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# An Analysis of the Effectiveness of Uninterrupted Time on High Stakes Writing Assessments

Chuck Story

*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

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An Analysis of the Effectiveness of  
Uninterrupted Time on High Stakes Writing Assessments

Ed. S. Field Project

Presented to the  
Department of Educational Administration

And the

Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree  
Educational Specialist

University of Nebraska at Omaha

By

Chuck Story

April 2007

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EDUCATION SPECIALIST  
FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College.  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree, Education Specialist.  
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

*Kristine Swain*  
*Karen L Hayes*

Chairperson *Leon Dappen*

Date *4/20/07*

## Abstract

### An Analysis of the Effectiveness of Uninterrupted Time on High Stakes Assessments

At Millard North High School

2004 – 2006

Mr. Chuck Story, EDS

University of Nebraska, 2007

Advisor: Dr. Leon Dappen

The design of the study was to analyze the mastery level of tenth grade students at Millard North High School to determine the effectiveness of extended, uninterrupted time on their successful completion of the Analytical Writing Assessment. The Analytical Writing Assessment is a three prompt writing assessment that must be passed in order for a student to graduate from the Millard Public Schools. In the fall of 2004, an analysis of writing results of Millard North High School students lead to concerns over writing instruction in the classroom and testing procedures. Although the assessment is not a timed test, it was believed that the class bell ringing at the end of a fifty-minute period was creating an artificial conclusion to the test for many students. The first step was to attempt to change the testing procedures in the spring of 2006. As part of the changes in testing procedures, students who had only had fifty minutes to complete the writing assessment in the past were given ninety minutes of uninterrupted time (no bells or other interruptions) to complete two of the three prompts of the Analytical Writing

Assessment. As a result, in the spring of 2006, Millard North High School experienced significant increases in the mastery level of students writing assessment scores.

Because of concerns over test security and consistency in procedures between the three high schools, a committee established changes to the district procedures for the Analytical Writing Assessment in the spring of 2006. As part of the procedural changes, each student in all three high schools would be tested over the same prompt on the same day, for three days. In addition, all students would be given ninety minutes of uninterrupted time to complete each of the three writing assessments. The result was sustained higher mastery level scores for students at Millard North High School on the Analytical Writing Assessment.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In the United States, both policy makers and business leaders are increasingly under the opinion that strong writing skills are critical for individuals entering the work force in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Baldwin, 2004). Federal Reserve Chairman, Alan Greenspan, while addressing lawmakers spoke of the importance of education to our economy and pointed out that our schools must do a better job preparing students to adapt to the complexities of today's workplace. The complexity comes from the fact that our economy is idea-based; educating students to think and communicate is vital (Kerrey, 2004). The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools and Colleges believes that writing is the key to addressing Alan Greenspan's concerns (Kerrey, 2004). The National Commission points out that today, one in five twelfth grade students can produce satisfactory writing communication and only 50 percent meet basic requirements (Kerrey, 2004).

Because of the growing concerns of writing in the curriculum, we have also seen the development of assessments to evaluate students' ability to write effectively. The literature suggests that we need to teach students how to write effectively and assess their ability to write based upon how they have been taught. One of the key elements to writing is effective use of prewriting and revision strategies. Research supports that the effective use of prewriting and revision strategies by students on writing assessments levels the playing field for all students regardless of their abilities (Hopkins, 2002).

In the Millard Public Schools, students are assessed for a number of reasons. In fact, the Millard Public Schools administers several assessments between 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade to ensure that students are able to perform up to district standards. In the Millard Public Schools, all district standards for student performance are referred to as Essential Learner Outcomes (ELO's). The Essential Learner Outcome (ELO) program in the Millard Public Schools has been developed to check that students are ready to transition from one level to another and for student, school and district accountability (Millard Public Schools, 2005).

