

The **INSTITUTE** for  

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Public Policy & Economic Development

Lackawanna  
County School  
Assessment  
Report

**2010**

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The School Assessment Report (SAR) provides educators, administrators, parents, business and industry, and civic leaders with information regarding student proficiencies.

Writing

**May 2010**

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## Executive Summary

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2006-2008 population estimate, Lackawanna County has a population of approximately 209,194. Moreover, the county's median annual per capita income is \$23,568 (2008 inflation adjusted) and its median household income is \$42,126 (2008 inflation adjusted). Both income levels rank below the national averages. The county includes ten school districts, which, in 2008-2009, reported an 83.2-97.6% graduation rate.

There is often a link between educational attainment and poverty; poverty rates steadily decrease with higher educational attainment levels. Lackawanna County reported a 13.1% of individuals below poverty rate.

It is important to remember that a student's performance reflects the collective effort of schools and their communities. Research has shown that the education levels and contributions of parents are critical factors that impact a child's academic performance. To help all students reach their full potential, it is necessary that they, along with their teachers, families, and communities collectively engage in efforts to improve student performance.

State test proficiency by subject provides an overall summary of school, school district, or state performance in a particular subject and includes students at all grade levels tested. Proficient is the minimum level of academic performance that all students are expected to attain under the No Child Left Behind Act; however, each state may administer its own exam and set its own proficiency standards.

*It should be noted that student performance data displayed may differ slightly from state reported data due to rounding differences.*

This SAR's group (fifth, eighth, and eleventh graders) consisted of more than 6,099 Lackawanna County students, including 750 students with disabilities who completed PSSA testing during the 2005-2006 school year. During 2006-2007 school year, 6,224 students were tested which included 877 students with disabilities. During 2007-2008 school year, 6,261 students were tested which included 862 students with disabilities. The most recent year's data was from the 2008-2009 school year, where 5,973 students took the PSSA, including 867 students with disabilities. Since 2005-2006, Lackawanna County experienced a decrease of 126 students taking the test but an increase of 117 students with disabilities.

## Report Methodology

This document is designed to summarize the performance and monitor the progress of Lackawanna County public schools writing PSSAs since the 2005-2006 school year. NCLB was enacted in 2002. In doing so, this SAR aims to identify Lackawanna County's strengths as well as areas that require timely improvement. It should be noted that the goal of this particular study is to evaluate the performance of students in fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades only. As such, statistics and comparisons reported herein are reflective of those grades only and not necessarily the entire population being tested.

PSSA scores, which serve as the foundation of the report, are found on the Pennsylvania Department of Education's website at <http://www.pde.state.pa.us>. PSSA results are organized by county and divided into the following proficiency ratings: advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic.

The total number of proficient scores is calculated by combining the number of PSSA test takers who scored advanced or proficient on the test's writing section. (Note: There are a few inconsistencies in data arrangement for earlier years in which PSSA scores were recorded. For example, student population figures were not recorded, and some state averages were missing. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has since organized recent PSSA data in a more consistent manner).

For clarification, those students requiring an Individualized Educational Program are classified as "IEP" students. This category includes any student with a disability who requires a service or accommodation in addition to the standard educational approach used for non-IEP students. Usually, the term IEP involves at least one of the following disabilities: autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, learning disability, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health-impairment, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury or visual impairment including blindness.

Economically disadvantaged students comprise another subcategory. This group includes those who are eligible for free or reduced fee lunch. Data on this subcategory is not available for each year since 2002, which introduces uncertainty in the subcategory's trend predictions.

Similarly, data for both African American and Hispanic students is sparse at best, with data lacking for most school districts. For schools with fewer than ten students in the subgroup, data is not reported.

## Introduction

The purpose of the School Assessment Report (SAR) is to provide educators, administrators, parents, business and industry, and civic leaders with information regarding student proficiencies in our public K-12 school system – the same system that trains our future workforce. Since local and regional economies are dependent upon the strength of the workforce, K-12 education is a strong economic development tool. To guarantee an adequate future workforce, within the next several years (through 2014), the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania must ensure that each child is proficient in reading and mathematics – a goal that coincides with the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) provisions. Moreover, parents, guardians and educators can mutually assist in student proficiency improvements if they take the necessary actions to help students learn and advance their basic writing skills.

The SAR measures and analyzes Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) statistics from 2006 to 2009, and reports on the efficiency and progress of Lackawanna County’s public education system. Fifth, eighth, and eleventh grade student proficiencies are evaluated across Lackawanna County and are compared with state and county averages. While the PSSA is broken down into four sections of proficiency – reading, writing, mathematics and science, this SAR examines the writing proficiency only.

## Education Reform Since 2000

The Federal government enactment for NCLB occurred in 2002. NCLB aims to ensure that American students are equipped with the necessary tools for future success.

NCLB attempts to:

- Gear school curriculum toward PSSA tests and essential skills needed to succeed in school and out.
- Use the latest technology to improve PSSA scores.
- Narrow proficiency gaps between students with disadvantages and those without.
- Strengthen standards for incoming teachers to improve education quality.
- Create competition among schools in their drive to succeed.

## Adequate Yearly Progression

NCLB requires student proficiency in mathematics, reading and writing by 2014. To meet the goal of achieving 100% proficiency, the Federal government has developed for each state Adequate Yearly Progression (AYP) goals.

AYP goals are measured by three indicators:

- **School Attendance (for schools without a high school graduating class):** Target of 90% or any improvement from previous year.
- **Achieving Proficiency (Performance):**  
To meet the performance target required for AYP, schools and every measurable subgroup in each school must have at least 56% tested students achieve a score of proficient or higher on the mathematics assessment and 63% of tested students achieve a score of proficient score or higher on the reading assessment.
- **Taking the Test (Participation):**  
At least 95% of students overall and within each measurable subgroup must take the PSSA.

AYP goals are intended to move schools toward full proficiency and make them more accountable to students, parents, teachers and the community. AYP measurements can positively affect schools that consistently miss their targets. The results allow schools and districts to evaluate their students' progress to make full proficiency a reality. It is hard to believe that today's seventh graders will be 11th graders by the year 2014 when full proficiency will be reached.

Pennsylvania's 2008 AYP goals were 56% of students scoring proficient or higher in mathematics, and 63% of students scoring proficient or higher in reading. For 2009, the mathematics AYP goal increases to 61%, while the reading AYP goal rises to 75%. Targets increase annually until 2014, when schools are required to reach 100% proficiency in both subjects.

If a school meets its AYP goals in all areas, it will not be identified as needing improvement. The school must apply strategic interventions to its special education program and providers. Such interventions include investments in curriculum and instruction. If a school fails to achieve its AYP goals within two years, NCLB sanctions will be implemented.

For a school to meet AYP, all AYP targets must be met. However the total number of targets used for AYP can vary. This occurs mainly because the targets associated with subgroups that have fewer than 40 students in the school do not apply. Therefore, schools with fewer than 40 students are still accountable and are evaluated when the scores have been completed and processed.

School district targets are assessed at three grade levels: fifth, eighth, and eleventh. To meet AYP goals in academic performance or test participation, the district must achieve all targets for both subjects in one grade span only. All school districts must meet both targets in school attendance and graduation in order to be considered.

