in Wisconsin, reflect criterion-based decisions. Scores are set for each category and pupils are placed into these categories based on their performance on the tests.

Standardized tests are widely used for accountability purposes because they allow comparisons among pupils, schools, school districts, and states; are easy to administer and score; and are usually the most cost-effective type of test. However, they are frequently criticized as being culturally and/or economically biased and emphasizing less important factual knowledge and rote memorization skills rather than higher-order skills such as problem-solving, writing, and critical thinking. Another criticism is that the pressure to raise standardized test scores encourages schools to adjust their curricula to focus on test material, or "teach to the test," which results in narrowing the curriculum and further encouragement of memorization skills over more complex thought. Norm-referenced tests in particular have been criticized as providing misleading information if the original norm group's scores are dated. Critics of criterion-referenced tests dispute the use of standards, which they believe may be arbitrary, and the emphasis placed on passing the standard rather than performing as well as possible.

**Performance Assessments.** To address such criticisms of standardized tests and create assessments which are more authentic and valid, providing better information about the abilities of pupils, many states and school districts have developed alternative assessments. These include various methods intended to measure not only knowledge of a particular subject, but also the use of complex reasoning and problem-solving skills. Also called performance-based or outcome-based assessments, performance assessments are designed to require pupils to demonstrate what they know and can do and to integrate interdisciplinary knowledge into

the accomplishment of a task. Tasks may include writing exercises, math problems, science experiments, open-ended multiple-choice questions, or a combination. Performance assessments require pupils to produce an original answer, rather than select an answer.

Significant obstacles to the widespread implementation of performance assessments exist. Due to their complexity, performance assessments are more costly and less efficient to develop and score than standardized tests. "Multiple assessments," which are primarily multiple choice, but also combine true/false, short answer, and essay questions into one test, are also available from vendors. The combination of both standardized tests and performance assessments can provide more complete information on a pupil's education.

With the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, all states were required to implement standardized tests, and Wisconsin was required to make a number of changes to its state assessment program.

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### **Current Wisconsin Assessment Programs**

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In Wisconsin, one way that students demonstrate their progress toward achieving the state academic standards in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies is through participation in the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS). The WSAS includes both regular assessments -- the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE), a criterion-referenced test taken by nearly all students -- and alternate tests, known as the Wisconsin Alternate Assessment for English Language Learners, and the Wisconsin Alternate Assessment for Students with Disabilities.

The following section describes the current Wisconsin Student Assessment System.

**Wisconsin Third Grade Reading Requirement.** State law requires all districts to annually administer a standardized reading test, developed by DPI, to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade pupils. Wisconsin public schools assessed third graders' reading comprehension each spring from 1989 to 2005 using the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test (called the Third Grade Reading Test from 1989 to 1995).

Since the fall of 2005, third graders have been assessed in reading and mathematics with the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations, part of the comprehensive state assessment systems required by the No Child Left Behind Act. Statewide third grade scores for reading and math are shown in Table 1.

Remedial reading services for pupils in kindergarten through grade four are required under state law if: (a) a pupil fails to meet the district's reading objectives; or (b) a pupil fails to meet the minimum performance standard on the standardized state reading test and either the teacher and the pupil's parent or guardian agree that the test results accurately reflect the pupil's ability, or the teacher determines that based upon other objective evidence of the pupil's reading comprehension, the test results reflect the pupil's reading ability.

**Knowledge and Concepts Examinations.** In 1992-93, DPI was required under state law to make available to districts, at no charge, examinations designed to evaluate the level of knowledge attained by pupils in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. District participation was voluntary in 1992-93 and required beginning in the 1993-94 school year. A third exam, for pupils in fourth grade, was added under 1995 Act 27. School district participation for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade exam was voluntary in 1995-96 and required beginning in the 1996-97 school year.

Beginning in 2005-06, the federal No Child Left Behind Act requires all states to test all students in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school (grade 10 under state law). These tests are now known as the Wisconsin

Knowledge and Concepts Examination -- Criterion Referenced Tests (WKCE-CRT) and replaced the WKCE reading and mathematics tests beginning in fall 2005.

Currently, the 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade knowledge and concepts examinations evaluate the level of knowledge attained by pupils in the areas of mathematics, science, social studies, reading, and language applications. In 2005-06, the WKCE-CRT consisted of multiple choice and short-answer questions. At grades 4, 8, and 10, students also provide a rough draft writing sample.