Throughout a student's development, they are assessed in writing, reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. Both nationally normed and local ELO assessments are given to each student. The standards for all Essential Learner Outcomes assessments are set by teachers based upon the written and taught curriculum in the Millard Public Schools. In high school, students are assessed in the areas by grade level:

- a) Reading — Grade 9
- b) Writing — Grade 10
- c) Math — Grade 11
- d) Social Studies — Grade 11

As part of the writing assessment during students' sophomore year, they must write on three different prompts: narrative, expository and persuasive. None of the Essential Learner Outcome assessments are timed tests so students are given unlimited time (Millard Public Schools, 2005).

Prior to 2006, all writing assessments were given in English 10 classrooms. At Millard North High School, through data analysis, it was determined that students were not performing at an acceptable level on the district writing assessment. One concern given was that the assessment was given during each student's English 10 class time. The three high schools in the Millard Public Schools are all on different bell schedules. Millard North has a traditional seven period day with 50 minute class periods. The other two Millard high schools are on ninety minute block schedule. Even though all students were given unlimited time to complete the assessment, it had been observed that students were rushing through the assessment to be done before the bell rang and the class period was complete. As part of the writing assessment, students are to use the six trait writing model. The six trait writing model includes prewriting and revision strategies that are taught to the students in their English classrooms. By providing sufficient uninterrupted time, this study planned to evaluate if students given additional uninterrupted time would be more successful on the district writing assessment. The analysis was done with student scores on the Analytical Writing Assessment given to tenth grade students at Millard North High School in the spring of 2006.

### *Theoretical Perspective*

The formulating of a theoretical perspective for this study was derived from previous research and analysis on the uninterrupted time on standardized testing (Baldwin, 2004; Barry & Moore, 2004; Crawford, Helwig, & Tindal 2004; Hopkins, 2002; Thomas, 2004). Although there is no need to verify the existing research, the establishment of new procedures for testing may emerge during the data collection and

analysis of this research. Therefore, the intent of this study is to confirm that uninterrupted testing procedures allow students to demonstrate what they have been taught in the classroom and confirm that students are learning how to be successful writers.

### *Purpose Statement*

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of extended uninterrupted time on the mastery level of students' high stakes writing assessments. The study examined if giving students extended uninterrupted time to write will increase the level of mastery of students on writing assessment scores at Millard North High School in the spring of 2006.

### *Research Question*

The following question guided this study.

- 1) Will the increased uninterrupted time given to students participating in the Analytical Writing Assessment improve student level of mastery and performance?

### *Definition of Terms*

- *Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA)*: A writing assessment based upon the successful completion of three prompts: Narrative, expository and persuasive. This assessment must be passed in order to graduate from the Millard Public Schools based upon the Essential Learner Outcomes.
- *Essential Learner Outcomes (ELO's)*: Subject area assessments that students must master in order to graduate from the Millard Public Schools.

- *Prewriting Strategies*: Methods to organize ideas and concepts in order to successfully complete a writing assignment or assessment (Ex. Graphic Organizer).
- *Prompt*: A question or statement that students must respond to in the process of writing an essay.
- *Revision Strategies*: A process to re-examine written text to correct grammatical and spelling errors.
- *Rough Draft*: An original writing sample with irregularities.
- *Student Level of Mastery*: The percentage of student who successfully mastered the assessment or achieved proficiency.
- *Six Trait Writing Model*: A concept for successful writing that includes provisions for developing ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions.
- *Uninterrupted Time*. Time utilized during an assessment that is not disrupted by bells or other interruptions that would deter from a student's concentration.

#### *Assumptions, Delimitations and Limitations of the Study*

This study was limited to tenth grade students in one high school. This decreased the possibility of generalizing the results, and, therefore, they may not be applicable to other schools or educational settings.

The study may not be appropriate to all schools since it studied the results on a high stakes writing assessment that must be completed by students in order to graduate.

Because of this fact, results are not applicable to most assessment data from other high schools.

