

THE SUCCESS OF WACCAMAW SCHOOL
A CASE STUDY OF AN ANOMALY

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Advisory Committee

Chair

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Dean, Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to find out why and how Waccamaw School has been so successful. This kindergarten through eighth grade school has achieved exceptional success, especially the last six years, which coincidentally is the length of time the state of North Carolina has instituted its ABC's of public Education Program.

The success of this school is an anomaly because it does not fit the criteria most associated with highly achieving schools. This school is over sixty percent free or reduced lunch, the educational background of the parents of these children is low (meaning fewer than fifty percent graduated high school) and the location of the school itself, in a rural area. The achievement gap between white students and minority students is also a variable to consider in the success of this school. When all these factors are taken into consideration, it is understandable why this school is a success anomaly.

The qualitative data were obtained from personal interviews conducted from April of 2001 to May of 2002. The primary stakeholders, teachers, students, parents, administrators, classified staff, and community personnel from the school, and members of the central office staff from curriculum and instruction and the testing department also contributed to this study. All stakeholders were asked the same questions and their replies were taped or hand written to be analyzed. The data from this study show that Waccamaw's success is the product of three basic factors. The unique staff at this school is a huge part of that success, along with a very strong nurturing community.

All the stakeholders agreed that the three principles for this school's success are as follows: (1) Student time on task, (2) the commitment of the faculty to the schools

mission, and (3) the support from the community through the school's parent center and volunteer program.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the teachers, staff, administrators, and central office staff who contributed their time and energy so that I could complete this study. Waccamaw is a very special school and you are very special people.

I would also like to thank Doctors' Martin Kozloff, John Rice, and Jean Gearhart respectively. Their help and guidance was instrumental in my completion of this study.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge my wife, who in her own way gives me the courage to continue when the way gets rough. Her faith and courage has helped me to overcome many obstacles. To her I say with sincere and deep appreciation, "Thank you for being there."

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INTRODUCTION

Waccamaw School is located just off highway #130, in the rural farming community of Ash, North Carolina on the western edge of Brunswick County. From first glance there's nothing that really stands out about this school, except that the grounds are always neat, well groomed, and attractive. The term "Elementary" is somewhat misleading, since Waccamaw is a kindergarten thru eighth grade school. As a matter of fact, it is the only k-8 school in the county.

Waccamaw provides its community with three grade levels: a primary, an elementary, and a middle school. This makes this small community school basically three schools in one. Some critics feel this is a disadvantage, but to the stakeholders of Waccamaw School this arrangement has several advantages such as (1) on site tracking of student progress from year to year, (2) the same teachers per grade level, (3) familiarity with the learning environment and its expected outcomes, (4) a safe nurturing environment that is conducive to learning, and lastly(5) a group of teachers whose sincere mission is to provide every student with the tools to obtain the best education possible at this level. Their mission is to ensure that all Waccamaw's children are given the opportunity to be successful and that success is virtually guaranteed.

The history of this school began in the 1920's when it was built to replace the one room classrooms that were scattered throughout the various surrounding communities. At that time it had grades one through twelve. Later, in 1972, when the present high school along with two other new high schools were built in Brunswick County, Waccamaw began operating as a kindergarten through eighth grade school. After several renovations, there is the present campus, which consists of the primary building for

grades kindergarten through third with two mobile units, grades four through six for the elementary students, and the middle school or junior high for grades seven and eight. Waccamaw has always had strong community support. Examples include its athletic programs, Workout with Waccamaw, and the Turkey Trot which helps to raise funds for the physical fitness program. There is also the Waccamaw Alumni Association which helps to supply the school with a number of things from pencils and paper to clothing and other needs the students may have. There are also academic programs such as Science Olympiad, Battle of the Books, Math Counts, and ROCAME (Region "O" Council for the Advancement of Minorities). Waccamaw has had great support, but that support was never so evident until the ABCs' of Public Education program was instituted by the state. The ABCs' legislation required schools to achieve specific academic standards using a state mandated formula. Schools which exceeded those requirements were rewarded; those that didn't were classified as "no recognition" or "low performing". From that time until the present, this school has achieved some notable accomplishments such as National Blue Ribbon School, National Title One School, N.C. School of Distinction, and N.C. School of High Growth.