Under federal law, school boards can decide to exclude from testing limited English-proficient pupils, provided they meet certain criteria or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for less than three years. These pupils may be given the alternate assessment for English language learners.

No Child Left Behind requires that districts must include children with disabilities in the tests, with appropriate modifications where necessary or alternate assessments for those children who cannot meaningfully participate in the regular assessment. If a district excludes certain children with disabilities from the assessment, then a statement explaining why that assessment was not appropriate and how the pupil will be assessed through alternative means must be included in the pupil's individualized educational program. In addition, a statement must be included in a pupil's program indicating any modifications that were made to the pupil's assessment.

Under state law, any 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, or 10<sup>th</sup> grade pupil may be excused from taking the tests upon the request of the pupil's parent or guardian.

Total WKCE-CRT test time varies by grade, ranging from four to seven hours. In 2005-06, approximately 59,889 4<sup>th</sup> grade pupils (99.6% of the total enrollment), 66,403 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils (99.1%) and 71,172 10<sup>th</sup> grade pupils (97.7%) completed each subject area test. A three-week testing window is provided to allow local flexibility in

scheduling for make-up testing.

In grades 3, 5, 6, and 7, pupils must be tested in reading and mathematics beginning in 2005-06 under federal law. For 2005-06, approximately 58,630 3<sup>rd</sup> grade pupils (99.6% of the total enrollment) completed the WKCE-CRT. Approximately 60,291 5<sup>th</sup> grade pupils (99.7%), 62,898 6<sup>th</sup> grade pupils (99.7%), and 64,980 7<sup>th</sup> grade pupils (99.5%) completed the WKCE-CRT.

Since 1997-98, results of the WKCE have been reported by proficiency categories. Separate results are reported for each test area: reading, mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts. The rough draft writing sample scores at grades 4, 8, and 10 are not used for performance scoring purposes. Proficiency categories are listed below.

- **Advanced:** In-depth understanding of academic knowledge and skills tested on WKCE.
- **Proficient:** Competency in the academic knowledge and skills tested.
- **Basic:** Some academic knowledge and skills tested.
- **Minimal Performance:** Very limited academic knowledge and skills tested.

Proficiency summaries are reported for all students who have been enrolled in the school or district for a full academic year, as well as for a partial year, regardless of disability or English-proficiency status. Previously, scores were reported only for students who took the test. Under the new proficiency levels reporting, those pupils not tested are listed under the not tested category and are not included in proficiency level scoring.

Wisconsin's statewide test results for each subject area of the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade tests for 2005-06 are provided in Table 1. The statewide proficiency scores are reported for all students enrolled. The table shows, for each grade level tested and by each test area, the percentage of students enrolled in Wisconsin public schools that scored at each proficiency level and the percentage of students that were not tested.

In the past, DPI has also provided national percentile rankings for each content area and grade level. National percentile ranks indicate the relative standing of a student compared with other students in the same grade in the nationwide sample. Beginning in 2002-03, Wisconsin began using a combination of off-the-shelf national test items and customized test items to improve alignment between the knowledge and concepts

**Table 1: 2005-06 Statewide Knowledge and Concepts Exam Results (Percent of Pupils in each Proficiency Level)**

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Minimal	Not Tested
<b>3rd Grade</b>					
Reading	42.0%	38.6%	14.5%	4.5%	0.4%
Mathematics	32.0	40.0	10.2	17.5	0.3
<b>4th Grade</b>					
Reading	42.0	40.3	12.5	4.9	0.3
Mathematics	32.0	40.7	10.7	16.3	0.3
Language Arts	35.6	44.1	15.2	4.7	0.4
Science	21.5	56.8	16.2	5.2	0.3
Social Studies	63.0	28.5	5.8	2.3	0.4
<b>5th Grade</b>					
Reading	42.2	40.7	11.8	5.1	0.2
Mathematics	30.3	42.3	12.0	15.1	0.3
<b>6th Grade</b>					
Reading	42.2	41.2	10.8	5.5	0.3
Mathematics	28.5	44.5	12.6	14.1	0.3
<b>7th Grade</b>					
Reading	42.1	41.7	10.0	5.7	0.5
Mathematics	27.3	46.6	12.9	12.8	0.4
<b>8th Grade</b>					
Reading	41.6	43.0	9.0	5.8	0.6
Mathematics	25.3	48.9	13.6	11.7	0.5
Language Arts	25.9	39.5	22.2	11.5	0.9
Science	28.0	46.2	15.9	9.1	0.8
Social Studies	43.9	39.6	11.5	4.1	0.9
<b>10th Grade</b>					
Reading	42.5	32.5	14.1	9.2	1.7
Mathematics	25.8	45.8	12.8	14.0	1.6
Language Arts	19.0	51.5	18.7	8.6	2.2
Science	36.0	34.7	10.7	16.4	2.2
Social Studies	44.0	30.1	7.1	16.5	2.3