*Significance of the Study*

This study looked at the use of extended uninterrupted time and its effects on increased mastery level of students in completing a writing assessment which must be passed in order to graduate. The results should prove useful in determining if additional uninterrupted time would increase student success on the Analytical Writing Assessment at Millard North High School.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The focus of this literature review was to provide insight into the topics and research that supports the need for uninterrupted time for students to complete writing assessments. The essence of this literacy review was constructed around three aspects of literature: (1) the impact of state mandated assessment on the writing process of students, (2) the effect of the writing process on student achievement, and (3) the relationship of prewriting strategies and uninterrupted time to student achievement on writing assessments.

National and state academic standards generally support the writing process. This support includes planning (prewriting), drafting, revising, editing and sharing (Schuster, 2004). This support, however, is usually limited to one or two aspects of the writing process. In the review, we will include discussions related to the increased pressure of government assessments on the teaching of writing, what should be taught and assessed to create successful writers and how successful writers master writing assessments.

#### *The Impact of State Mandated Assessment on the Writing Process*

Today, assessment is widespread and is central to accountability in our standards-based reform movement. This reform movement that began in the early 1990s has grown into the recent high stakes testing push of No Child Left Behind. No Child Left Behind is the federal plan to improve student learning (A Parent Guide to No Child Left Behind, n.d.). As part of this school improvement plan, four key components, content standards, test designed to measure progress towards the standards, performance targets which allow

school communities to know if they have achieved the set standards and incentives or sanctions based upon if the target goals are attained (Abrams & Madaus, 2003). Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation, most states have developed content standards and assessments (Abrams & Madaus., 2003). This legislation which was passed in 2001 requires that all students in grades 3 – 8 be tested every year in reading and math. If a school cannot demonstrate adequate yearly progress as a percentage of those students who passed the test, corrective actions will be required by the state (Bronwyn, 2002).

Another unique but critical expectation of the No Child Left Behind Legislation (NCLB) is that students who are part of a significantly large sub group within the student population will also be included in adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals. One of the more controversial aspects of NCLB legislation is that students with specific learning disabilities, low social economic status, minority ethnic status and English language learners will be assessed for adequate yearly progress (Barry & Moore, 2004).

Following this legislation, some states (Massachusetts, New York, Texas, and Virginia) and some independent school districts (Millard Public Schools) have used assessment to determine whether a student will graduate from high school (Abrams & Madaus, 2003). Because of these demands on curriculum and class time, one of the hallmarks of being an educated person is being neglected. Statistics from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has concluded that the United States is in a writing crisis (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2004). In fact, test scores show that fewer than one in three of the students in grades 4, 8, and 12 are proficient in writing. In 2002, a survey



conducted by Public Agenda determined that 70 percent of employers who recently hired high school graduates rated them as average to poor writers (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2004). In a 2003 interview, Bob Kerrey, president of New School University in New York City, pointed out that, “The teaching of writing requires small classes, talented teachers and time. Experts agree on how to improve writing, we just have to insist that both the time be given and the money allocated to it (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2004 p. 16).”

Change in the testing culture is now developing. Thomas points out in his article, “The Negative Impact of Testing Writing Skills”, that, “large-scale standardized tests, such as the SAT, have primarily emphasized reading and math. Looming before us now, however, is the addition of writing as something to be tested – as something that counts (Thomas, 2004).” As writing is included into standardized testing, it too will affect how writing is taught in the classroom. Depending on how the assessment is developed, it might or might not simulate the writing process. The process of including brainstorming, first draft, editing, final draft and proof reading stages is important to keep the assessment rubrics tied to good writing instruction. The problem with some states is that even with the addition of writing assessments; the test is dictating what happens in the classroom and in some cases, at the expense of proper instruction. The concern raised by many educators is that assessments have restrained their curriculum and time. Educators will teach lessons that help students to succeed on assessments, but this in turn limits time where the curriculum might be expanded upon for the students’ future benefit. (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2004).