Figure 1a

| Waccamaw School Statistical Profile | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Total Enrollment | 518 |
| Average Daily Attendance | 99.4% |
| Ethnic Background | 71.5% White |
| | 18.5% Black |
| | 8.3% Hispanic |
| | 1.2% Multi-racial |
| | 0.5% American Indian |
| Percent Gifted | 3% |
| Percent Handicapped | 15% |
| Eligibility for Free or Reduced Lunch | 71% |

Figure 1b

| Staff Member Categories | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Administrators | 2 |
| Certified Staff | 40 |
| Classified Staff | 14 |
| Custodial and Food Service Staff | 10 |
| Student/Classroom Teacher Ratio | 20/1 |
| Teachers Holding Advanced Degrees | 16 |

CHAPTER ONE

The Study

Waccamaw School has been successful in achieving extraordinary results in its mission to educate the children it serves. In this chapter we will take a look at Waccamaw's' composite results from 1996 to 2001 and also the 2002 North Carolina School Report Card. There are many ways for schools to be successful and success can be measured in several different ways. These include percentages of students passing state mandated requirements on subject areas such as math and reading, percentages of students meeting national requirements such as proposed in the "No child left behind legislature" and North Carolinas' ABC's of Public Education , which is the standard by which this school's success is based. Moreover, success may be affected by a number of variables, including socio- economic status, geographical attendance area, cultural diversity, teaching staff, school site/district leadership, and community support. It is rare that any one of these variables is the sole reason for success, but any one of them can be the reason or the cause of failure. This case study was conducted to determine the underlying factors that account for the remarkable success this school has had the last six years. Three of those years Waccamaw was designated as an Exemplary School and the other three as a School of Distinction. This has not been achieved by any other school in Brunswick County and very few in the state. Why is this so remarkable for this small rural k-8 school, considering this schools' profile and factors such as socio-economic status of the majority of the parents, geographic location of the school, and the educational achievement level of most of the parents. It's no wonder this school is a success anomaly.

In researching the factors that led to these achievements, the qualitative data was obtained primarily from personal interviews with the schools stakeholders. This data was recorded or written verbatim. Some stakeholders were re-interviewed to ensure clarity of the information. The qualitative data will be discussed in chapter three. In this chapter we will take a look at Waccamaw's' composite results for the last five years and an explanation of the ABC standards. There are some notable points of interest, especially in the third grade scores. Grades kindergarten through second grade is not tested in the ABCs' program. This cause's the third grades scores to seem low, but this is far from the truth according to the interview with the principal and the testing coordinator. The area of need is the first and second grades; these children are not prepared for school when they arrive at Waccamaw in kindergarten. It takes three years to get them on track as you may discern from the scores. It is here that they begin to excel. The teachers at this school go to great lengths and take pride in what they do. The ABCs' are only a part of the success of this school, but as stated they are the standard by which the state measures success. The ABC standards simply stated are

- At least a year's worth of growth for a year's worth of school will be expected.
- Growth will be the expected growth rate for that school based on previous performance statewide.
- Exemplary growth will be (10%) greater than the expected growth rate.

EOG/EOC Performance Composite Factors

- Alternate Portfolio Assessment
- Reading / Math EOG

- Computer Skills Assessment
- Algebra 1 (Eighth grade only)

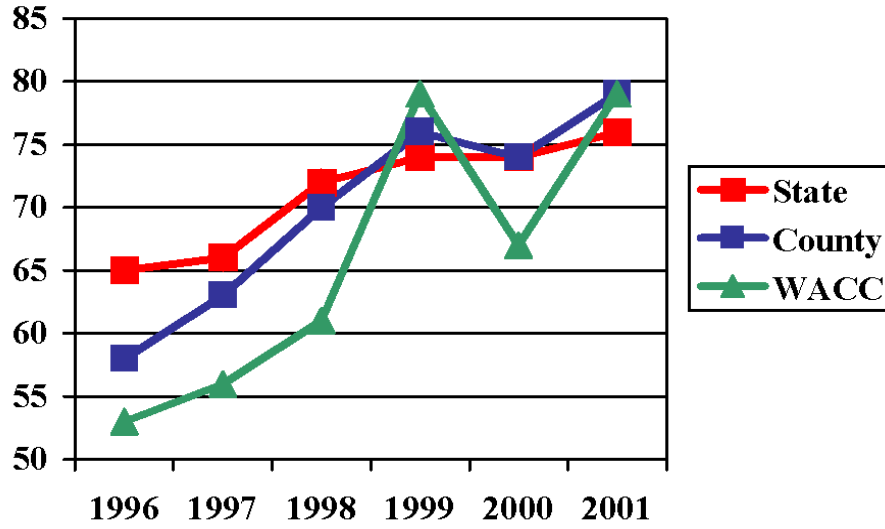
The End of Grade Growth Components is:

