

Writing Changes in the Nation's K–12 Education System

Richard J. Noeth and Jennifer L. Kobrin

Introduction

Writing is a core skill needed for success in both education and the workplace. Yet the writing proficiency among American students has been below expectation. Only 2 percent of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-graders scored at the advanced level, and roughly a quarter scored at the proficient level in the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing assessment (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). In addition, 14 percent of entering college freshmen are required to enroll in remedial writing courses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). These and other similar statistics highlight the critical need for greater emphasis on writing in our nation's schools.

The National Commission on Writing (2003) has called for a National Writing Agenda that includes the recommendation that “assessments of student writing must go beyond multiple-choice, machine-scorable items. Assessment should provide students with adequate time to write and should require students to actually create a piece of prose” (p. 4). The SAT® writing section was introduced to reinforce this recommendation. The College Board introduced the writing section to affirm that writing is essential for postsecondary success, and that more attention to writing is needed in K–12 education. Our advocacy and initiatives in the domain of writing, as well as the SAT writing section, are intended to strengthen writing in our nation's schools and colleges, reinforce the importance of writing skills throughout a student's education, enhance all students' chances of academic success, and help administrators to determine students' readiness to successfully meet postsecondary writing demands.

The SAT writing section is composed of two multiple-choice components (one of 25 minutes and one of 10 minutes) and a 25-minute essay. The 49 multiple-choice questions are combined to produce a scaled writing subscore from 20 to 80. These questions focus on improving sentences, identifying sentence errors, and improving paragraphs. The essay measures skill in developing a point of view on an issue. The essay is scored by two trained readers on a scale of 1–6, and those scores are combined to produce a raw subscore of 2 to 12.¹ The multiple-choice and essay subscores are ultimately combined to form a total score for the SAT writing section on the standard SAT 200–800 point scale.

Study Purpose

It has been about two years since the writing section was first implemented. The purpose of this study was to learn whether there have been any changes in writing instruction across K–12 education in the past three years. A three-year time frame was chosen to structure the study as it included the time period subsequent to the College Board's first announcement of the SAT writing section (the 2002–03 academic year), and the writing section's first administration (March 2005). A secondary goal of this study was to determine whether the SAT writing section had any influence on changes in writing instruction. This is referred to as the “near-term” impact of the SAT writing section, and is similar to the notion of consequential validity. Consequential validity (Messick, 1989) pertains to the social consequences of using a particular test for a particular purpose. It is important to gather evidence of positive consequences of using a test as well as evidence that any adverse consequences are minimal (Brualdi, 1999).

¹A very small fraction of essays are given a score of zero, either because they are blank, not written with a No. 2 pencil, severely illegible, or written on a topic that was not addressed in the essay prompt.

The present study does not evaluate the consequences of the use of test scores per se, but rather the consequences of the addition of the writing section to the SAT. Positive consequences might include the addition of writing programs, teaching strategies, and resources that genuinely improve students' writing achievement and their preparation for postsecondary writing. Negative or adverse consequences might include any changes made directly in response to the addition of the SAT writing section that narrow the writing curriculum or create an environment that is perceived to widen the achievement gap for underserved students. The SAT writing section has not been embraced by all educators. Since its announcement and debut, some have criticized the writing section, and the essay in particular, for rewarding length over content in the scoring process, stunting students' critical thinking abilities, and prohibiting the flexibility of ideas (Kobrin, Deng, and Shaw, 2007). Therefore, it was very important to evaluate the extent to which these criticisms are held by a larger representative population of educators across the country.

Study Methods

To learn about changes in writing, a national Internet survey of both teachers and administrators was conducted. This survey focused on changes with regard to writing priorities, instruction, learning, and resources over the past three years in our nation's schools and school districts. The College Board contracted with Market Data Retrieval (MDR) to select national samples of teachers and administrators, and also to conduct the actual survey.

The target samples for the surveys were based on two populations:

- English/language arts teachers—those closest to writing in our nation's schools and whose students would be those most impacted by the SAT writing section given their proximity to the high school-to-college transition.
- School district administrators—those with broad curriculum responsibilities, knowledge, and involvement, which would include writing.