NCLB legislation was to be re-authorized by the Federal government in 2008; however, the legislation was tabled for a number of reasons. The emergence of a Democratic administration suggests that NCLB may be repealed or re-written. A number of NCLB components must be revisited in order for the act to be truly effective.

Following are some specific NCLB criticisms/concerns:

- Students with disabilities who require Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are mandated by law to take the same standardized test as regular education students, and their scores are equally factored into a school's overall proficiency score. The fact that students with disabilities are required to take the same standardized test as regular education students contradicts earlier Federal mandates requiring students with IEPs to receive individualized educational instruction and assessment. In addition, their scores may unfairly skew a school's overall proficiency score.
- Students who are new to the English language (ELLs—English Language Learners, or LEP—Limited English Proficiency) are largely subject to the same standardized test as regular education students. The test is written and must be completed in English. These scores are also equally factored into a school's overall proficiency score. An exception to this involves students who are in their first year in the school district and have had limited or no exposure to the English language. In such instance, these students may be permitted to take a Spanish language version of the standardized mathematics test and their scores are not included in the district's overall AYP. The test's reading and writing portions are optional. While the reading and writing tests are in English, students are permitted to use word-to-word dictionaries that translate native language to English or English to native language. It should be noted, however, that certain restrictions apply on types of dictionaries allowed and their use. In addition, interpreters may also be used. Students may take Spanish test versions for the first three years of their enrollment in the U.S. school system.
- Schools in urban areas typically include higher percentages of IEP, ELL, or LEP, and economically disadvantaged students. Based on the overall proficiency scores for these schools, one may assume that these districts are not scoring as well as their suburban or rural counterparts (as suburban and rural schools' AYPs are not greatly negatively impacted by such factors).
- Subjectively, many professional educators believe that through NCLB's mandates, the science of teaching and learning has usurped the art of teaching and learning. Much of the creativity that a teacher might use in the classroom is overtaken by his or her need

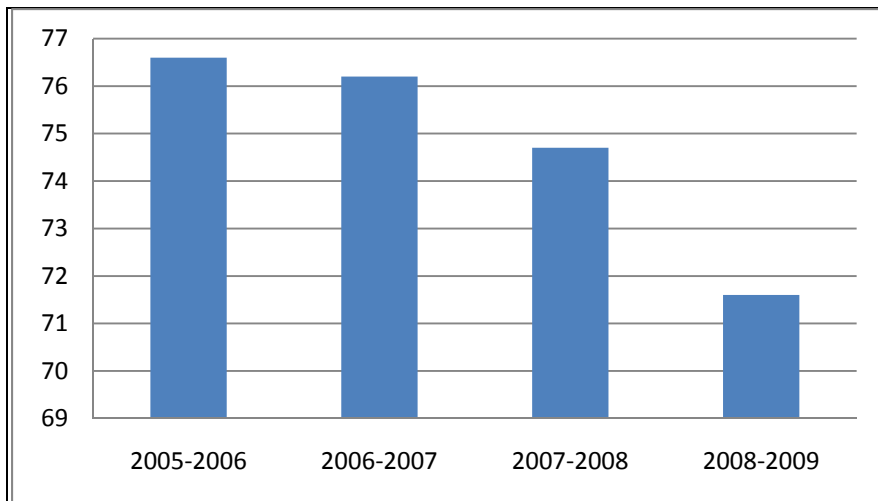
to conduct repeated practice exercises in order to train students to perform well on the standardized test. Essentially, teaching to the test stifles teachers' abilities to implement project-based learning, creative hands-on experiences, and critical thinking exercises. Is this federal or district mandated. Many argue that if teachers just teach the curriculum well, that the student learns and therefore does well on the test.?

### Proficiency Trends 2006-2009

In Lackawanna County, and statewide, since 2005-2006 students have displayed a decrease in writing proficiencies. Since 2005-2006, Lackawanna County's writing proficiencies have slowly declined, but have stayed consistently higher than state averages. Overall, each Lackawanna County school district has experienced some setbacks in the writing portion of the PSSA over the past four school years. The county's IEP students have also had some difficulties making improvements with the writing portion of the test. The county's economically disadvantaged students have had a steady decrease of between 2% and 4%. Hispanic and African-American students also demonstrated similar inconsistencies, scores varied from year to year mainly decreasing but with a positive spike in 2007 for both subgroups.

In the 2005-2006 school year, Lackawanna County students averaged a 76.6% writing proficiency score, compared with 60.8% statewide. By the 2006-2007 school year, Lackawanna County students achieved a 76.2% writing proficiency score, compared with 65.7% statewide. In 2007-2008 school year, the county's students achieved 74.7% writing proficiency score, compared with 64.1% statewide. In the 2008-2009 school year, the county's students achieved a 71.6% writing proficiency score, compared with 61.5% statewide.

Figure 1: Lackawanna County Writing Proficiency Results 2005-2009



Lackawanna County writing proficiency scores have fluctuated between 2005 and 2009, but have shown an overall decrease for the time period. In 2005, Lackawanna County fifth, eighth,

and eleventh grade students averaged a score of 76.6%. By 2009, this average score decreased to 71.6%.

## Proficiency Results by School District for 2008-2009

### Number of Students Tested

The table below shows the number of students tested in each school district in 2009.

**Table 1: Students Tested in Writing 2008-2009**

<b>Table 3: Number of Students Tested in Writing 2008-2009</b>			
<b>School District</b>	<b>5th Grade</b>	<b>8th Grade</b>	<b>11th Grade</b>
ABINGTON HEIGHTS SD	241	271	271
CARBONDALE AREA SD	95	118	111
DUNMORE SD	128	102	131
LAKELAND SD	115	118	107
MID VALLEY SD	134	135	120
NORTH POCONO SD	249	273	254
OLD FORGE SD	63	69	50
RIVERSIDE SD	109	111	102
SCRANTON SD	612	644	643
VALLEY VIEW SD	195	212	190
<b>Total by Grade:</b>	<b>1,941</b>	<b>2053</b>	<b>1979</b>
<b>County Total:</b>	<b>5,973</b>		

### Proficiency Changes 2005-2009

In terms of writing proficiency scores, there have been changes at each grade level between the 2005-2006 and 2008-2009 school years. In terms of changes between 2005-2006 and 2006-2007, the eighth grade students from Carbondale school district made remarkable strides with a 17.2% positive change in writing proficiency since the prior year. On the other hand, eleventh grade students from Old Forge SD showed the largest decrease within the year of 23%. The changes between the school years 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 showed decreases as well. The overall county average change for fifth graders was -5.2%. Fifth graders from the Mid Valley SD performed the worst bringing their writing proficiency down to 17.9% from 47.4% in the prior school year. Lakeland SD fifth graders performed very well this past year; they raised their writing proficiency score by 21.7% to 67.8%.

