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## THE WRITING REPORT CARD: REPORT ON NAEP

**Speakers:** Ina Mullis, NAEP, Educational Testing Service  
Kent Ashworth, NAEP, Educational Testing Service

**Introducer/Recorder:** Karen Greenberg, National Testing Network in Writing

NAEP--the National Assessment of Educational Progress--is an assessment of the writing achievement of representative samples of 55,000 fourth, eighth, and eleventh grade students in private and public schools across America. Ina Mullis, the Deputy Director of NAEP, began the session by discussing the 1984 assessment. In 1984, NAEP assessed informative, persuasive, and imaginative writing performance by asking students to respond to four writing tasks (out of fifteen different tasks). Students' success was evaluated in terms of the specific goal of each writing assignment, and papers were rated "elaborated," "adequate," "minimal," or "unsatisfactory." Specific definitions of these ratings were developed for each task, and experienced writing teachers were trained on sample responses.

Mullis noted that most students in the 1984 sample, majority and minority alike, were unable to write adequately except in response to the simplest of tasks. Writing performance improved from grade 4 to grade 8 (and less dramatically from grades 8 to 11); even in eleventh grade, fewer than one-fourth of the students sampled performed the writing tasks adequately. Students at all three grade levels had difficulty with the persuasive and analytical writing tasks; and most had difficulty providing evidence for their points of view. They had less difficulty with writing tasks requiring short responses based on personal experiences and with writing stories. Writing performance was higher for White and Asian-American students than for Black and Hispanic students, for females than for males, for advantaged students than for disadvantaged students.

In addition, Mullis stated that the 1984 results indicated that home environment is related to writing achievement: students with more writing materials in their homes and students whose parents have a post-high school education had higher writing achievement. Results also showed that students' positive attitudes toward writing deteriorate steadily across the grades, and that students report that their teachers are more likely to mark mistakes than to show an interest in what they write or to make suggestions for the next paper.

Kent Ashworth then explained graphs showing specific findings about writing performance across selected subgroups. He also discussed graphs depicting the effects of home influence on writing achievement. At all three grade levels, there was a consistent relationship between television viewing and writing achievement: increased viewing was related to decreased writing achievement. Next, Ashworth described some of the findings about students' values and attitudes toward writing and about their ability to manage the writing process.

Mullis ended the session with the comment that a major conclusion to draw from the 1984 assessment is that students at all grade levels are deficient in higher-order thinking skills--they had difficulty organizing their thoughts coherently, analyzing information, and supporting a point of view. She noted that instruction in the writing process must focus on teaching students how to think more effectively as they write. She then concluded by handing out the report on the 1984 assessment, *The Writing Report Card* (available from the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey).◇