The samples were selected to represent all six College Board regions and included all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The samples were stratified on school metropolitan area and school size to ensure that all relevant subgroups were repre-

sented. Teachers from SAT states (states with high SAT volumes) were oversampled to ensure that a large proportion of those surveyed would be familiar with the SAT, and thus able to comment on its impact.

The total number of English/language arts teachers who completed the entire survey was 4,922. (There were 5,716 teachers who responded to at least one question on the survey.) This represents a response rate of 9 percent for full-survey completers and 10 percent for partial-survey completers. This sample size meets the threshold for ensuring a 95 percent confidence level that the teachers who completed the entire survey are representative of MDR's entire national database of senior high school English/language arts teachers (MDR, personal communication, November 2006).

Responding teachers represent schools in every state as well as the District of Columbia, and 3,340 different schools across the country. There were 2,464 schools with one teacher responding and 876 schools with more than one teacher responding. Most of the schools with multiple respondents (i.e., 599) had two teachers responding to the survey. The teacher respondent group is very similar to national distributions of all public and private schools by metropolitan area, diversity (by percent of minority enrollment), and size (by enrollment). For example, there is a 1 percentage point difference in urban school representation between our sample and national distributions, a 7 percentage point difference for suburban schools, and a 3 percentage point difference for high/low minority schools (personal communication, National Education Data Resource Center, 2006).

The total number of administrators who completed the entire survey was 826. (There were 949 administrators who responded to at least one question on the survey.) The responder totals represent a return rate of 8 percent for full-survey completers and 9 percent for partial-survey completers. This sample size meets the threshold for ensuring a 95 percent confidence level that the administrators who completed the entire survey are representative of MDR's entire national database of school district administrators (MDR, personal communication, November 2006).

The administrators who completed the survey represent districts in every state as well as the District of Columbia, and at least 671 different school districts across the country. There were 71 districts with more than one administrator responding and there were 84 administrators who had no district identifier. While district comparisons are more difficult,² the respondent

²There are fewer district-level descriptive data at the federal level; there are a number of differently defined districts in terms of agency, enrollment, and/or administrative/operational control; and there is no direct public-private district indicator such as there is with schools.

sample is very similar to national distributions of public school districts by diversity, and somewhat similar by metropolitan area and size. For example, there is a 3 percentage point difference between our sample and national distributions for high/low minority districts, 4 percentage points for urban districts, and 17 percentage points for rural districts.³

Survey Development

Several key sources were used to help develop the frameworks for the surveys used in this study. These included the work of the National Commission on Writing (2003, 2006), the SAT Writing Curriculum Survey (Milewski, Johnsen, Glazer, and Kubota, 2005), and the National Writing Standards (National Council of Teachers of English, 1996). SAT Program administrators, College Board research staff, and College Board regional staff provided extensive input in the survey development; and additional guidance was sought from MDR, the company that administered our online surveys.

The surveys included four content sections that covered a wide range of issues related to writing. These focused on changes in:

1. Priorities, attitudes, expectations, and awareness of writing.
2. How writing is taught.
3. Learning related to writing.
4. Resources allocated to writing.

There were a total of 44 possible items in the administrator survey, and 47 possible items in the teacher survey; many of the same questions were included in both surveys. Respondents received a varying number of items depending on their responses to previous questions. If a respondent indicated that there had been a change in at least one area in a section, that person received an “SAT impact” question. This question asked to what extent the SAT writing section was a factor in this change. The four response options to this question were: The SAT writing section was (1) a major factor, (2) a minor factor, (3) not a factor, or (4) I don’t know.

Several survey items had branching options, which enabled the specification of more information for a given response. There were also several background questions including length of time in the position, percentage of students at the school or district who take the SAT, and highest grade level currently taught (for teachers). The end of the survey included a two-part question where respondents were asked to indicate the overall importance the school or district

placed on writing three years ago and today. Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide comments and to provide a Web site that contained information about their school’s or district’s writing program and curricula.

Survey Implementation

At the end of October 2006, all secondary school administrators in the MDR database were contacted, either by e-mail or by postcard. Those administrators for whom MDR had e-mail addresses were told that they would receive an e-mail with a link to the survey in about a week, and those without e-mail addresses were given a Web site and password and asked to log in to complete the survey. Given the large teacher population in MDR’s database, no postcard premailing was required for this group. (Those teachers for whom MDR had only surface mail addresses were not included in the sample, as the study sample was drawn only from those for whom MDR had e-mail addresses.)