**Table 2: Lackawanna County Writing Proficiency 2005-2009**

School District	Grade 5					
	2005-2006	2006-2007	Change	2007-2008	2008-2009	Change
ABINGTON HEIGHTS SD	76.9	80.2	3.3	73.6	78.4	4.8
CARBONDALE AREA SD	42.0	34.3	-7.7	34.3	20.0	-14.3
DUNMORE SD	64.7	66.9	2.2	68.5	56.3	-12.2
LAKELAND SD	66.0	53.7	-12.3	46.1	67.8	21.7
MID VALLEY SD	34.7	38.8	4.1	47.4	17.9	-29.5
NORTH POCONO SD	57.6	68.8	11.2	63.1	78.7	15.6
OLD FORGE SD	59.3	56.9	-2.4	28.3	15.9	-12.4
RIVERSIDE SD	84.1	79.0	-5.1	80.9	71.6	-9.3
SCRANTON SD	43.4	39.4	-4.0	41.0	31.2	-9.8
VALLEY VIEW SD	52.5	39.4	-13.1	49.5	43.0	-6.5
<b>County Average</b>	<b>58.1</b>	<b>55.7</b>	<b>-2.4</b>	<b>53.3</b>	<b>48.1</b>	<b>-5.2</b>

School District	Grade 8					
	2005-2006	2006-2007	Change	2007-2008	2008-2009	Change
ABINGTON HEIGHTS SD	92.6	97.5	4.9	95.7	91.8	-3.9
CARBONDALE AREA SD	61.6	78.8	17.2	77.8	65.3	-12.5
DUNMORE SD	95.1	95.7	0.6	86.1	95.1	9.0
LAKELAND SD	95.0	96.1	1.1	91.9	72.0	-19.9
MID VALLEY SD	69.2	85.3	16.1	77.0	79.3	2.3
NORTH POCONO SD	81.8	81.2	-0.6	85.7	85.0	-0.7
OLD FORGE SD	80.0	67.7	-12.3	75.0	71.0	-4.0
RIVERSIDE SD	66.1	73.0	6.9	72.3	64.0	-8.3
SCRANTON SD	76.1	84.2	8.1	78.7	80.3	1.6
VALLEY VIEW SD	67.4	68.0	0.6	70.6	89.6	19.0
<b>County Average</b>	<b>78.5</b>	<b>82.8</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>81.1</b>	<b>79.3</b>	<b>-1.7</b>

School District	Grade 11					
	2005-2006	2006-2007	Change	2007-2008	2008-2009	Change
ABINGTON HEIGHTS SD	94.7	93.6	-1.1	95.3	97.8	2.5
CARBONDALE AREA SD	82.5	88.7	6.2	88	90.1	2.1
DUNMORE SD	93.2	95.4	2.2	91.4	91.6	0.2
LAKELAND SD	96.8	89.6	-7.2	93.2	91.6	-1.6
MID VALLEY SD	93.4	88.4	-5.0	81.5	90	8.5
NORTH POCONO SD	96.5	95.2	-1.3	92.1	85.1	-7
OLD FORGE SD	92.0	69	-23.0	77.4	64	-13.4
RIVERSIDE SD	96.6	89.9	-6.7	91.8	87.3	-4.5
SCRANTON SD	93.7	94.9	1.2	91.9	90.5	-1.4
VALLEY VIEW SD	91.5	94.9	3.4	94.7	84.7	-10
<b>County Average</b>	<b>93.1</b>	<b>89.96</b>	<b>-3.1</b>	<b>89.73</b>	<b>87.27</b>	<b>-2.46</b>

### Progression of Proficiency Results by School District for 2008-2009

This SAR reports the progress of certain distinct Lackawanna County classes, the 2005-2006 fifth grade class – and their scores as eighth graders in the 2008-2009 school year. Overall, this class increased their writing scores in eighth grade; going from 58.1% to 79.3%. Mid Valley Area and Valley View Area demonstrated the largest increases with 44.6% and 37.1% respectively. The four years of data does not allow us to analyze this class as eleventh graders yet.

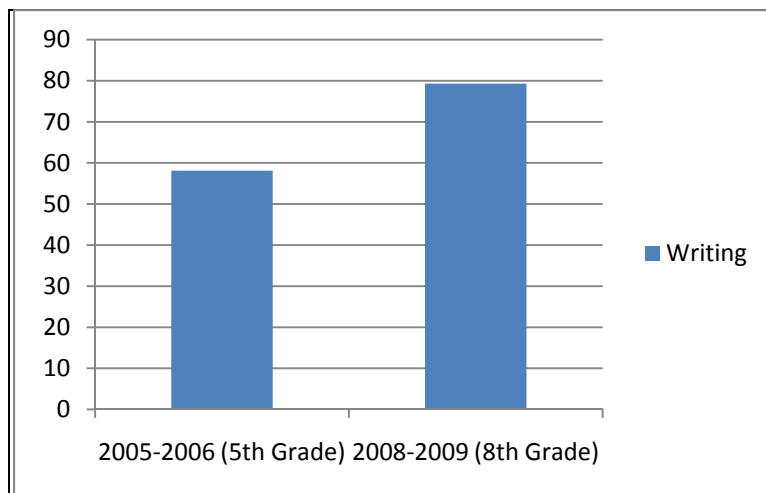
**Table 3: Progression of PSSA Writing Performance 2005-2009**

Table 2: Progression of PSSA Writing Performance 2005-2009			
School District	2005-2006	2008-2009	Change 5th-8th
	Grade 5	Grade 8	
ABINGTON HEIGHTS SD	76.9	91.8	14.9
CARBONDALE AREA SD	42.0	65.3	23.3
DUNMORE SD	64.7	95.1	30.4
LAKELAND SD	66.0	72.0	6.0
MID VALLEY SD	34.7	79.3	44.6

NORTH POCONO SD	57.6	85.0	27.4
OLD FORGE SD	59.3	71.0	11.7
RIVERSIDE SD	84.1	64.0	-20.1
SCRANTON SD	43.4	80.3	36.9
VALLEY VIEW SD	52.5	89.6	37.1
<b>County Average</b>	<b>58.1</b>	<b>79.3</b>	<b>21.2</b>

The figure below demonstrates the county average writing scores for this class in fifth and eighth grades.

**Figure 2: County-wide Progression of PSSA Writing Performance 2005-2009**



### Proficiency in Subgroups

The tables below show the number of students in each subgroup tested in 2009.

**Table 4: Number of Students Tested in Writing by Subgroup**

Subgroup	Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 11
IEP	340	303	224
Economically Disadvantaged	780	713	514
Black	92	57	41
Hispanic	122	95	63
Asian	24	21	23
Multi-Ethnic	11	25	0

## Students with Disabilities

For the purposes of this report, a student with a disability is defined as any student that requires the use of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to meet his/her educational goals. In Lackawanna County, 867 fifth, eighth and eleventh grade students with disabilities took the writing portion of the PSSA during the 2008-2009 school year. Students with disabilities demonstrated a steady decline in their writing scores in the past four years. Their score in the 2005-2006 school years 44.6% and the most recent school year they reported a score of 38.2%. It should be noted that although the scores of students with disabilities are often reported separately from the aggregated data, their scores are factored equally into each school district's proficiency total and AYP goals.