In March 2005, both the SAT and ACT added a writing section into their assessment (Baldwin, 2004). Starting 2003-04, in the state of Nebraska, all students in grades 4, 8, and 11 are tested each year in writing. Each grade had separate prompts (Narrative, Descriptive or Persuasive) and were tested over a two day period with day one for prewriting and the second day for the final draft. Each day of the state test is timed and limited to 45 minutes (Nebraska Department of Education, 2006). In the Millard Public Schools, besides having each student in grade 4, 8 and 11 take the state writing assessment, students must take district writing assessments in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 10 (Millard Public Schools, 2005). Completion of the Millard Public Schools analytical writing assessment's three prompts (narrative, expository and persuasive) are required to graduate from high school. The analytical writing assessment is one of five assessments needed to graduate in the Millard Public Schools (other assessments include reading, math, science and social studies). The state of Nebraska also requires a norm reference assessment to be given in each school district. The Millard Public Schools requires that the Terra Nova norm reference assessment is given to students in grades 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10, which also contains a writing component. In the Millard Public Schools, test preparation is taken very seriously, and is always dealt with in a professional manner. Still, with multiple assessments to prepare for, testing can have an effect on classroom instruction. Many tests provide narrow data on students' true ability to write. This data can also distort a schools' success and mandate classroom time away from instructional goals (Thomas, 2004).

### *The Effect of the Writing Process on Student Achievement*

With the increased federal mandates and lack of federal support, making improvements to the writing process has been difficult. Just having teachers assign more writing assignments won't help. Teachers need to have clear guidelines of effective writing instruction and staff development to make positive changes in student achievement. So what techniques work best? The basic features of the writing process include prewriting, drafting, reading and revising, editing, and sharing the written product. Students must, however, be taught these strategies to effectively use them to improve achievement levels of students (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2004).

What has developed is an instruction process based upon research. The six trait writing model is both an effective instruction and assessment guideline. The six traits of writing is a program that describes the characteristics of writing that most professionals agree, is good practice. One of the first people to research and identify the six traits of writing was Diederich (Spandel, 2001). What Diederich did was to ask professionals (teachers, writers, editors, and people who work in business) to rate samples of student writing and identify qualities of good writing (Spandel, 2001). Over the following three decades since Diederich's research, several other people and groups have duplicated and confirmed his original research findings. What developed was a common thread nationwide of what constitutes good writing. The following six traits are (Spandel, 2001) used by the state of Nebraska and also the Millard Public Schools to teach and assess writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions. The rubrics (1-5) score indicates the student's level of mastery of the concept.

Teachers, however, don't always see a connection between instruction and assessment. The instructional process for writing includes, but is not limited to, the following: exploration, searching, prewriting, drafting, sharing, revising, editing and evaluation. Writing is said to be not linear but a circular process (Spandel, 2001).

Instruction must be tied to constant rehearsal and practice of the writing process. In the Millard Public Schools, six trait writing has been linked to instruction in multiple areas. For instance, exploration, searching, generating ideas and revision are incorporated within the six trait concept of ideas. In the curriculum of the Millard Public Schools, writing instruction through the six-traits writing model is incorporated throughout a student's educational career and assessed in a process that reinforces the writing process and the six trait model (Millard Public Schools, 2005).

As the assessment process develops, connections between best practices in instruction, staff development and testing are combined to help students learn and achieve. Still, other issues need to be worked out that help the student to achieve and that provide the instructors reliable data for feedback into instruction of the writing curriculum. Since the writing process is key to the student's success on any writing assessment, the question that must be answered is if writing assessments support rather than hinder the writing process?

*The Relationship of Prewriting Strategies and Unlimited Time to Student Achievement on Writing Assignments and Assessments*

Research supports that the only consistent part of the writing process supported by the structure of the assessments is prewriting or drafting (Schuster, 2004). Hurwitz and

Hurwitz (2004) point out that prewriting can help students to develop ideas and overcome fear, promoting a solid first draft. In a study of college students, found students who do some type of prewriting improve the quality of their work significantly over other students in various research studies (Brodney, Reeves & Kazelski, 1999).