In the first week of November 2006, an introductory e-mail with a link to the survey was sent successfully to 56,384 teachers and 10,918 administrators. One week later, a follow-up e-mail was sent with a link to the survey. The survey was closed at the end of November, giving respondents about three weeks to complete the survey.

As an incentive to complete the survey, 40 people who completed the entire survey were randomly selected to receive \$25 Amazon.com gift certificates (this opportunity was announced in the introductory e-mail). The College Board Call Center fielded telephone calls and e-mail regarding questions or comments about the survey. Finally, respondents were promised that they would receive the results of the survey when available.

Selected Survey Results

Writing Priorities, Attitudes, and Expectations

The first survey section examined perceived changes over the past three years in writing priorities, attitudes, expectations, and awareness. English/language arts teachers and district administrators were asked about these changes regarding schools, districts, teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, and students.

³National district data were extracted from the NCES Common Core of Data: America’s Public Schools, 2004–05 School Districts.

The first question in the survey addressed whether writing had become more of a priority. (This question was intended to set the tone for the entire survey.) The large majority (roughly 90 percent of both groups) indicated that writing had become much more or slightly more of a priority in their schools and districts (Figure 1). Over three-quarters of administrators also reported that there has been an increased focus on writing in middle school. Results from these two questions appear to demonstrate both significant horizontal (across schools and districts) and vertical (within districts down into middle schools) increases in the priority that writing has taken in our nation's education system.

Both groups were asked about changes in English/language arts teachers' attitudes and expectations regarding the writing performance of their students. It was deemed important to look at both attitudes and expectations to see if attitudes transferred into performance expectations. Very high proportions of teachers (85 percent) and administrators (91 percent) indicated that expectations were much higher or slightly higher. This question followed questions about overall teacher and administrator attitudes about the importance of writing—both of which were also very high (77–88 percent).

Teachers were surveyed about changes in student awareness regarding the importance of writing for postsecondary preparation. Given that awareness and knowledge of the future importance of particular academic subjects and subject matter often form the basis for consequent engagement and performance, it seemed particularly important to gauge potential increases in student awareness about the importance of writing. Teachers indicated that the vast majority of their students (80 percent) were much more or slightly more aware of the importance of writing.

The final question in this section involved the impact of the SAT writing section. Specifically, those who indicated a positive response for *any* of the preceding questions in the sec-

tion were asked if the SAT writing section had been a factor in changing these priorities, attitudes, or expectations about writing in their schools or districts. Two-thirds of teachers and 58 percent of administrators felt that the SAT writing section had been a major or minor factor effecting this change. With regard to changes in writing priorities, attitudes, and expectations, the SAT writing section has demonstrated a clearly positive impact.

It is particularly worth noting that when schools and districts were categorized by high and low minority enrollment, there was only one notable difference (i.e., 10 percentage points or more) on any question regarding writing priorities, attitudes, and expectations. Specifically, 91 percent of administrators in high-minority districts reported that there was an increased focus on writing in the middle schools, compared to 77 percent of those in low-minority districts.

Teaching of Writing

The focus of the second section of the survey was on changes in the teaching of writing over the past three years. (This was the largest section and covered multiple aspects of writing curricula and instruction.) English/language arts teachers and district administrators were asked about changes in how writing is taught; the number of writing courses; class time; the frequency of essay tests and assignments; curriculum and class structure; teaching methods and rigor; the connection between writing and reading; and the frequency of teacher collaboration.

There were two questions that dealt with aspects of writing related to the number of writing courses and class time spent on writing. Both groups reported a similar increase in writing courses, as 28 percent of teachers and 29 percent of administrators indicated that there was an increase of at least one or two new writing courses (including three or more in a small percentage of instances) in their schools and districts (Figure 2). Given the lead time often required to initially develop and then add academic courses to existing curricula, this increase appears to be significant.

Both groups were also asked if more class time had been spent on writing projects, writing assignments, writing analysis, and/or related writing activities in English/language arts courses as well as in other courses (Figure 3). Roughly 80 percent reported that either more than 10 percent additional class time or up to 10 percent additional class time had been spent on writing in English/language arts courses.