When compared with their peers in Lackawanna County, students with disabilities performed at a lower level in all grade levels in writing. This is particularly evident in the eighth and eleventh grades, when writing proficiency scores are generally lower than those in the fifth grader scores. Obviously there are times when students with disabilities have a harder time succeeding their educational purposes and many things then occur, including:

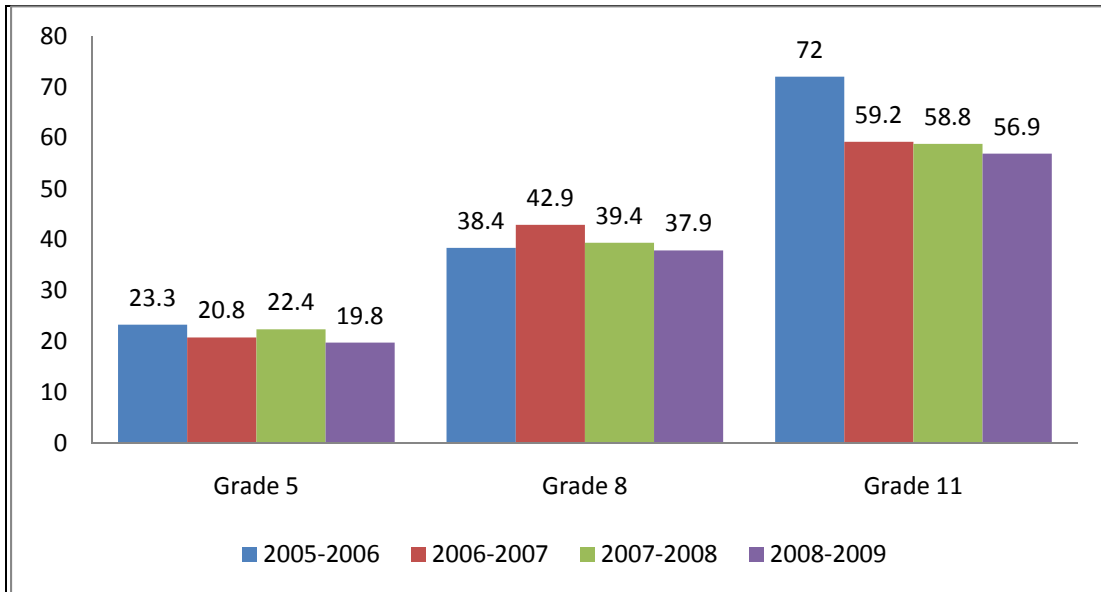
- Modifications to the content of the program
- Lowered success criteria for academic success
- Increased emphasis on daily living skills and decrease on educational assignments
- Alternative state assessments, such as off-grade level assessments

## Specially Designed Instruction

Specially designed instruction affects the instructional content, method of instructional delivery, and the performance methods and criteria that are necessary to assist the student make meaningful educational progress. This instruction is designed by or with an appropriately credentialed special education teacher or related service provider. For some students, teachers may need to present information through the use of a manipulative. For other students, teachers may need to select and teach only important key concepts and then alter evaluation activities and criteria to match this content change.

IEP students scored lower than all students as a whole in all school years examined except 2008-2009 school year where the African-American subgroup scored 16.5% which was less than the IEP score of 19.8%. The trends, however; are the same with fifth grade scores being the lowest and eleventh grade scores being the highest. For writing, IEP students scored lower in 2009 in all grades examined.

**Figure 3: IEP Student Writing Proficiency**



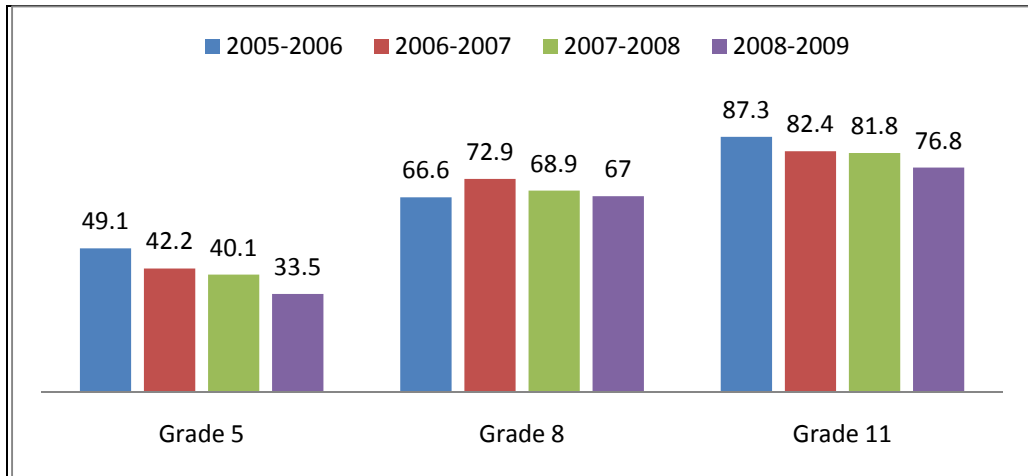
## Economically Disadvantaged

Economically disadvantaged students constitute another subgroup whose performance is monitored and analyzed via PSSA testing. The Pennsylvania Department of Education categorizes a student as “economically disadvantaged” based on his or her participation in the public school system’s free or reduced fee lunch program. Traditionally, students who are raised in low-income environments tend to perform at a significantly lower level than peers from a higher socioeconomic background.

In Lackawanna County, 2,007 fifth, eighth and eleventh grade students classified as economically disadvantaged took the writing portion of the PSSA during the 2008 -2009 school year. The state average for this subgroup is 51.2%.; overall this subgroup has not achieved the lowest scores. The average writing proficiency score for Lackawanna County during the 2008-2009 school year was 59.1%.

Students that fall into the economically disadvantaged population trended similar to all students as a whole. Scores remained somewhat consistent in each grade but normally on the lower side of the average with fifth and eleventh graders showing slight decreases over the four school years and eighth graders experiencing a minor gain.

**Figure 4: Economically Disadvantaged Student Writing Proficiency**



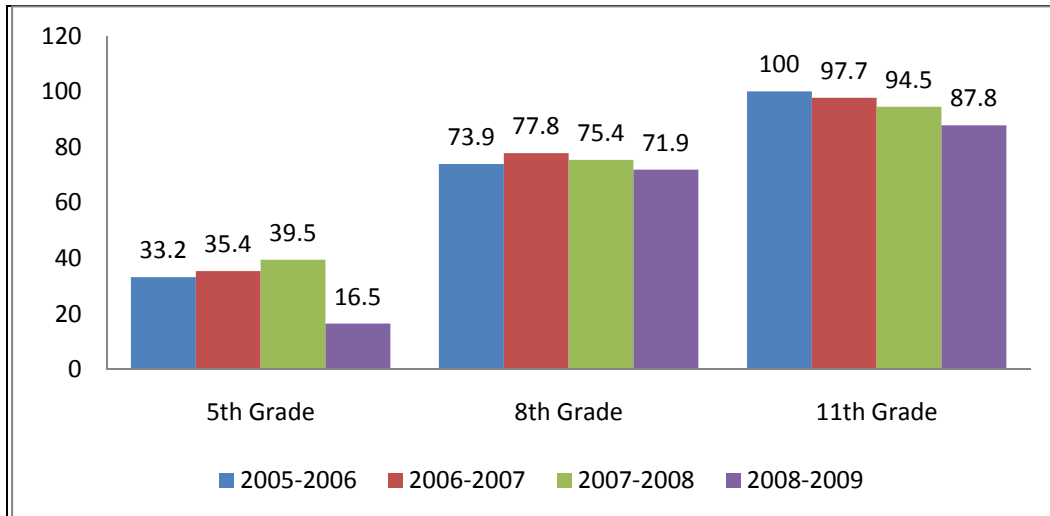
### African-American Students

African-American students comprise another subgroup also monitored by PSSA testing, as dictated by NCLB. Just 190 African-American students in Lackawanna County were tested in the writing section of the PSSA during the 2008-2009 school year. It should be noted that only two districts (Mid Valley and Scranton) included schools with African-American populations large enough to be scored and independently reported (population greater than 10). Furthermore, given the little data available both in this testing year and in prior years the overall analysis may vary depending on each district.