- Reading grades Three through Eight
- Math grades Three through Eight
- Algebra 1 (Eighth grade only)

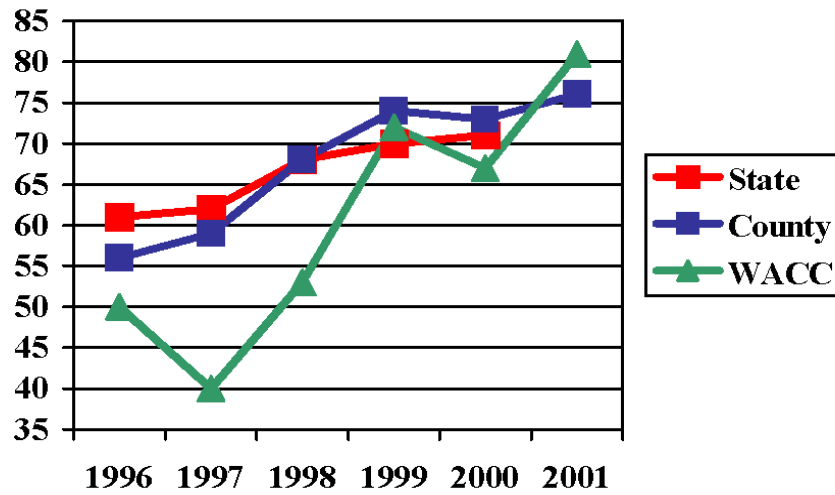
The graphs on the following pages provide quantitative data, which substantiated the qualitative data obtained in the interview portion of this study. Please be reminded that although the performance of students on end of grade tests are an important factor in the overall success story of this school, that success is an end product to all the other stated factors that contribute to this school's achievements.