Separate questions were asked about in-class and outside-of-class (homework) writing assignments pertaining to English/language arts teachers. Similar percentages

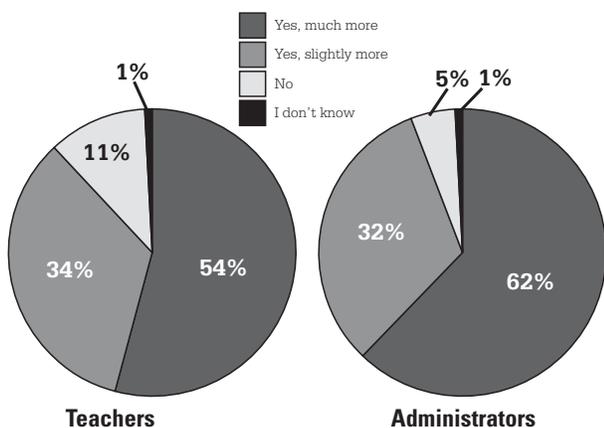


Figure 1. Survey results for question, “Has writing become more of a priority in your school or district?”

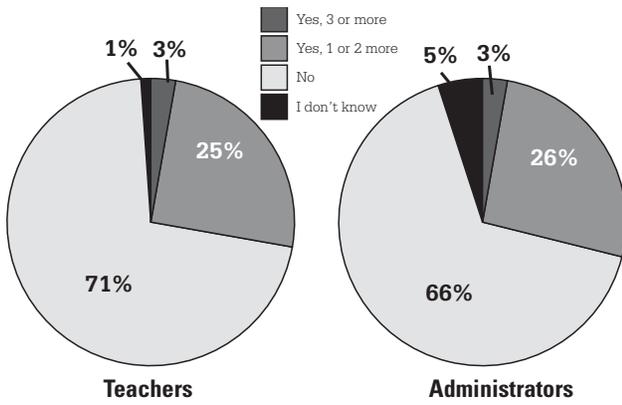


Figure 2. Survey results for question, “Has there been an increase in writing courses throughout your school or district?”

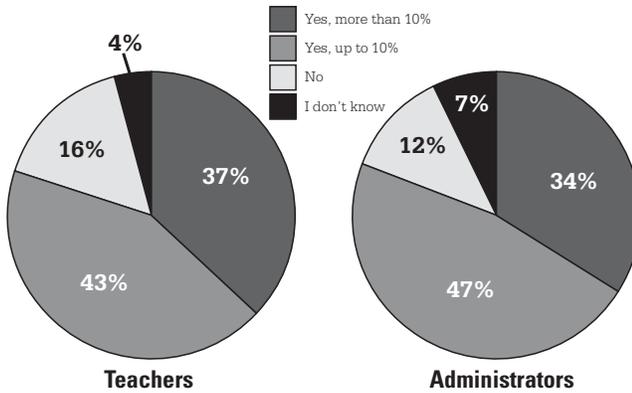


Figure 3. Survey results for question, “Has more class time been spent on writing projects, writing assignments, writing analysis, and/or related writing activities in English/language arts courses?”

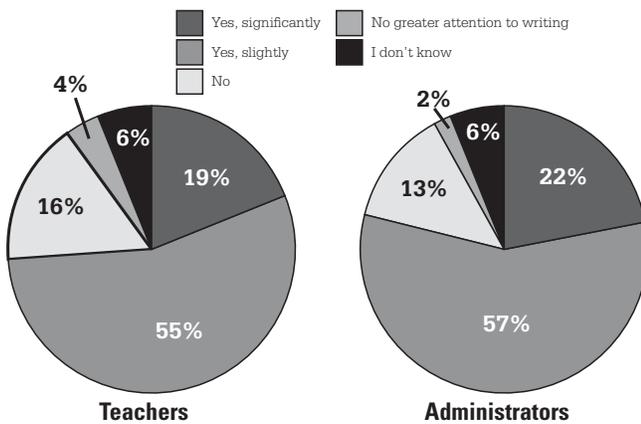


Figure 4. Survey results for question, “Has overall curriculum rigor (e.g., in-depth focus within or across certain course topics, a greater emphasis on critical thinking) been increased by greater attention to writing?”

of teachers and administrators (86 percent and 83 percent, respectively) reported that teachers had given many more or a few more in-class writing assignments. With regard to outside-of-class writing assignments, roughly two-thirds of both groups reported that there were many more or a few more such assignments.

