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*Engage. Inspire. Prepare.*

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## 2020-2021 Georgia Milestones Assessment: Low Participation, Strong PCSD Performance

Recently released results from the 2020-2021 Georgia Milestones Assessment show the percentage of Paulding County students scoring at levels 2, 3, and 4 topped the percentage of students scoring at the same levels statewide in all 24 subject areas. At the highest two levels Proficient or Advanced (3 & 4), PCSD students topped the state in 23 of 24 subject areas.

These results, however, come with an important disclaimer: due to the pandemic, participation rates for the assessment were down significantly across the state in 2021. Out of concern for the safety of virtual students having to take the tests in person at schools this spring, the state Department of Education asked that the 2021 Milestones be cancelled (as had happened in 2020), but that request was denied at the federal level. Therefore, the state DOE issued a statement instructing school districts not to require virtual students to come to schools solely for the purpose of taking the Milestones tests. The DOE also lowered the End of Course weighting for the tests to an almost insignificant .01 percent of high school students' final grades and asked districts to remove promotion and retention accountability for elementary and middle school End of Grade assessments. While the tests were administered to in-person students, participation was down substantially for virtual students and there was little performance incentive for high school students as the tests had almost no impact on their final grade.

In its own press release, the state DOE stated:

While tests were administered in 2020-2021, there is an urgent need to share scores with our communities **in the proper context** – ensuring they understand that the validity of the scores depends on them being interpreted in the context of pandemic schooling. Georgia Milestones was designed to measure the performance of students in a traditional educational environment, and the 2020-2021 school year was anything but. Rolling quarantines, rising case counts, and shifting instructional models were beyond the control of teachers and students. Districts, the news media, and other stakeholders should exercise caution in making year-to-year comparisons using the state-level data, due to changes in students' learning environments and differences in participation. In general, year-to-year comparisons should not be made using school- and district-level data.

While individual student scores may be valid, comparing the Paulding County School District's 2021 Georgia Milestones results to prior years is not valid for the reasons cited above. Additionally, comparing the Paulding County School District's 2021 results to Georgia's 2021 results may raise validity questions as well because of the



participation decline. In a normal year, approximately 99 percent of students in Paulding County and in Georgia take the tests, whereas this year the participation percentages were far lower. What the results do show is that *for the percentage of students who took the tests*, Paulding County students excelled in comparison to their peers statewide.

“While these GMA results may not provide a valid comparison to previous years, what they do show is the incredible amount of work our teachers, administrators, school staff, parents, and entire school community put in to ensure that education continued in Paulding County during the pandemic,” said Interim Superintendent Steve Barnette. “These scores reflect well on our students at every grade level and in every subject area, and we will use them as one data point in a wide range of assessments that are helping our academic focus.”

Since the start of the 2021-2022 school year, schools have conducted more than 20,000 Reading Inventory assessments to gauge where students currently stand. Literacy remains a primary emphasis at all PCSD schools through the district-wide Literacy by Design initiative, and the focus continues to show positive results as evidenced by the Milestones Reading At/Above Grade Level scores where PCSD students significantly outperformed the state.

Following is a testing brief that summarizes the 2020-2021 Georgia Milestones Assessment results:

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### **Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade/End-of-Course Assessments Testing Brief for 2020-2021**

The Georgia Milestones Assessment System is a comprehensive assessment program spanning grades 3 through high school. It is designed to provide information about how well students are mastering the state-adopted content standards in the core content areas of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Elementary students and Middle School students take End-of-Grade (EOG) assessments and high school students take End-of-Course (EOC) assessments.

The Georgia Milestone Assessments were not administered in 2019-2020 due to the COVID19 pandemic. Administration of the Georgia Milestone Assessments resumed in 2020-2021, but the participation rate for both the Paulding County School District and the State of Georgia was greatly impacted by the pandemic. In a typical year the participation rate for the Georgia Milestone Assessments is 99%+ for both the state and the school district.

This impact necessitates caution and context when interpreting individual or summary scores: many students received virtual instruction following interruptions and closures; opportunity to learn has been variably reduced due to health and safety measures in the past year; the contribution of EOC scores to final course grades has been reduced in weight; and fewer students participated in this administration as compared to prior years.

High School EOC Milestone assessments typically serve as the final exam for the course and count as 20 percent of a student's final grade. For the 2020-2021 school year, the grade weight was reduced to 0.01 percent due to the COVID19 pandemic. The State Board of Education has designated American Literature and Composition, Algebra I, Biology, and United States History as EOC courses. Middle school students who are enrolled in one or more of these courses also take the End-of-Course assessment. Grade 8 students (only) enrolled in Physical Science took the EOC in lieu of the Grade 8 EOG.

2020-2021 Georgia Milestones Assessment data for both the Paulding County School District and the state of Georgia can be found on the next page.



HIGH SCHOOL FY21 GMA End of Course Data %								
	PCSD				STATE			
	Participation	Levels 2,3,4	Levels 3&4	Reading at/above Grade Level	Participation	Levels 2,3,4	Levels 3&4	Reading at/above Grade Level
Am. Lit.	76	70.8	31.6	62.8	58	64.9	29.8	57.6
Algebra I	74	67.8	28.1	NA	60	61.4	30.2	NA
Biology	76	70.1	40.8	NA	59	66.8	40.7	NA
US History	66	81	43.2	NA	55	65.2	29.8	NA
*Phy Sci	70	73.1	95.8	NA	62	74.9	52.8	NA
*Physical Science scores reflect all 8th grade participation								
GRADES 3-8 FY21 GMA End of Grade Data %								
	PCSD				STATE			
ELA								
Grade	Participation	Levels 2,3,4	Levels 3&4	Reading at/above Grade Level	Participation	Levels 2,3,4	Levels 3&4	Reading at/above Grade Level
3	86	71.5	41.8	68.7	79	62.2	36.1	61.6
4	86	76.1	40	64.7	78	68.5	36.7	58.7
5	84	79.2	39.4	73.6	77	73.2	39.4	68.1
6	80	79.7	49.6	68.8	69	68.7	41.9	58.3
7	75	78.9	43.8	74.7	65	69.9	39.3	66.6
8	63	82.7	48.6	77.3	61	74.9	41.4	67.8
MATH								
Grade	Participation	Levels 2,3,4	Levels 3&4		Participation	Levels 2,3,4	Levels 3&4	
3	86	83.7	45.4	NA	79	75.8	38.4	NA
4	86	82.3	53.1	NA	78	74.9	43.0	NA
5	83	75.7	38.5	NA	76	67.5	34.7	NA
6	79	80	34.9	NA	69	69.3	30.4	NA
7	75	82.5	42.5	NA	65	74.3	36.3	NA
8	59	74	35.6	NA	59	66.9	31.8	NA
SCIENCE								
Grade	Participation	Levels 2,3,4	Levels 3&4		Participation	Levels 2,3,4	Levels 3&4	
3	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
4	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
5	83	69.1	35.5	NA	76	65.2	38.5	NA
6	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
8	61	63.7	29.9	NA	60	54.2	27.2	NA
SOCIAL STUDIES								
Grade	Participation	Levels 2,3,4	Levels 3&4		Participation	Levels 2,3,4	Levels 3&4	
8	59	84.7	50.1	NA	60	73.6	34.7	NA