GRADES THREE THRU EIGHT READING AND MATH STATISTICS

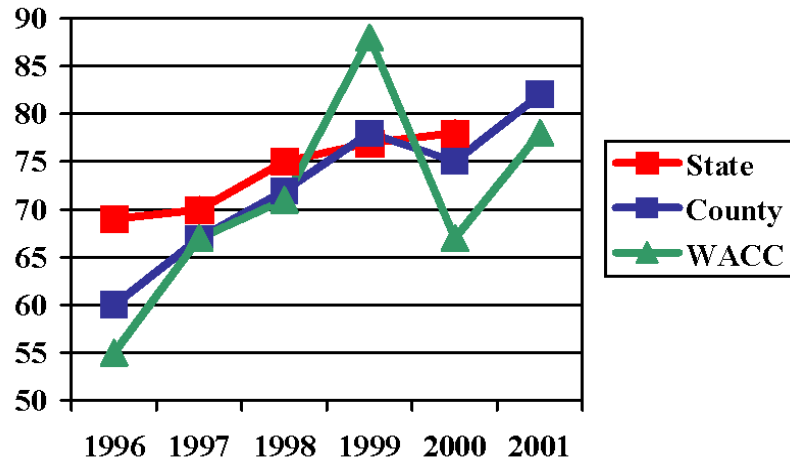
Third Grade Reading



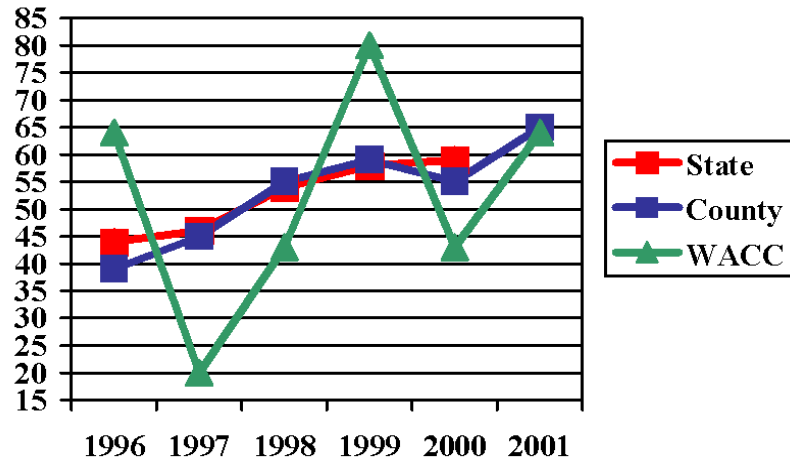
Third Grade Reading Males



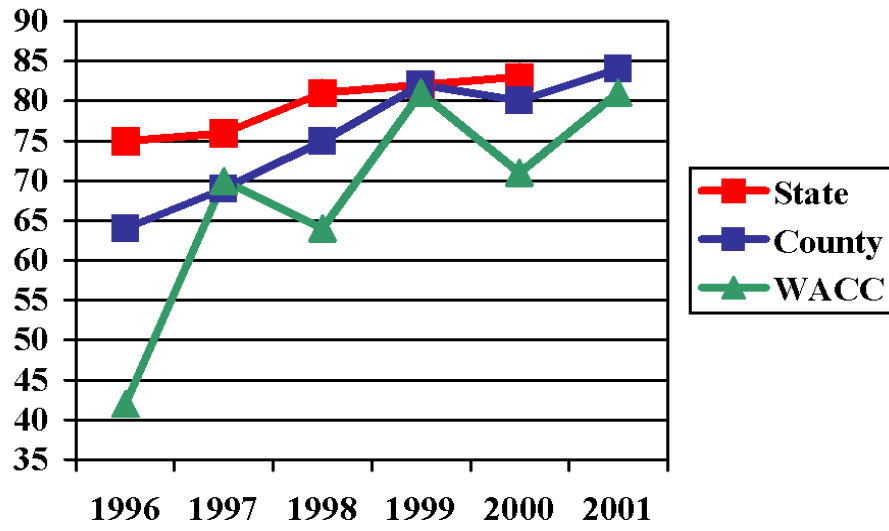
Third Grade Girls



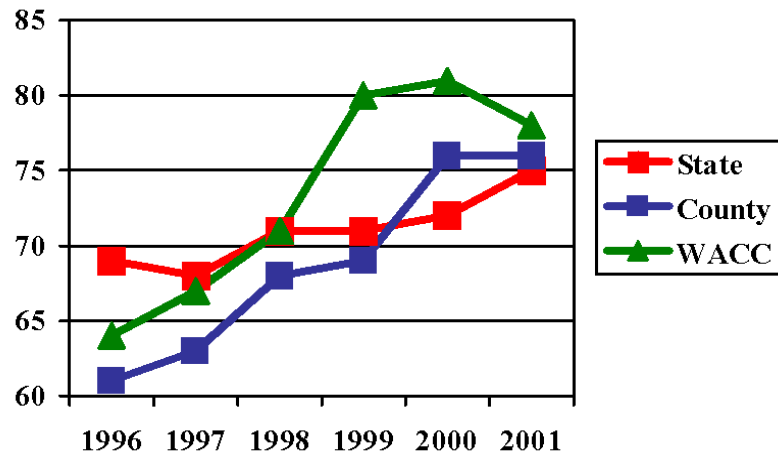