Two questions focused on curriculum change and curriculum rigor. Large proportions of teachers (76 percent) and administrators (81 percent) reported that writing has become more of a major or an increased, but still minor, focus of the curriculum. A substantial increase in overall curriculum rigor due to a greater attention to writing (e.g., in-depth focus within or across certain course topics, a greater emphasis on critical thinking) was also reported by both groups. About three-quarters of teachers and 79 percent of administrators indicated significant or slight increases in curriculum rigor due to writing (Figure 4).

Clearly there has been a major positive shift in the English/language arts curriculum with regard to the importance of writing. Writing has not only increased in focus, it has also positively impacted overall academic rigor in our nation’s schools.

Two questions asked teachers about instructional methods related to writing and the use of essay tests. In terms of English/language arts courses, there was a high degree of change in teaching methods, as 82 percent of teachers indicated much more or a little more focus on writing. Three-fifths also reported that they had used SAT-type essays and scoring rubrics (holistic scoring) in their classrooms. This second question did not focus on frequency of occurrence, but dealt instead with whether SAT-type essays and scoring rubrics had been used over the past three years. This fairly large proportion seems to suggest that classroom use of the type of essay and scoring rubrics found in the SAT has been at least part of some of the changes that have been observed in curricula, teaching methods, and writing assignments.

The last question asked respondents if the SAT writing section had been a factor in changing *any* aspect of the teaching of writing. Roughly three-fifths of both groups reported that the SAT writing section had been a major or a minor factor in changing the teaching of writing. In other words, over the past three years the teaching of writing has been positively affected by the development and implementation of the SAT writing section. Additionally, there were no notable differences for any question regarding the teaching of writing when schools and districts were categorized by high and low minority enrollment. Changes in the teaching of writing are parallel across schools and districts, and those with high minority enrollments are placing just as much emphasis on writing as those with low minority enrollments.

Learning Related to Writing

The third section of the survey centered on changes in learning related to writing. Specific questions focused on improvement in students' writing skills (both in overall writing skills and in the writing skills of English as a Second Language [ESL] students or those not writing at expected levels); expansion and/or implementation of general writing programs; expansion and/or implementation of special or remedial writing programs; and expansion and/or development of new writing proficiency standards.

Both groups were asked whether special or remedial programs for ESL students or those not writing at expected levels had been expanded and/or implemented. Similar proportions of teachers (39 percent) and administrators (44 percent) reported that such writing programs had been expanded and/or implemented. Those who responded positively were then branched to a follow-up question that provided four specific program options to describe their remedial writing programs. Both groups indicated that programs for students not writing at expected levels (roughly two-thirds), programs for ESL students (more than half), and programs for students with inadequate fundamental preparation (slightly less than half) were expanded and/or implemented as part of school and district remedial writing programs. A smaller proportion of teachers (39 percent) than administrators (54 percent) also listed programs for students with specific writing deficiencies.

Another question asked administrators if there had been expanded and/or new writing proficiency requirements included as part of their district's academic performance standards. Nearly three-fifths (59 percent) reported expanded and/or new writing proficiency requirements. When those who responded affirmatively were asked to indicate which particular writing proficiency requirements had been added (via a branching question), they selected a range of descriptions. They reported that new or revised benchmarks or standards for writing proficiency were specified as part of graduation requirements (39 percent), as part of at least one or more of middle school and/or high school end-of-year performance requirements (48 percent), and/or were incorporated into expectations for college readiness (33 percent). Additionally, 63 percent reported a greater focus on assessment and analysis of writing proficiency (Table 1).

