



**The 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics CRCT: a High-Stakes Assessment**

Georgia's 8<sup>th</sup> grade math Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) is a test that has special importance as a gateway in the state's assessment system; students must either pass it or successfully appeal to their school system to be promoted to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The test also factors into middle schools' Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) calculations under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

After three years of preparation, piloting and teacher training on the new 8<sup>th</sup> grade Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), the stakes were raised for both students and schools this year. Students were asked to learn a more rigorous curriculum and also to get more items correct on the test to earn a passing score.

According to the [Georgia Department of Education](#), "Courses previously taught in grades 6-8 were extremely repetitious, addressing almost the same content in all three grades. Expectations for student learning were not clear and in most cases, demanded only low-level cognitive skills. Under the new GPS, by the time students have finished 8th grade, they should have learned 80% of the concepts and skills previously taught in Algebra I, 50% of the content traditionally taught in high school geometry, and a significant amount of statistics and probability previously taught in high school courses."

**Highest Achievers on the New 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Math CRCT**

When any curriculum and testing change is implemented, and the standards for passing are raised, stakeholders should expect a dip in performance as students and teachers get used to the new material and the new tests, followed by a rebound of scores. Most subjects have followed that pattern in transitioning from the old (QCC) standards to the new GPS. The average decline across the state for 8<sup>th</sup> grade math in 2008 was 19 points. Clay County, Webster County and Decatur City actually *improved* their scores in 2008.

System Name	2007	2008	Change
Clay County	47	59	+12
Webster County	81	88	+7
Decatur City	76	77	+1
Wheeler County	61	59	-2
Lanier County	77	74	-3
Oconee County	92	86	-6
Trion City	96	90	-6
Montgomery County	61	55	-6
Schley County	93	87	-6
Miller County	92	85	-7
<b>State Average</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>-19</b>

System Name	2008	System Name	2008
Trion City	90	Pierce County	81
Webster County	88	Buford City	80
Forsyth County	88	Banks County	80
Schley County	87	Houston County	78
Oconee County	86	Gwinnett County	77
Jefferson City	85	Lincoln County	77
Miller County	85	Monroe County	77
Fayette County	81	<b>Top 15 Average</b>	<b>83</b>
		<b>State Average</b>	<b>62</b>

**Top 10 School Systems with Smallest Drop in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Math CRCT Performance**

Source: Georgia Department of Education

**Top 15 school systems with highest percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards on 8<sup>th</sup> grade math CRCT**

Source: Georgia Department of Education

**What about Students Who Don't Pass the Test?**

By law, students who do not pass this test have two options to be promoted to 9<sup>th</sup> grade: a) they can retake and pass the test; or b) after retaking the test, they can appeal the decision to retain them in 8<sup>th</sup> grade to their school and be promoted without passing the retest. Data from summer 2007 on subsequent tests were not promising:

Grade Level Reported in October 2008	Students Scoring “Does Not Meet” on Spring 2007 CRCT Grade 8 Math:						
	Total Count	No Retest Data Found	% With Retest Data	Passed Retest	% of Retesters Passing Retest	Failed Retest	% of Retesters Failing Retest
08	1,777	854	51.9%	67	7.3%	856	92.7%
09	19,051	2989	84.3%	6314	39.3%	9748	60.7%

Source: Georgia Department of Education

These data suggest that:

1. Only about half of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders (51.9%) who failed the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Math CRCT retook it last spring.
2. The vast majority of 8<sup>th</sup> graders who did retest also failed the retest (92.7%).
3. Many students who did not meet standards in 2007 were classified as 9<sup>th</sup> graders taking the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Math CRCT (19,051). The state appears to have had 19,051 students who had previously failed the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Math CRCT and yet had been promoted to 9<sup>th</sup> grade; however, 61% of those 9<sup>th</sup> graders who took the retest failed it again.

Yet, by [law](#), Georgia schools and school districts are allowed to procedurally promote students who did not pass the gateway CRCTs:

1. The student must retake the CRCT;
2. The school must convene a placement committee, comprised of the principal, teacher, and parent or guardian, to “review the overall academic achievement of the student in light of the performance on the CRCT and promotion standards and criteria established by the local board of education, and make a determination to promote or retain”;
3. The decision to promote must be predicated upon the placement committee’s belief that the student will be successful at the next grade level if he receives accelerated, differentiated, or additional assignments;
4. Finally, the placement committee must provide a plan for continuous assessment at the next grade level for the student.

Lowest DNM Promotion Rates	2007
McIntosh County	24.1%
Gainesville City	30.9%
Johnson County	50.0%
Ware County	50.5%
Early County	58.3%
Bryan County	62.1%
Marion County	64.3%
Stewart County	66.7%
Rome City	67.7%
Randolph County	68.2%

### Both Ends of Georgia’s Retention Spectrum

In 2007, an average of 84.2% of the students in systems with 10 or more test takers who did not meet (DNM) standards on the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Math CRCT were promoted to 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the fall of 2008.

Promotion rates of DNM students ranged from a low of 24.1% in McIntosh County to a high of 100% in Bleckley, Glascock, Lincoln, Tattall, Treutlen, Turner and Warren Counties as well as Social Circle City Schools.

Source: Georgia Department of Education

100% Promotion Rates of 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math DNM Students in 2007
Bleckley County
Glascock County
Lincoln County
Tattall County
Treutlen County
Turner County
Warren County
Social Circle City

### Retention vs. Promotion: the Jury’s Still Out

Research is mixed on the effects of retention on students’ future outcomes. Most studies conducted over the past 75 years on [grade retention](#) show that retained students tend **not** to improve their academic achievement when they eventually do move on to the next grade level. While it has been studied less frequently, a 2002 review of 17 studies shows that early grade retention also seems to be related to (though not necessarily a cause of) a higher risk of dropping out of school.

[One newer study](#), highlighted by researcher Jay P. Greene in an [op-ed in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#) on July 13, 2008, argues that retained students slightly outperform socially promoted students. This study examined Florida’s test-based retention policy in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and found that this academic growth actually accelerates in the years after a student is retained.

Other large school systems from around the country, including New York and Chicago, have struggled with this same policy. Chicago Public Schools in particular have gone through [heated arguments over this topic](#) in recent years. Chicago has kept a retention policy in place, though with a close observer noting that in the end, “without substantial supports, neither social promotion nor retention will improve low-performing students.” “Substantial supports” ideally would mean an enriched, accelerated academic program that would, through additional help and tailor-made interventions, result in a better outcome at the end of the repeated grade.

### Conclusion

Some school systems in Georgia have already had some success with the new math standards. Most are faced with making decisions about their remediation and retention programs and policies. Placement committees are able to override retention decisions; parents are often able to make a case that their child, despite failing a gateway test, earned a good grade in the course, and therefore deserves to be promoted anyway. This begs the question: what is the relationship between students’ gateway test scores and students’ grades in related courses? Speaking on the topic of retention appeals to the [Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#), State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox said that, “I think what this law is trying to do with the test is conquer that issue [of grade inflation] more so than ‘social promotion.’” GOSA will study this relationship and publish reports in the coming months that explore the link between course grades and students’ success on Georgia’s high school End-of-Course Tests (EOCTs).