African-American students achieved proficiency ratings of 58.7% in writing. Lackawanna County’s African-American eighth and eleventh grade students performed well with similar results to other subgroups. However, the fifth graders performed poorly and received the lowest score during the 2008-2009 school year. African-American students are competitive with their non-African-American peers at some grade levels and subjects (i.e., eighth grade math), however the majority of grade levels show vast performance discrepancies, in some cases by as much as 40%.

African American students scored lower than the average of all students as fifth and eighth graders in all four school years from 2005-2009. The trends show the fifth grade scores being significantly lower than the average of all students and the eighth graders scores being slightly below average. The eleventh graders performed exceptionally well in all school years examined with scores higher than average each year. Overall, there has been a decline in writing proficiency scores over the past four school years in all three grades. From 2008 and 2009 school years, the decline in scores for 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders has been 23%, 3.5% and 6.7% respectively.

**Figure 5: African American Writing Proficiency 2005-2009**



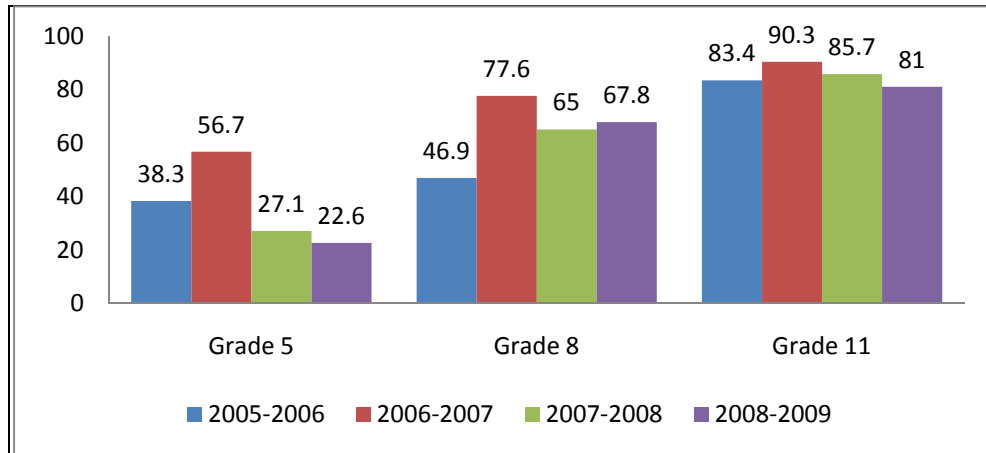
## Hispanic Students

In Lackawanna County, 280 Hispanic students took the writing portion of the PSSA during the 2008-2009 school year. This group of testers earned a writing proficiency score of 57%. Not all students at all grade levels in each district are included in PSSA results, as grades with fewer than ten students in a particular subgroup are not measured. Like the African-American subgroup population, only four districts had Hispanic populations large enough to be scored and independently reported (Mid Valley, Scranton, Riverside and North Pocono). Again, the generalizations and analysis that follow should be tempered with caution given the little data available both in these four testing years and in prior years.

As the data suggests, Hispanic students in fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades are having a difficult time competing with peers in writing, with total proficiency scores trailing by more than 25% at some grade levels. Hispanics were below the average of all students in 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades during all four school years that were examined except in 2006-2007 where the fifth and eleventh graders were slightly above the average by no more than 1%.

Hispanic students did not show any obvious trends among the three grades besides increasing their scores significantly during the 2006-2007 school year. However, the fifth grade scores have decreased by a lot since the spike in 2006. Hispanic students performed lower overall in writing when compared to all students tested.

**Figure 6: Hispanic Writing Proficiency 2005-2009**



## Conclusion

Overall, Lackawanna County’s public education system has shown improvements since the 2002 inception of NCLB. Five of ten school districts experienced declines in fifth grade writing scores in all four school years from 2005-2009. In the transition from fifth to eighth grade (2005-2008), students experienced a 21.2% increase in writing proficiency scores. Unfortunately, the data for these same students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade is not yet available. None of Lackawanna County’s school districts reported a 100% proficiency rating at any grade level in writing during 2006, 2007, 2008 or 2009 – as students largely vary by academic proficiency level and subgroup. There are many reasons for a decline in performance, which must be considered in order to make improvements. Such issues may require adjusting the current curriculum, remediating students and tracking their progress. More teachers, classroom aides, and tutors could be considered to guide students toward academic success. Also, smaller class sizes, homogeneous class structures, and other teaching methods could be employed depending on a school’s specific issues.

Achieving or exceeding state targets should be the primary goal, since Pennsylvania’s average proficiencies in the 2008-2009 school year reached only 61.5% for writing, compared with 64.1% in the 2007-2008 school year, 65.7% in 2006-2007 and 60.8% in 2005-2006 school year. While goal percentages increase annually to reach NCLB’s end proficiency goal of 100% by 2014, school districts must continually aim to exceed state targets and show consistent improvements each year. Moreover, if school districts fail to meet target levels, they are subject to penalties and sanctions, or may be mandated to develop improvement plans, provide tutoring or be taken over by the state.

Proficiency examinations in other subjects have recently been added (science and social studies) and may continue to be added over time. Therefore, schools that have reduced instruction time in those subjects to focus on mathematics, reading, and writing PSSAs may be doing themselves a disservice. It is critical for school districts to determine best practices to ensure proficiencies in all subjects are met, while avoiding teaching to the test.

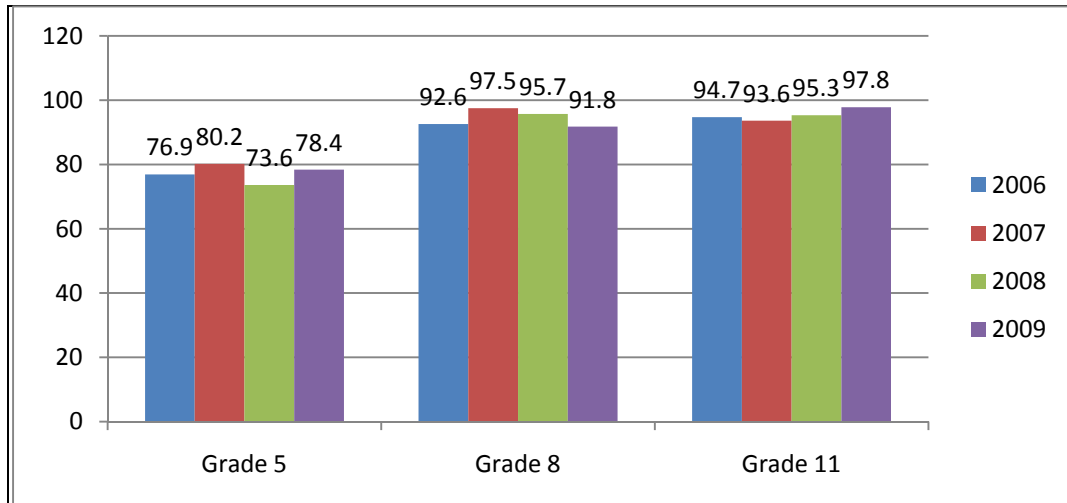
The education triad (administrators, teachers, and parents) must form a more effective collaborative effort to ensure that real learning is taking place. It is especially critical for parents and families to stress to their children the importance of education. Studies show that students with encouraging parents/families have a higher chance of succeeding in their academic progress than those from families who do not support their educational advancement. For Pennsylvania, emphasis on improving higher education attainment and other continuing education is critical. The economic development success of any region is dependent upon the quality of its workforce. That quality training begins in elementary school. Specifically, the best economic development strategy is one that maximizes the potential of Pre-K – 20 education.