examinations and the state's model academic standards. This change was required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Customized items are not nationally normed, and therefore national percentile ranks are not available.

Schools are held accountable for achievement and progress in each subject area. Low achievement in reading, for example, is not offset by high achievement in math. State law prohibits using the results of the knowledge and concepts tests to evaluate teacher performance, discipline teachers, or as a reason for non-renewal of their contracts. Further, a district's scores may not be used to determine its general or categorical school aids. The tests are also required, to the extent possible, to be free from bias.

DPI currently provides these examinations through a contract with testing vendor CTB/McGraw-Hill.

Under 1997 Act 237, starting in 1998-99 a school board operating elementary grades may develop or adopt its own examination designed to measure pupil attainment of knowledge and concepts in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. If a school board develops or adopts its own examination it is required to notify DPI. In addition, the board must provide the State Superintendent with statistical correlations of those examinations with the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade knowledge and concepts examinations adopted or approved by the State Superintendent and the federal Department of Education must approve the examination.

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### Recent State Assessment Initiatives

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**Governor's Council on Model Academic Standards.** By executive order in January, 1997, the Governor created the Governor's Council on Model Academic Standards. The Council consisted of the Lieutenant Governor who served as chair, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the chairs

and ranking minority members of the Senate and Assembly Education Committees, and one public member appointed by the Governor. The Council was responsible for working on the development of academic standards for all pupils in English language, arts, mathematics, science, and social studies at grades 4, 8, and 12.

As part of the 1997-99 budget (1997 Act 27), a Standards Development Council under the Office of the Governor was statutorily created that was nearly identical to the Governor's Council. Statutorily, the Council was required review to the Governor's proposed pupil academic standards in mathematics, science, reading and writing, geography, and history. Through 1997, the Council held various public meetings on the proposed standards. The Council's final recommendations on the standards were provided to the Governor in December, 1997. The Governor then had 30 days to approve or disapprove of the Council's recommendations. In January, 1998, the Governor approved the recommended standards and issued the standards as Executive Order 326. By August 1, 1998, each school board had to either adopt these statewide academic standards or develop their own. The Council is required to review the issued pupil academic standards periodically. If the Governor approves any subsequent modifications to the standards recommended by the Council, the changes can be issued as an executive order.

**4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Knowledge and Concepts Examinations.** Under 1999 Act 9, beginning with the 2002-03 school year, school districts must administer the state's 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, or 10<sup>th</sup> grade examination or develop and administer its own examinations to measure pupil attainment of knowledge and concepts in the respective grades.

Under Act 9, school boards and charter schools were required to devise written policies for promoting pupils from grade four to grade five and from grade eight to grade nine by September 1, 2002. The knowledge and concepts examination score, unless the pupil has been excused from taking the exam by a parent or guardian, is one of

several criteria to be used to make the promotion decision, including the pupil's academic performance and teachers' recommendations, along with any other criteria the school board or charter school operator chooses. Beginning September 1, 2002, a school board or charter school operator cannot promote a 4<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupil unless the pupil satisfies the board's criteria for promotion.

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### Federal Assessment Programs and Requirements

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This section provides a discussion of a national assessment program in which Wisconsin participates and recent changes to federal law that directly affect pupil assessment in Wisconsin.