In the study “Selected Prewriting Treatments: Effects on Expository Compositions Written by Fifth-Grade Students,” Brodney, et al, (1999) drew three powerful conclusions from their study. In the study, students received one out of four treatments: reading/prewriting, prewriting alone, reading alone, or no combination of the two, reading/prewriting. Students who were randomly selected from five 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes were placed in one of four treatment groups and then evaluated by a composition test using a holistic rubric, analytic measure and T-unit measure. The significant conclusions were that reading a selection of literature and the prewriting produced higher scores than reading or prewriting alone. Second, the reading/prewriting combination improved students’ structure and cohesiveness in a composition. Third, multiple assessments provide the best indicators of a student’s writing performance and achievement. In the reading/prewriting group, students would read a selection, “The Volcano Wakes”, then be given time to prewrite and take notes. The notes from the selection were used for the essay and as you would expect, helped students significantly remember what they had read a day later when they wrote their paper (Brodney, et al. 1999). Clearly, however, prewriting is the key to successful writing and students must feel they have the time necessary to use it in an assessment.

In fact, there is evidence that extended time influences the success of students on writing assessments. In a study conducted at the University of Missouri, O'Brien found that students in grade 8 who had three 45 minute sessions to complete a writing assessment scored significantly higher than if they took the same assessment in one 45 minute period (O'Brien, 1991). In another study conducted by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) students in grades 4, 6, and 10 were asked to complete a writing assessment using different time periods. Students were assessed in a 50 minute class period, two 50 minute class periods and ten 50 minute class periods over ten weeks. The result was that older students (grades 6 and 10) benefited from extended time whereas younger aged students do not (Crawford, et al, 2004). In addition, research supports the idea that there is not a set writing pattern for all students. As pointed out earlier, the writing process is not linear but fluid. Most students, in fact, revise as they draft aside from some special education students who have been taught a step by step method to the writing process (Crawford, et al, 2004).

It is, then, no surprise that in some states who limit the amount of time of the assessment, the writing process is neglected. Other states such as Kentucky, Oregon and Kansas let students write on a single prompt for three to four days are to be commended, but are in the minority (Schuster, 2004). These studies are reflected in the state of Nebraska's 11<sup>th</sup>-grade writing assessment structure. Although students are only given two 45 minute sessions to write on one prompt, the first day of the exam students are given time to prewrite and the second day to develop a final draft.

As has been described, the Millard Public Schools also promotes the writing process and prewriting in its assessment process. In each grade level, prewriting strategies (drafting, outlining and graphic organizers) are taught as part of the writing process and six trait model (Millard Public Schools, 2005). In the Millard Public Schools, students are assessed in writing by the Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA). During this assessment, students write on three prompts (persuasive, expository and narrative) and are given unlimited time, drafting paper, a student self-assessment to evaluate their use of the six trait writing model and a copy of the six trait writing model for reference. The AWA is set up to support the writing process and give sufficient time for its use during the assessment. Once again, this assessment process is based upon sound research on how students should learn to write and be successful on all future writing assignments throughout their educational career.

#### *Summary and Review of Implications*

If the key to successful writing and assessment is sufficient time, students should be taught the proper writing process and the assessment should reflect the instruction model used by the teachers. If the research is correct, students who have time to employ some type of prewriting strategy should score significantly higher on writing assessments. In the present study, student scores on the Analytical Writing Assessment who had extended uninterrupted time were compared with scores from previous years at Millard North High School.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### *Design*

The design of the study was to analyze the use of uninterrupted time with tenth grade students' level of mastery on the Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA) in 2006 and compare it with the scores from previous years on the same assessment.

#### *Sample*

At Millard North High School, all tenth grade students are required by school board policy to take the Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA) and must pass it before graduating from high school. In the spring of 2006, there were over 600 students in the tenth grade class at Millard North High School. Before the 2005 - 2006 school year, students at Millard North High School took the Analytical Writing Assessment in English classrooms. Prior to testing, it was determined that all students would be taking the assessment on the same day and time and be given up to 90 minutes to finish the exams. Provisions for students with accommodations were provided in addition to extended time if they or any other students didn't finish in the 90 minutes of uninterrupted time provided.