The expansion and/or creation of special writing programs and of writing proficiency requirements would likely require considerable academic, administrative, and fiscal planning. This seems to confirm the previously reported

Table 1

Survey Results Related to Expansion and/or Development of New Writing Proficiency Requirements	
Writing Requirement	Percentage of Administrators
Part of graduation requirements	39
Part of end-of-year middle school and/or high school performance requirements	48
Incorporated into expectations for college readiness	34
Greater focus on assessment and analysis of writing proficiency	63
Other	11

Note: The survey question read, "Please indicate the expanded and/or new writing proficiency requirements that have been added as part of your district's academic performance standards (*check all that apply*)."² Fifty-nine percent of the administrators responding to the survey indicated "yes" to the baseline question and were branched to the above question.

increase in the priority and instructional emphasis placed upon writing in our nation's schools and districts.

The final question asked whether the SAT writing section had been a factor in changes in *any* aspect of learning related to writing. Identical proportions (53 percent) of both groups indicated that the SAT writing section had been a major or a minor factor in changes in learning as related to writing. Also, there were no notable differences between teachers at high-minority and low-minority schools in terms of their reports of learning as related to writing. There was only one difference between districts: a larger percentage of administrators from high-minority districts compared to low-minority districts (71 percent versus 59 percent) reported that the writing skills of their ESL students or those not writing at expected levels had improved through programs, courses, and assignments that emphasized writing.

Writing Resources

The fourth survey section focused on changes in resources dedicated to writing instruction. Questions asked whether more resources had been allocated to writing, if there was more professional development of teachers with regard to writing, and if teachers had been given more dedicated time to grade writing assignments.

A much larger proportion of administrators (55 percent) than teachers (33 percent) reported that additional writing resources had been allocated. Respondents reporting additional resources were then branched to a follow-up question that allowed them to select descriptions of writing resources (Table 2). There was general consistency between both groups, as 24 percent of teachers and 28 percent of

Table 2

Survey Results Related to Additional Writing Resources

Resources	Percentage of Teachers	Percentage of Administrators
Additional staff members	24	28
Technical resources	61	65
Commercial programs, materials, assessments	47	54
Other	25	27

Note: The survey question read, “Please indicate the different types of resources that have been allocated to support writing (*check all that apply*).” Thirty-three percent of teachers and 55 percent of administrators indicated “yes” to the baseline question and were branched to the above question.

administrators indicated that additional staff members had been hired to support writing instruction. Larger proportions (roughly half of each group) reported that commercial writing programs, materials, and/or assessments had been purchased, and even larger proportions of each group (more than 60 percent) indicated that technical resources had been brought in to support writing instruction.

Both groups were then asked additional questions to help create a complete picture of how writing resources have changed. The first asked if there had been more professional development of teachers with regard to writing, and the second asked if teachers had been given more dedicated time to grade writing assignments. A considerably larger proportion of administrators (81 percent) than teachers (64 percent) reported that there was much more or slightly more professional development of teachers with regard to writing. However, when asked about more dedicated time to grade writing assignments, only 13 percent of administrators and 7 percent of teachers indicated that either up to one more class period per week or two or more class periods per week had been set aside for evaluating writing (and we know from earlier survey questions that there has been a large increase in both in-class and outside-of-class writing assignments).

Thus, while there clearly has been a significant increase in writing resources and more professional development with regard to writing, there has only been a modest change in the actual time given to teachers to grade writing assignments. This limited change in dedicated grading time seems out of step with other survey results and suggests that while there have been major changes in multiple elements of writing instruction, there has only been a limited amount of additional time provided to teachers to accommodate these changes.

The last question in this section asked whether the SAT writing section had been a factor in increasing *any* aspect of

writing resources. A somewhat larger proportion of administrators (40 percent) than teachers (33 percent) reported that the SAT writing section had been a factor in increasing their districts’ and schools’ writing resources. While the reported impact of the SAT writing section is not as high as its impact on writing expectations and attitudes, teaching, and learning, the time and administrative effort required to develop new and/or apportion existing resources to better support writing instruction make this impact significant, particularly given the short (three-year) evaluation period.

Finally, when schools and districts were analyzed by high- and low-minority enrollment, there were no differences for teachers but two differences for administrators on questions about writing resources. Specifically, 89 percent of those in high-minority districts, compared to 79 percent in low-minority districts, reported that there was more professional development of teachers in writing. Also, more than half (53 percent) of the administrators in high-minority districts, compared to 38 percent in low-minority districts, indicated that the SAT writing section was a factor in increasing writing resources. As with previous survey sections, there were remarkably consistent similarities between high-minority and low-minority schools and districts.