**National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).** The NAEP, commonly referred to as the Nation's Report Card, is intended to provide a continuous national survey of educational achievement and trends. The program is administered by the Commissioner of Educational Statistics, who heads the National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education. The independent National Assessment Governing Board, appointed by the Secretary of Education, governs the program and is responsible for selection of subject area to be assessed, development of assessment methodology, standards, testing procedures and reporting. Under NAEP, objective-referenced tests are administered periodically to representative, randomly selected national and state samples of 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade pupils in both public and nonpublic schools. Items included in the NAEP are fixed-response, machine-scorable, multiple-choice questions, and constructed-response questions. The federal government covers all costs associated with administering this exam.

Since 1969, assessments have been conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, writing,

science, history/geography or other areas including music, art, computer competence and civics. The NAEP has used the results to track changes in national student achievement levels over time and collect information on pupil performance by gender, race/ethnicity, and other variables intended to indicate the pupils' instructional experiences. In 1990, NAEP began administering trial state-level assessments with an 8th-grade mathematics assessment, which represented the first national program designed to provide state-by-state comparisons of pupil achievement. Previously, NAEP was specifically prohibited from reporting results at the state level.

Table 2 provides the average scale scores for Wisconsin and the U.S. for each subject and year in which Wisconsin participated in the NAEP assessments.

**Table 2: NAEP Average Scale Scores**

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Scale Score</u>	
			<u>Wisconsin Average</u>	<u>National Average</u>
Mathematics (scale: 0-500)	4	1992	229	219
		1996	231	222
		2003	237	234
		2005	241	237
	8	1990	274	262
		1992	278	267
		1996	283	271
		2003	284	276
		2005	285	278
	Reading (scale: 0-500)	4	1992	224
1994			224	212
1998			222	213
2003			221	216
2005		221	217	
8		1998	265	261
		2003	266	261
	2005	266	260	
Science (scale: 0-300)	4	2005	158	149
	8	1996	160	148
		2005	158	147
Writing (scale: 0-300)	8	1998	153	148

**No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.** In 2001, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), renaming it the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Under the reauthorized legislation, schools receiving Title I funds are subject to extensive new accountability provisions. NCLB requires that all students be tested in reading and math each year in grades three to eight by 2005-06, with science assessments once each in elementary, middle, and high school beginning in 2007-08. States select and design their own assessments, but the tests must be aligned with the state's academic standards.

As a condition of receiving federal education funding, a sample of 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in each state must participate in NAEP in reading and math every other year to provide a point of comparison of the state's results on its own tests. Previously, participation in NAEP was voluntary for states. In addition, under NCLB, NAEP will conduct a national assessment, and may conduct a state assessment, in reading and mathematics in grade 12 at least once every four years.

Additionally, under NCLB states are required to report the performance of schools and districts in making "adequate yearly progress" (AYP), as defined under Title I and measured by pupil assessments. AYP must be reported by gender, race or ethnicity, English proficiency status, by students with disabilities compared to non-disabled students, and by economically disadvantaged students compared to those not economically disadvantaged. States must attain academic proficiency, as defined by each state, for each subgroup of students within 12 years. States must raise the level of proficiency gradually, but in equal increments over time, as compared to a minimum performance threshold based on the lowest-achieving schools or student subgroups in the 2001-02 school year. At least 95% of each subgroup must participate in the assessments in order for the school to make AYP. No more than 3% of pupils statewide may take alternate assessments for pupils with disabilities or limited English proficiency. Districts receiving Title I funds must

identify and sanction schools that consistently fail to make AYP for any subgroup.

The 2005-06 results of the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade exams, as well as AYP status for all pupils, by school district, school, and by demographic group within the district or school are available on the Department's website: [[www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/oea/spr\\_kce.html](http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/oea/spr_kce.html)].

If a school fails to make AYP for two consecutive years, then it is identified for improvement. The school district and DPI must provide technical assistance to the school and transportation for students who choose to attend other district schools until the school is no longer identified for improvement. In providing such an option, priority must be given to the lowest achieving students from low-income families. The district must use at least five percent of its Title I funds to pay for that option.

After a third year of failure to make AYP, the district must also make tutoring and other supplemental educational services available to low-income students still enrolled in the school identified for improvement. Private and public, nonprofit, and for-profit entities may provide these services if they agree to various criteria, including that all content and instruction are secular, neutral, and non-ideological, and are consistent with the district's instructional program. The district must use at least five percent of its Title I funds to pay for that option. Unless a smaller amount is needed to satisfy all requests, up to 20 percent of a district's Title I funds are required to be spent on either or both of these options.