## **Appendix: Lackawanna County School Proficiency Scores**

### **Abington Heights School District**

Abington Heights School District's writing scores remained relatively consistent between 2006 and 2009. Only eleventh grade students saw a consistent increase specifically since 2007 and gaining 4.2%. Both fifth and eighth grades showed increases and decreases during the four school years.

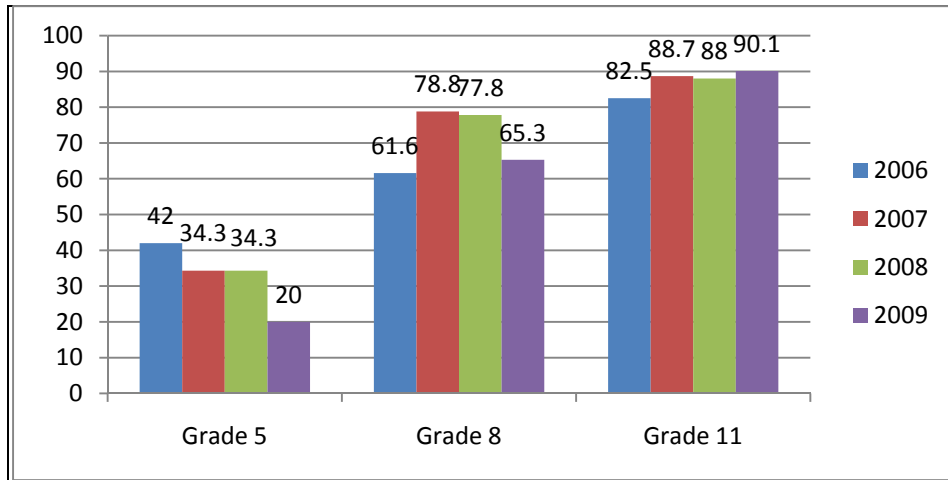
**Figure 7: Abington Heights SD: Writing Proficiency 2006-2009**



### Carbondale Area School District

The Carbondale Area School District’s writing proficiency scores were below the county’s average for all grades and years examined except the eleventh grade score of 90.1% in the 2008-2009 school year which was 2.83% higher than the county average. Fifth graders performed poorly; their scores were below average and decreased each year. Eighth graders performed exceptionally well during 2007 and 2008 school years; however, their scores decreased by more than 10% during the recent 2008-2009 school year.

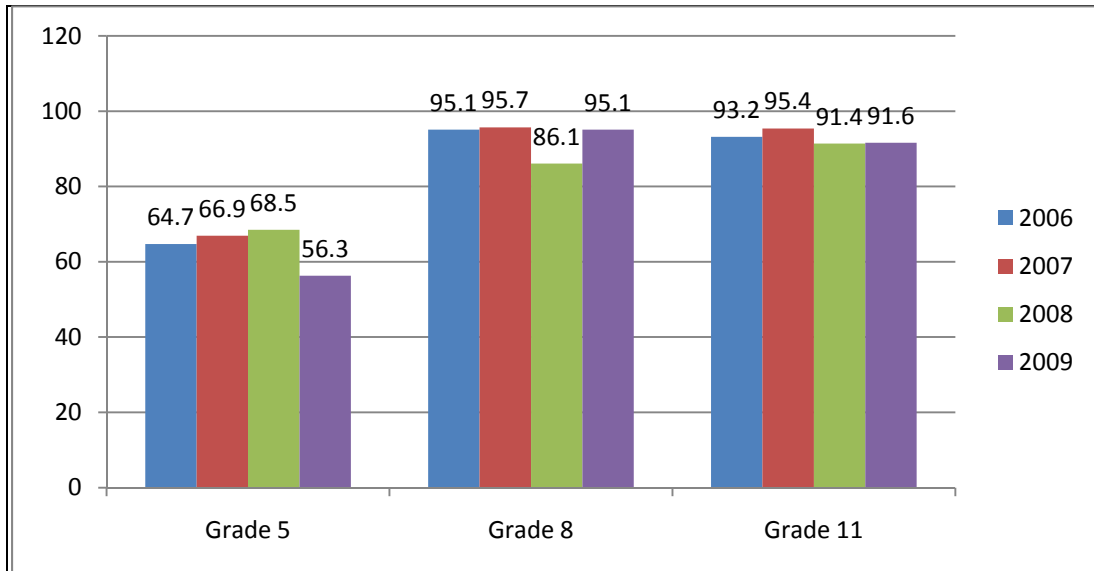
**Figure 8: Carbondale Area SD: Writing Proficiency 2006-2009**



### **Dunmore School District**

Students in the Dunmore School District performed exceptionally well in the past four school years. All three grade levels examined achieved scores higher than the county averages from 2006 through 2009. While fifth grade scores decreased, the district's eighth graders remained consistent except for a 10% drop in 2008 that was quickly recovered the following year with a 95.1% proficiency score. Eleventh graders also remained very consistent with their scores besides a slight decrease of 3.8% from 2007 to 2008.

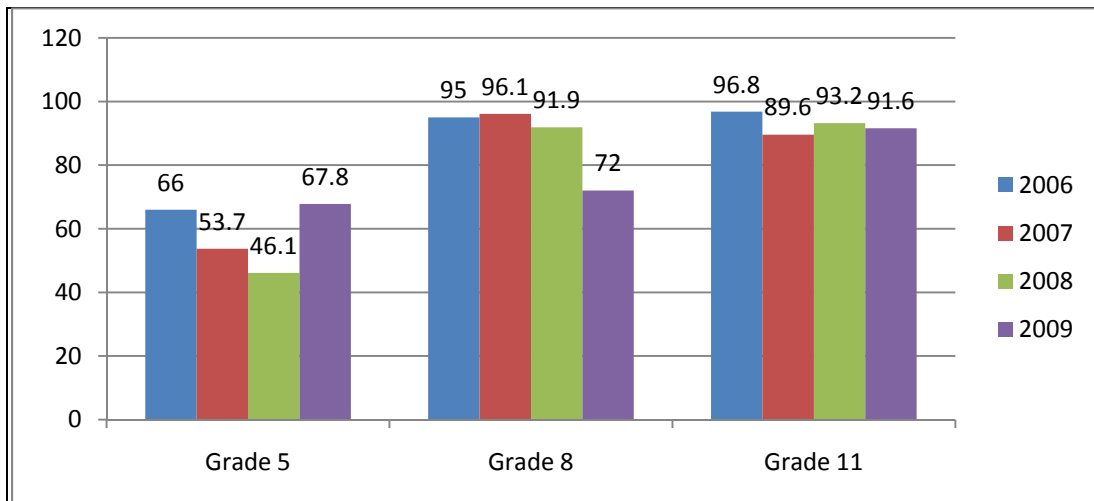
**Figure 9: Dunmore SD: Writing Proficiency 2006-2009**



