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## FCAT writing scores on the rise in Marion County

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OCALA — Marion County elementary and middle school children have moved closer to reaching the state average Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test score for writing.

The results of the writing test given annually to fourth-, eighth- and 10th-graders were released Wednesday, and they show that Marion County students have improved over last year.

"Considering the distraction of the

hurricanes and the fact we focused on reading, we still gained ground on the state," said Janet Weldon, director of guidance and assessment for Marion County Public Schools.

"We are on the right track," she said. Marion County elementary fourth-graders improved their average combined score in writing from 3.4 in 2004 to 3.5 this year. The test has two parts: narrative and expository. The state average remained 3.7.

The improved score in Marion came

during the first year that the passing score was raised from 3.0 to 3.5.

Dunnellon Elementary School Principal David Denaro said he was elated and proud of his students who averaged 3.9 on the test, one of the county's top performers.

"We're steadily increasing," said Denaro of the entire school system. "I'm proud of what we have accomplished and we need to keep moving forward!"

Dr. N.H. Jones Elementary School also scored a 3.9.

The most improved elementary schools include Wyomina Park, which jumped from 3.4 in 2004 to 3.8 this year, and Greenway, which jumped from 3.2 to 3.6.

Wyomina Park Principal Mike Graff said teachers worked hard this year in developing ways to remind fourth-graders of proper structure and technique.

Using colored arm bands,

PLEASE SEE **WEB ON 4A**

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## Web program said to have helped scores

CONTINUED FROM 1A

representing different parts of an FCAT essay, the students would automatically associate the color with their paper's organization.

"This is just an example of the hard work by our teachers and the fact our kids stayed focused," said Graff, adding his exceptional student education students also improved.

Graff said they included the ESE students with mainstream classmates and Graff said that made a difference among the students that had been falling behind.

The principal said many teachers took extra intensive writing instruction, which Deputy Superintendent of Instruction Diana Green says was one key to improvement.

Green said there have been at least 300 teachers that have been hired in the last several years that have not taken an intensive writing training class.

"We plan to train those teachers in intensive writing so that we can keep improving," Green said.

Marion County middle school children also narrowed the gap on the state. Scores rose from 3.6 in 2004 to 3.7 this year, even though the state average remained at 3.8.

Lake Middle School and Dunnellon Middle School were the two most improved schools, both raising the scores from 3.5 in 2004 to 3.7 this year.

Lake Weir Middle Principal Walt Miller said a new Web-based program called My Access has made an immediate impact on students this year.

Purchased in December, My Access requires students to log on with a password and write an essay. When completed, the computer gives the student a

score, ranging from 1 to 6, and ways to improve the paper.

"It has been a phenomenal program and has made a big difference for our students," said Miller, adding that six of the county's 33 perfect scores came from Lake Weir Middle.

"Last year we only had one," Miller continued. "I can't imagine if we had this program all year how much better we would have scored."

Dunnellon Middle School Principal Jane Ashman said this year's strong focus on reading helped increase her school's writing scores.

"I think they write better when they read good writing," she said.

Marion County high school scores remained at 3.6, as did the 3.8 state average. Forest High School and Vanguard were the top performers with a 3.8 score.

The most improved school was West Port High School, which rose from a 3.5 in 2004 to a 3.6 this year. Principal Jayne Ellspermann said she is pleased.

"I believe the improvement is due to our focus on vocabulary," said Ellspermann, adding a word of the day helped increase vocabulary and that leads to better writing.

Ellspermann, who is also the principal at West Port Middle School, said she is also pleased that more eighth-graders score higher than a 3.0 on the essays.

"Last year, only 87 percent of our students scored higher than a 3.0 and that rose to 93 percent this year," said Ellspermann. "We are pleased with the performance."

For a school-by-school comparison, go to [www.fldoe.org](http://www.fldoe.org).

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## 2005 FCAT writing scores

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test for writing was released on Thursday. Though Marion County was still below the state average on the combined writing assessments for fourth-, eighth-, and 10th-graders, elementary and middle school scores inched closer to state averages.

	SCHOOLS	2004	2005
ELEMENTARY	State	3.7	3.7
	District	3.4	3.5
	TP-Dunnellon	3.7	3.9
	TP-Dr. N.H. Jones	3.8	3.9
	MI-Wyomina	3.4	3.8
	MI-Greenway	3.2	3.6
MIDDLE	MI-Marion Charter	2.8	3.1
	SCHOOLS	2004	2005
	State	3.8	3.8
	District	3.6	3.7
	TP-Osceola	4.2	4.3
	MI-Dunnellon	3.5	3.7
HIGH	MI-Lake Weir	3.5	3.7
	SCHOOLS	2004	2005
	State	3.8	3.8
	District	3.6	3.6
	TP-Forest	3.7	3.8
	TP-Vanguard	3.8	3.8
MI-West Port	3.5	3.6	

TP-Top Performer, MI-Most Improved

Source: Florida Department of Education