Third Grade Black



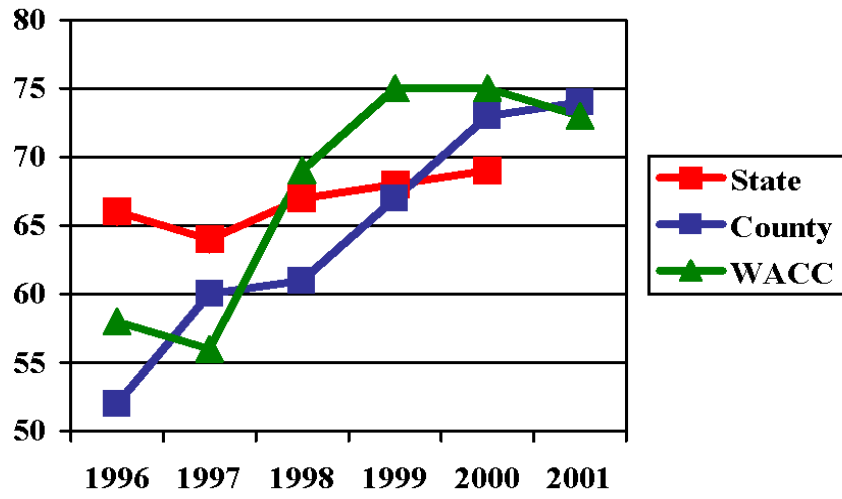
Third Grade Whites



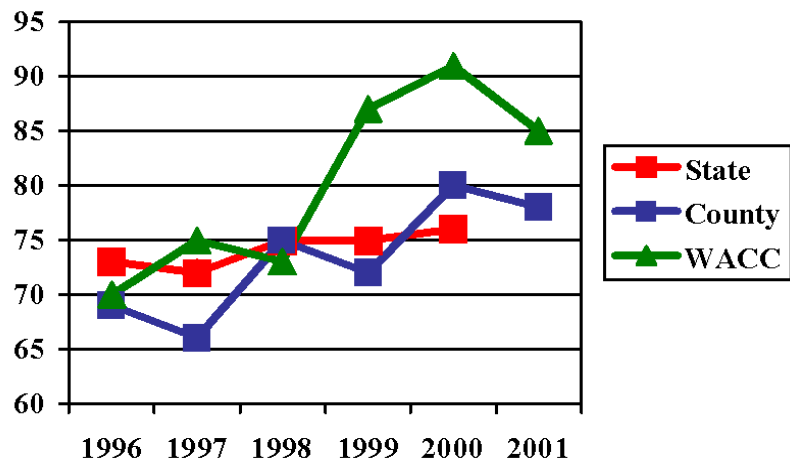
Fourth Grade Reading



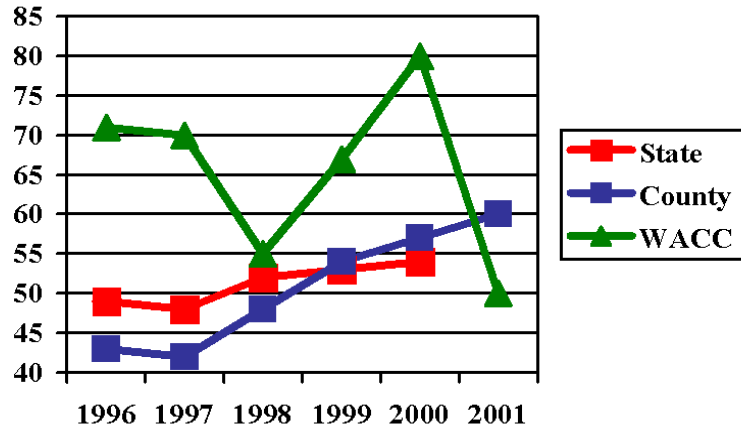
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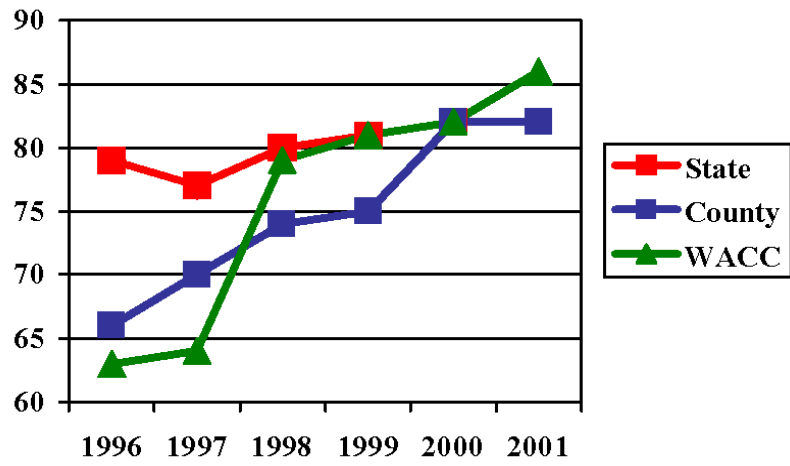
Fourth Grade Females