### Lakeland School District

The writing proficiency scores for Lakeland School District varied by grade. The trend of fifth grade scores was decreasing for three consecutive years; however, during the 2008-2009 school year their scores increased significantly by more than 20%. On the other hand, eighth grade scores were consistent for three consecutive years and then dropped 19.9% in 2009. Eleventh graders scored the highest in the county in 2006 and then continued to perform exceptionally well above county averages.

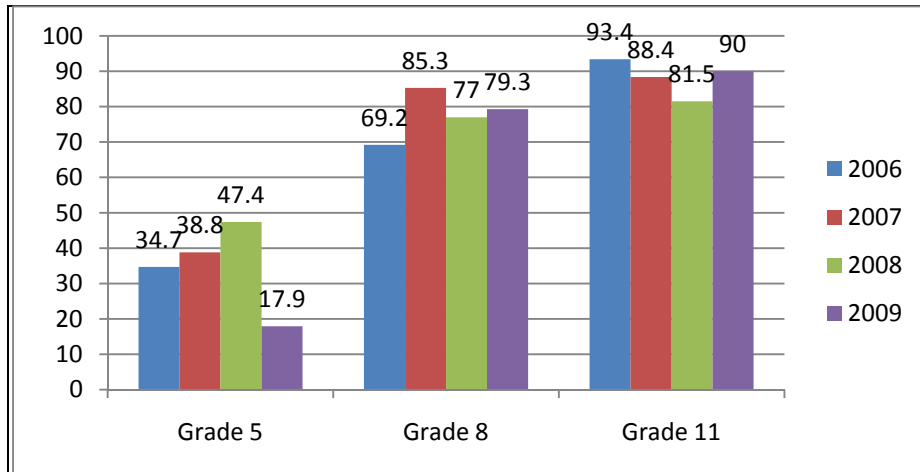
**Figure 10: Lakeland SD: Writing Proficiency 2006-2009**



### Mid Valley School District

Students in the Mid Valley School District performed poorly on the writing portion of the PSSA test. Their scores were below county averages in the past four school years for 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders. Eighth graders in 2007 and eleventh graders in 2009 were the only ones to score above the county averages by no more than 3%. The fifth graders are having the most difficulty with the writing portion of the PSSA; they scored the lowest in the county during the 2008-2009 school year.

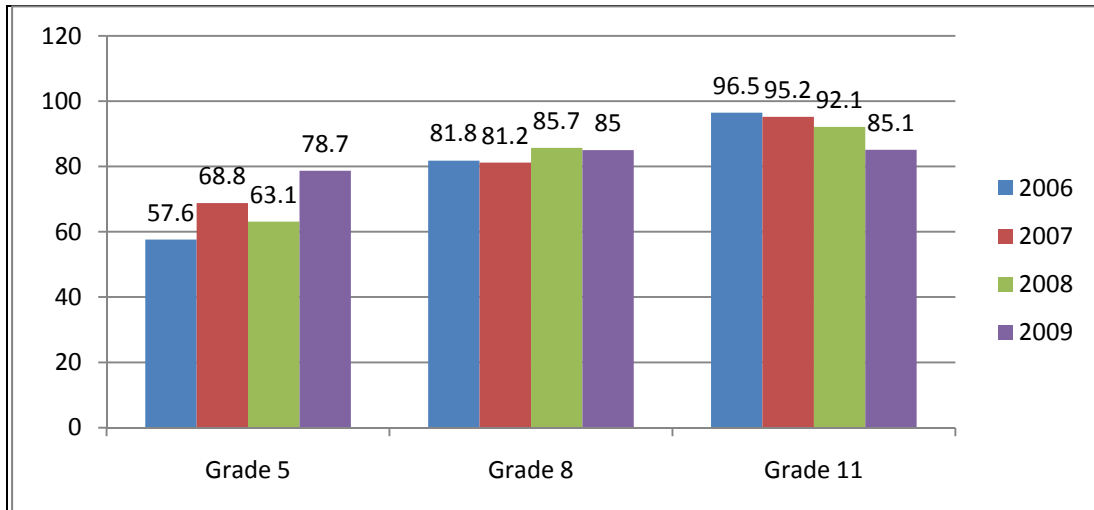
**Figure 11: Mid Valley SD: Writing Proficiency 2006-2009**



### North Pocono School District

Fifth and eighth grade students in the North Pocono School District did rather well in terms of their writing proficiency scores. Since 2006, they have each achieved positive increases of 21.1% and 4% respectively. Although the eleventh graders' score decreased each year and overall it declined 11.4% during the four years, they still achieved scores higher than the county averages.

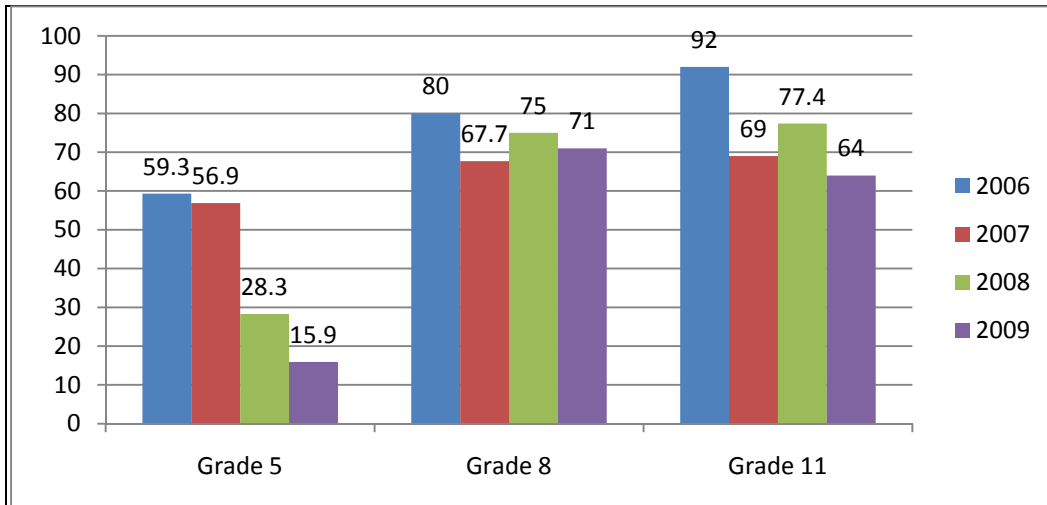
**Figure 12: North Pocono SD: Writing Proficiency 2006-2009**



### Old Forge School District

The Old Forge School District's writing proficiency scores were below the county's average for all grades and years examined except for fifth and eighth grade scores in 2006 and fifth grade scores in 2007. There was a decrease in scores for fifth, eighth, and eleventh graders from the 2006 writing proficiency scores to 2009 of 43.7%, 9% and 28% respectively.