Importance of Writing— Past and Present

The final survey section included a two-part question that asked both groups to rate the importance that their schools and districts have placed upon writing three years ago and today. Respondents were provided with a seven-point rating scale that ranged from “one of the most prominent parts of our curriculum” to “no importance placed on writing in our curriculum.” When combining the highest two response choices,⁴ teachers reported a 25 percentage point change and administrators reported a 38 percentage point change over the three-year time period (Table 3).

The final survey question was based on the preceding two-part question and asked whether the SAT writing section had been a factor in the changes reported in the importance placed upon writing over the past three years. Notable proportions of teachers (61 percent) and administrators (54 percent) indicated that the SAT writing section had been a major or a minor factor in the change in importance that their schools and districts had placed upon writing over this time period (Figure 5).

⁴The highest two response choices were “writing was/is one of the most important parts of our curriculum” and “writing was/is a very important part of our curriculum.”

Table 3

Survey Results on the Importance Placed on Writing Three Years Ago and Today

Importance of Writing	Percentage of Teachers		Percentage of Administrators	
	3 years ago	Today	3 years ago	Today
No importance	0	0	0	0
Little importance	3	1	2	0
Neither stressed nor ignored	15	6	14	3
Important	19	11	24	9
Fairly important	26	20	27	17
Very important	27	41	25	50
One of most prominent parts of curriculum	10	21	8	21

Respondents' Comments

At the conclusion of the survey, both groups were invited to provide additional information about attitudes, teaching, learning, resources, and/or other issues related to writing (and/or the SAT writing section). Respondents were also able to provide their school's or district's Web site with descriptions or documents about writing programs. Comments were written by 2,334 individual teachers (47 percent of teacher respondents) and by 251 administrators (30 percent of administrator respondents). MDR conducted a content analysis of the comments received and provided these within specific categories. (A single comment could be coded into up to 10 categories, depending on the number of issues addressed.) The most frequent categories (based on the number of those supplying comments), were as follows:

- Focus is on the state writing test (35 percent of administrators and 19 percent of teachers).
- Emphasis is on SAT (and/or ACT) preparation (26 percent of teachers and 25 percent of administrators).
- The emphasis on writing is not new; current initiatives only emphasize what our importance for student writing has been for years (21 percent of teachers and 23 percent of administrators).
- The district supports writing initiatives (21 percent of administrators, but only 4 percent of teachers).
- Emphasis is on cross-curricular approaches to writing (17 percent of administrators and 14 percent of teachers).
- The school or district has an intensive writing focus (16 percent of teachers and 14 percent of administrators).
- Teachers need more time to do their job effectively, to assign and grade writing assignments (15 percent of teachers, but only 5 percent of administrators).

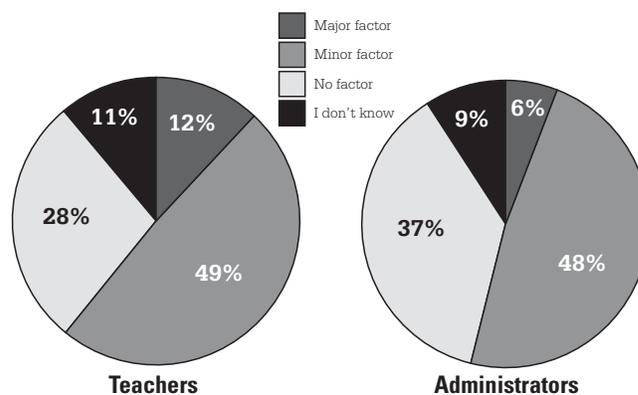


Figure 5. Survey results for the question, “Has the SAT writing section been a factor in the increased importance that your school or district has placed on writing?”

- Staff attends workshops and/or conferences to continue professional development (13 percent of administrators, but only 6 percent of teachers).

Some survey comments had a negative tone, reflecting the common criticisms of the SAT writing section and essay described earlier. (Approximately 10 percent of the teachers and 6 percent of the administrators who gave comments indicated that timed writing assessments are not productive, reading and writing instruction has declined due to an emphasis on test preparation, drafting and revision are needed for good writing, and/or writing is not supposed to happen under the guise of test-taking.)