This study was approved by Assistant to the Superintendent for Planning, Evaluation and Testing, and the Principal of Millard North High School. All students in the tenth grade class at Millard North High School were included in the study. The data used was reported to the Millard Public Schools board of education. Both male and female scores were used in the study that were enrolled in the tenth grade at Millard



North High School. There were also no restrictions on participation because of race, ethnic origin or student's participation in special education.

### *Procedures*

In the spring of 2004-05 a group of professionals met to deal with concerns over the writing scores of Millard North High School. The team which included language arts teachers and administrators looked at all areas affecting students' performance data on writing assessments at Millard North High School. Based upon an analysis of data, it was determined that either the testing procedures and/or instruction in the classroom will need to be addressed to improve student scores on the Analytical Writing Assessment. Based upon the analysis, it was first determined that students would be allowed extended uninterrupted time (no bells or other interruptions from the school) to write all three prompts of the Analytical Writing Assessment. The testing would still be administered in the students' tenth grade language arts classroom but the uninterrupted time allowed for testing in the classroom would be increased from fifty to ninety minutes for two of the three prompts. It was believed that students who are encouraged to use prewriting strategies would improve their scores if given the time to use the skills that should have been taught to them in the language arts classroom. During the week of testing, in the spring of 2004-05, Millard North High School worked on an A/B block schedule for four days of the week. During the block schedule, tenth grade students completed two prompts of the Analytical Writing Assessment. The two prompts assessed were the expository and persuasive prompts. The reason these two prompts were chosen was because they were viewed as the two most difficult to complete successfully by the

student. On the fifth day, the school went back to a fifty-minute, seven-period day class schedule. On the fifth day, students completed the third assessment, the narrative prompt. Most students, it was believed, did not have a great deal of difficulty completing this prompt successfully within the fifty minute bell schedule used at Millard North High School.

The district also had concerns over procedural consistency and test security during the spring of 2005. The issue was that even though the assessment provides for unlimited time, the bell schedule creates artificial limits that affect students' achievement levels. Second, students took the assessment at different times during the day, which allowed for some students to learn what the writing prompt was prior to testing. This created a test security problem which in the end dealt with equity in the procedures. In the fall of 2005, the Assistant to the Superintendent for Planning, Evaluation and Testing, called a team together to discuss concerns about the testing procedures of the Analytical Writing Assessment. From that meeting, it was determined that in the spring of 2006, all schools would be assessing the Analytical Writing Assessment with the same procedures. This change would include ninety minutes of extended uninterrupted time for every student on all three prompts. Based upon these concerns, all tenth grade students in the Millard Public Schools were given the Analytical Writing Assessment from 8:00 am to 9:30 am on February 23, 28 and March 2, 2006.

AWA Testing and Class Schedule

February 23, 28 & March 2, 2006

TESTING 8:00 – 9:30

PER. 1	9:37 – 10:13
PER. 2	10:20 – 10:55
PER. 3	11:02 – 11:38
PER. 4	11:45 – 12:20
PER. 5	12:27 – 1:47
PER. 6	1:54 – 2:33 (Announcements)
PER. 7	2:40 – 3:15

In the district, it was agreed that the ninety minute testing sessions would be sufficient time for most students to conclude the test. Under the procedures if a student could not finish the assessment in the ninety minutes provided they would be taken to another classroom to finish the test. Procedurally each student was then given unlimited time finish each prompt or test. Prior to testing, student room assignments would be determined and posted. Also, all teachers proctoring the assessments were required to attend an informational meeting on the procedures for the Analytical Writing Assessment.