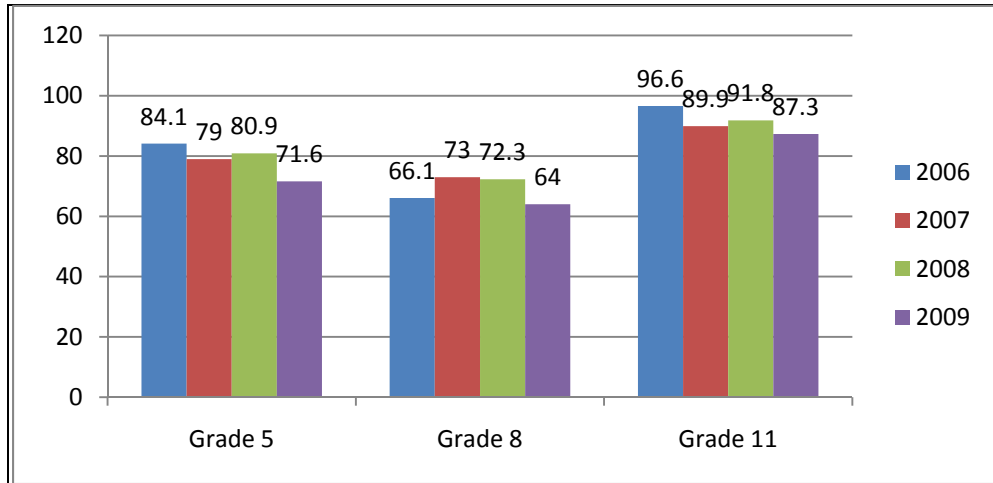
**Figure 13: Old Forge SD: Writing Proficiency 2006-2009**



### Riverside School District

The Riverside School District’s writing proficiency scores varied with each grade that was analyzed. Fifth graders performed well by achieving scores higher than the county averages every year; however, in the past school year their scores declined by 9.3%. Eighth graders performed poorly with scores below Lackawanna County’s average from 2006 through 2009. Eleventh grade scores did not vary much but overall, fifth, eighth and eleventh grade scores have decreased since 2006.

**Figure 14: Riverside SD: Writing Proficiency 2006-2009**

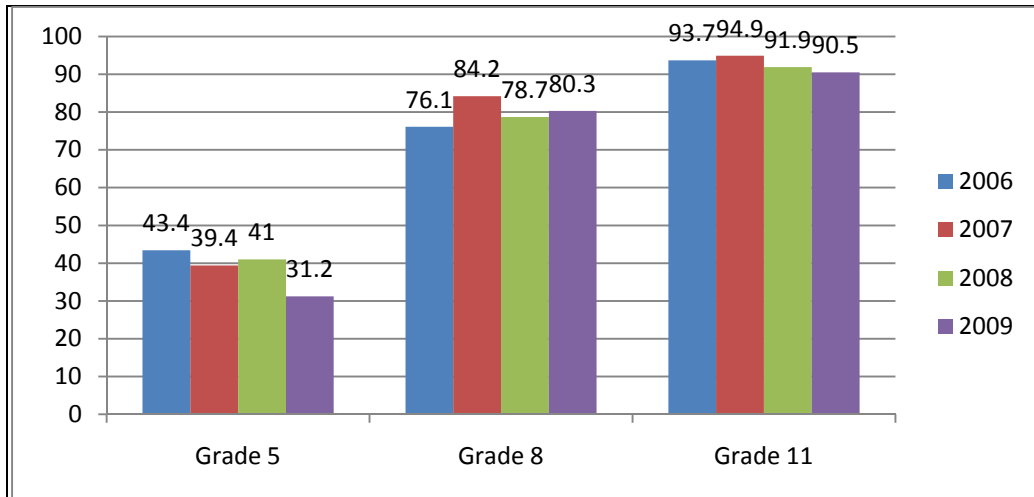


### **Scranton School District**

The Scranton School District's writing proficiency scores varied by grade with low fifth grade scores, eighth grade scores around county averages, and consistent high eleventh grade scores. With the fifth grade scores all below the Lackawanna County averages and still declining, action needs to be taken in order for these students to receive the attention that is required for them

to reach state testing standards. In four years, eleventh grade scores were consistent with at least 90% proficiency and only a -.2% change from 2006 to 2009.

**Figure 15: Scranton SD: Writing Proficiency 2006-2009**

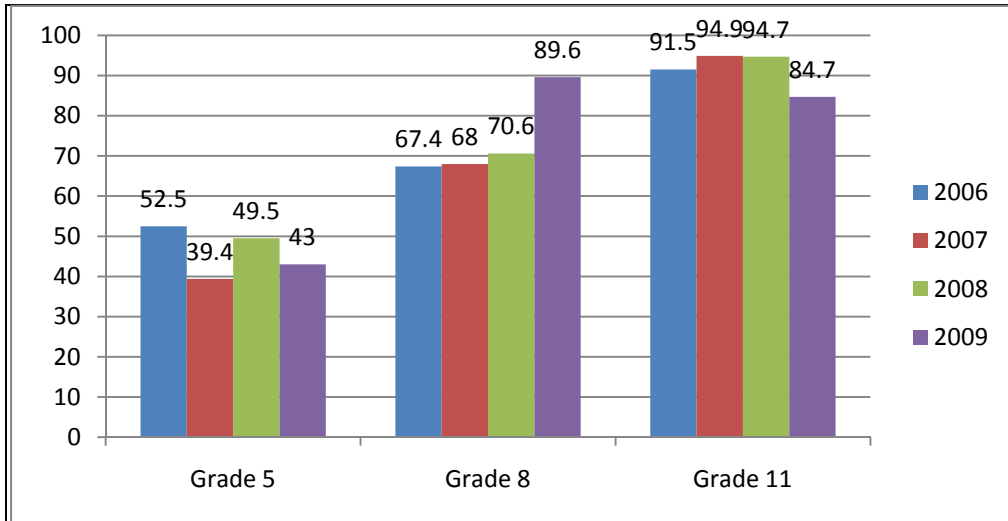


### Valley View School District

The Valley View District's writing proficiency scores are mainly below Lackawanna County averages except for eighth graders in 2009 and the eleventh graders in both 2007 and 2008. Fifth graders have had increases and decreases every other year for the past four school years

and have remained below the state and county averages of 61.5% and 48.1% respectively in the most recent 2008-2009 school year. The eighth graders have been increasing their scores since 2006 and performed exceptionally well in the past 2008-2009 school year where their scores increased by 19%. Eleventh graders achieved high writing proficiency scores from 2006-2008; however, during the most recent school year their scores declined by 10% down to 84.7%.

**Figure 16: Valley View SD: Writing Proficiency 2006-2009**



## References

"2008-2009 PSSA and AYP Results." *Pennsylvania Department of Education*. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2010. Web. 12 Apr 2010.  
<[http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/school\\_assessments/7442](http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/school_assessments/7442)>.