After a fourth year of failure to make AYP, the district must implement corrective actions such as replacing school staff, implementing a new curriculum, providing professional development, or otherwise restructure the school and enable it to make AYP. After a full year of corrective action and continued failure to make AYP, the district must implement major restructuring of the school, including reopening as a public charter school,

contracting with a different entity to operate the school, or turning operation over to the state. Requirements related to school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring end if the school makes AYP for two consecutive school years. AYP is also calculated on a district-wide basis, as Title I implements similar oversight requirements for states over districts as a whole.

In 2006-07, approximately 1,120 schools in 382 districts and 14 charter schools in Wisconsin will receive Title I funding totaling approximately \$147.3 million. Statewide, 92 schools did not make AYP in 2005-06. Of those, 38 schools (34 Title I schools) were identified for improvement (failed to make AYP for at least two consecutive years for at least one subgroup) in 2005-06. One school district (Milwaukee Public Schools) was identified for improvement.

Some changes to the Wisconsin student assessment system were necessary to fully comply with the NCLB. DPI indicates that additional test items were added to the knowledge and concepts examinations in all subject areas to more fully assess state model academic standards. Some standards not assessed by these examinations are instead measured and reported at the local district level for Title I accountability purposes. In addition, the knowledge and concepts examinations are now administered in the fall rather than spring, in order to be included in promotion decisions, to comply with "no social promotion" provisions of the NCLB.

Table 3 lists the starting points and intermediate goals of Wisconsin's state accountability plan submitted to the federal Department of Education, as required under NCLB.

**Table 3: Percent of Wisconsin Students Who Need to Score at Proficient/Advanced Annual Objectives**

		Reading	Math
Starting Point	2001-02	61%	37%
	2002-03	61	37
	2003-04	61	37
Intermediate Goal (Begin new 3-8 tests)	2004-05	67.5	47.5
	2005-06	67.5	47.5
	2006-07	67.5	47.5
Intermediate Goal	2007-08	74	58
	2008-09	74	58
	2009-10	74	58
Intermediate Goal	2010-11	80.5	68.5
Intermediate Goal	2011-12	87	79
Intermediate Goal	2012-13	93.5	89.5
Goal: All Proficient	2013-14	100	100

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### Funding for Pupil Assessment

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Table 4 provides a breakdown of total funding provided to DPI for pupil assessment programs from 2003-04 to 2006-07. The table identifies costs in three areas:

1. Printing, scoring, and reporting costs. This includes the cost of the contracts with CTB/McGraw Hill for the knowledge and concepts exams.
2. Contract costs for updates to the Wisconsin reading comprehension test and knowledge and concepts exams.
3. Program operations costs. In 2006-07, the Office of Educational Accountability within DPI consists of 11.75 authorized positions, which are directly responsible for assessment-related activities. Federal funds support 8.75 of these positions. The supplies and services budget includes items such as data processing, printing, travel, space rental, postage, conferences, and consultant expenses.

**Table 4: Estimated Expenditures for DPI Pupil Assessment Programs**

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07*
Printing, Scoring and Reporting	\$2,686,200 225,000	\$1,380,200 1,090,000	\$2,741,300 5,909,800	\$2,500,000 GPR 4,335,800 FED
Development	262,700 4,737,200	1,623,900 4,428,300	369,400 1,390,600	446,300 GPR 709,000 FED
Program Operations Salary and Fringe	232,300 427,700 20,400	212,900 521,400 0	181,100 614,400 0	190,000 GPR 688,900 FED 0 PR
Supplies and Services	46,200 <u>87,100</u>	43,500 <u>108,800</u>	42,200 <u>895,500</u>	45,000 GPR <u>1,140,100</u> FED
Total	\$8,724,800	\$9,409,000	\$12,144,300	\$10,055,100
Permanent Positions (FTE)	3.10 4.90	3.10 4.90	3.00 5.30	3.00 GPR 7.25 FED
Project Positions (FTE)	0.00 <u>4.50</u>	0.00 <u>3.50</u>	0.00 <u>1.00</u>	0.00 GPR <u>1.50</u> FED
Total	12.50	11.50	9.30	11.75

\*Budgeted.