Nevertheless, the complete set of content-analyzed and categorized comments appears in most cases to reflect the quantitative findings of the survey. Reviewing these comment categories within the perspective of the other survey results supports the conclusion that there has indeed been a renewed emphasis occurring with regard to writing in our schools. Furthermore, the comments reflect the need for additional time allocations for teachers to grade writing assignments.

Conclusion

The English/language arts teachers and district administrators surveyed reported major changes in writing priorities, attitudes, and expectations; how writing is taught; learning related to writing; writing resources; and the importance placed upon writing in the curriculum in their schools and districts over the past three years. Literally every survey item indicated an increase over this time period, and the data revealed that the SAT writing section had a clear role in supporting these changes. Also, there was general consistency between both groups in their responses; and there were very

few notable differences between high-minority and low-minority districts, and none between high- and low-minority schools, on any section of the survey.

The implications of these results for our nation's K–12 education system are significant. (Although some comments reflected the opinion that writing instruction has not changed in a positive way, the overall combination of survey responses and written comments suggests that a positive view on writing instruction is far more prevalent.) Essentially, there has been a major shift in the importance, role, and prominence placed upon writing in our nation's schools and districts over the past three years. This renewed writing emphasis also has helped broaden postsecondary preparation, shape instructional changes, enhance academic rigor, and buttress professional resource development. And these changes appear to be pervasive—impacting schools and districts regardless of size, location, or enrollment diversity.

Preview of Complete Report

The complete report of this study will be available in early 2008. This will include the background of the study, a detailed description of study procedures and samples, surveys and accompanying communications, analyses of the results of each survey question, breakdowns by size, metropolitan area, and diversity, and a discussion of any study limitations (e.g., potential sample restrictions).

Richard J. Noeth is an independent consultant.

Jennifer L. Kobrin is a research scientist at the College Board.

References

Brualdi, A. (1999). *Traditional and modern concepts of validity*. (ERIC Digest ED435714). Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation. Retrieved March 19, 2007, from <http://www.ericdigests.org/2000-3/validity.htm>.

Kobrin, J.L., Deng, H., & Shaw, E.J. (2007, April). *An investigation of prompt characteristics and response features on the SAT essay*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Messick, S. (1989). Validity. In R.L. Linn (Ed.) *Educational measurement* (3rd ed., pp. 13–103). New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Milewski, G.B., Johnsen, D., Glazer, N., & Kubota, M. (2005). *A survey to evaluate the alignment of the new SAT writing and critical reading sections to curricula and instructional practices* (College Board Research Report No. 2005-1). New York: The College Board.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). *Remedial education at degree-granting postsecondary institutions in fall 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

National Council of Teachers of English. (1996). *National standards for the English language arts*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association.

The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges. (2003). *The neglected "R": The need for a writing revolution*. New York: The College Board.

The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges. (2006). *Writing and school reform*. New York: The College Board.

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, and National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). *The nation's report card: Writing 2002*. Washington, DC: Authors.

Writing Changes in the Nation's K-12 Education System

Office of Research and Analysis
The College Board
45 Columbus Avenue
New York, NY 10023-6992
212 713-8000

The College Board: Connecting Students to College Success

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the association is composed of more than 5,400 schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,500 colleges through major programs and services in college admissions, guidance, assessment, financial aid, enrollment, and teaching and learning. Among its best-known programs are the SAT[®], the PSAT/NMSQT[®], and the Advanced Placement Program[®] (AP[®]). The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities, and concerns. For further information, visit www.collegeboard.com.

© 2007 The College Board. All rights reserved. College Board, Advanced Placement Program, AP, SAT, and the acorn logo are registered trademarks of the College Board. connect to college success is a trademark owned by the College Board. PSAT/NMSQT is a registered trademark of the College Board and National Merit Scholarship Corporation. All other products and services may be trademarks of their respective owners. Visit the College Board on the Web: www.collegeboard.com.

Permission is hereby granted to any nonprofit organization or institution to reproduce this report in limited quantities for its own use, but not for sale, provided that the copyright notice be retained in all reproduced copies as it appears in this publication.