During testing, students received a copy of directions and had it read to them before proceeding with the assessment. In addition, students received a blank piece of paper, self-assessment form and a copy of the six traits of writing. Students were reminded to pre-write and edit their paper following the six trait writing process. Proctors further instructed all students to write their student identification number on any prewriting sheets. Students also had access to dictionaries and thesauruses during the exam. In the last reminder before the assessment, students were once again reminded that

the Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA) must be passed before they can graduate from high school.

Students were then given their prompt and instructed that their final draft must be written in the folder provided and can only be one to two pages in length. At the conclusion of the assessment, students must turn in their prewriting, assessment booklet, and self assessment. All prewriting papers and self assessment materials were picked up by the district for test security.

This same procedure was followed all three days, February 23, 28, and March 2, 2006.

### *Instruments*

The Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA) is a required Essential Learner Outcome (ELO) for graduation from high school in the Millard Public Schools. All ELO assessments are based upon the written and taught curriculum in the Millard Public Schools. Since the curriculum is developed in part by the teachers, so to are the assessments. With the help of the Buros Institute in Lincoln, Nebraska, teachers in the Millard Public Schools developed prompts to test students for Essential Learner Outcomes (ELOs). In the case of the Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA), three prompts are given to all students tested during one assessment period. The expository, persuasive and narrative prompts are used to assess students as part of the Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA). The following examples are provided by of the Buros Institute (Kiestler, n.d.):

*Expository*

Imagine that going to the future was possible. Think how far ahead into the future you would like to visit. Think about your reasons why you would like to choose that particular time. Write an essay telling how far into the future you would like to go and explain why you chose that particular time.

*Persuasive*

Your local TV station is going to hire a student reporter for the evening news program, and you would like the job. Think about your local evening news program and why you should be chosen as the student reporter. Now write an essay to convince your local TV station to hire you as their student reporter.

*Narrative*

Everyone has a favorite season of the year. What is your favorite season? What do you like to do? Write a story about your favorite season (Kiestler, 2006).

*Scoring*

Students' writing assessments are evaluated by having two readers' scores of a paper added together to form an average for each of the six traits: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions. Students' writing is evaluated on a five point rubric scale with numeric scores of one to five representing the attaining of mastery. For example, a score of one represents that the reader felt the writer was still in the "beginning" stage, that they were still looking for a topic or a way to handle this trait. A score of two represents that the readers determined that the writer was at an "emerging" stage but did not yet show real strengths on this trait. A score of three means

that the readers felt the writer showed a balance of strengths and weaknesses and that the writer was developing control on this trait. Attaining a score of four, the readers felt the writer showed more real strengths than weaknesses on this trait and needed only a bit more work. When readers give the writer a score of five, they felt that the writing showed many strengths on this trait and that the writer was in control of their writing (Millard Public Schools, 2004).

### *Research Question*

The following questions guided this study.

- 1) Will the increased uninterrupted time given to students participating in the Analytical Writing Assessment improve student level of mastery and performance?

### *Analysis*

The mastery level of Millard North High School for the spring of 2006 was then compared with data from previous years. The evaluation of the changes in testing procedures was accomplished through a descriptive score analysis comparing the level of student mastery on the Analytical Writing Assessment in the spring of 2006 with scores from the past five years.

Chapter four will include an analysis comparing students' mastery scores from the spring of 2006 with scores from previous years at Millard North High School. The data will be compiled and compared to answer the research question.

## Chapter 4

### Presentation of Data

The design of the study was to analyze tenth grade students' level of mastery on the Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA) in the spring of 2006 and compare it with the scores from previous years on the same assessment. For the purpose of this study, once the mastery level of the writing assessment was verified for the spring of 2006 by the Office of Planning and Evaluation for the Millard Public Schools it was compared with data from previous years to answer the research question.

The research question presented was:

- 1) Will the increased uninterrupted time given to students participating in the Analytical Writing Assessment improve student level of mastery and performance?

This chapter will present data obtained from the spring of 2006 and compare it to four previous years' results of the Analytical Writing Assessment given to tenth grade students at Millard North High School.

#### *Analytical Writing Assessment Mastery Results*

SCHOOL YEAR	<u>2001/02</u>	<u>2002/03</u>	<u>2003/04</u>	<u>2004/05</u>	<u>2005/06</u>
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AT MASTERY LEVEL	94.5	97.2	96.4	99.8	97.7

Chapter 5 will include conclusions and recommendations addressing the relationship of the data to the research question.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of extended, uninterrupted time on the mastery level of students' high stakes writing assessments. The study examined if giving students extended, uninterrupted time to write might encourage them to use prewriting and revision strategies and increase the level of mastery of students on assessment scores at Millard North High School in the spring of 2006. To address this issue during the study, one specific question was addressed:

- 1) Will the increased uninterrupted time given to students participating in the Analytical Writing Assessment improve student level of mastery and performance?

#### *Research Question Results*

Based upon results of the Analytical Writing Assessment from the spring of 2000-01 through 2005-06 improvement in the mastery level of students is evident. In the spring of 2000-01 the student mastery level was 96.8 % at Millard North High School. In the spring of 2001-02 the mastery level dropped to 94.5 %. This was followed by an increase in 2002-03 of 97.2 % and another drop in 2003-04 to 96.4 %. During this three year period all students were tested during a 50 minute class period at Millard North High School. All testing was done in the students' tenth grade language arts classroom. Keeping with the same procedural consistency during this period of time, the average of all four years mastery level was 96.2 %. In the spring of 2004-05 procedures were changed at Millard North High School. Students were tested using a A/B block schedule four of the five days of the week. During testing two of the three prompts were given



ninety minutes of uninterrupted time. This resulted in the student mastery level on all three prompts increasing to 99.8%. In 2005 - 06 school year, district wide changes were instituted to increase all Analytical Writing Assessment sessions to ninety minutes throughout the district. As a result the mastery level for students was 97.7 %. The drop in overall mastery from 2004-05 to 2005-06 can be explained. In addition to changing testing procedures district wide in 2005-06, the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Testing introduced three new prompts or tests. This means that standards for evaluating these new tests must be established. It is expected that while introducing new assessments in a standard setting year, that up to ten percent of the students tested will not pass or master the new test. The testing results for the spring of 2005-06 were instead much higher than expected in a typical standard setting year. Finally the two year average for the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school year ended up being 98.75 %, which is the highest two year average percentage ever for Millard North High School. Clearly the changes in testing procedures did make a difference in the performance of tenth grade students on the Analytical Writing Assessment at Millard North High School. Based upon the data, increasing the amount of uninterrupted time did increase students' levels of mastery and performance on this assessment.

### *Conclusions*

Testing procedures do have an effect on students' performance on high stakes writing assessments. The process of changing these procedures over a two year period at Millard North High School and the Millard Public Schools involved a significant amount of analysis and work. Based upon the findings of this study, being attentive to research

findings on testing procedures can help student performance on high stakes tests. This supports the assertion that artificial deadlines (class bells) can have an effect on the students' performance and results on assessments. The amount of uninterrupted time might also affect the use of prewriting strategies used by students during the completion of the writing assessment, which should also improve a student's performance. The result of this work has been the establishment of new testing procedures for the Millard Public School District on the Analytical Writing Assessment.

### *Recommendations*

The data supports that students who get more uninterrupted time are more successful on high stakes writing assessments. What we don't know is, if that is because the students use more prewriting strategies? We also don't know, based upon this analysis, if the classroom teachers are doing a better job teaching the taught curriculum? Based upon the research on writing and writing assessments, if teachers are effective in the delivery of the written curriculum, students should use more prewriting strategies and be more successful on any writing assessment. This study does not answer these underlying questions. It would be advised that future data analysis in the Millard Public Schools is conducted on the type, development and frequency of students using prewriting strategies on the Analytical Writing Assessment. After all, the reason for the assessment is to determine if the student is learning what is being taught in the language arts classroom. It is only through this type of research that the Millard Public Schools can be sure that students are really learning what they should be taught in the classroom and make successful writers of each student who graduates.

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