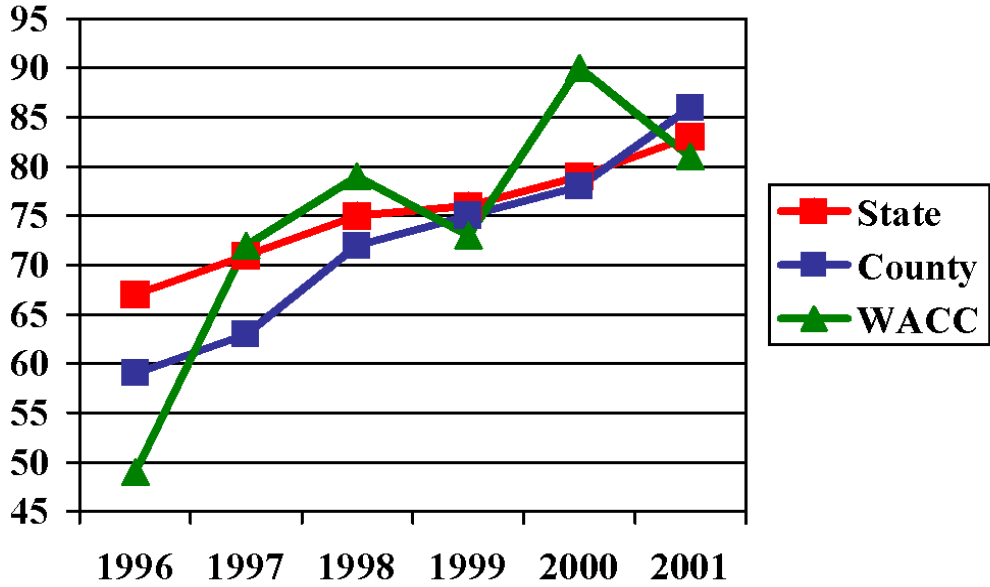
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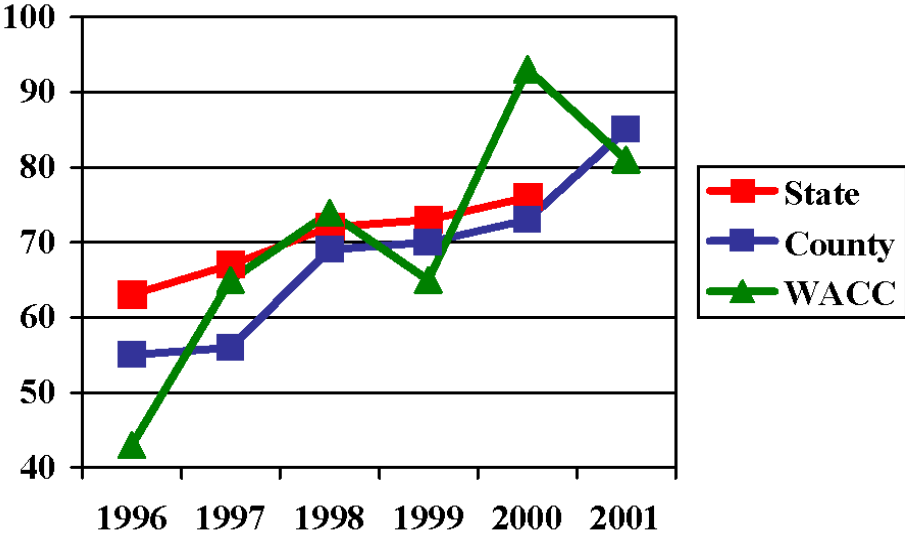
Fourth Grade Whites



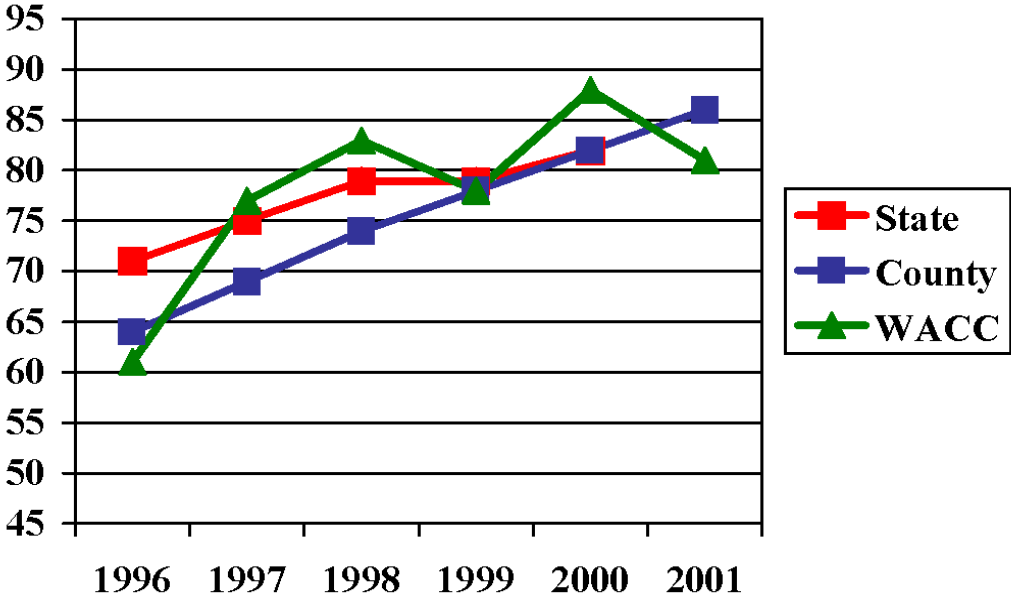
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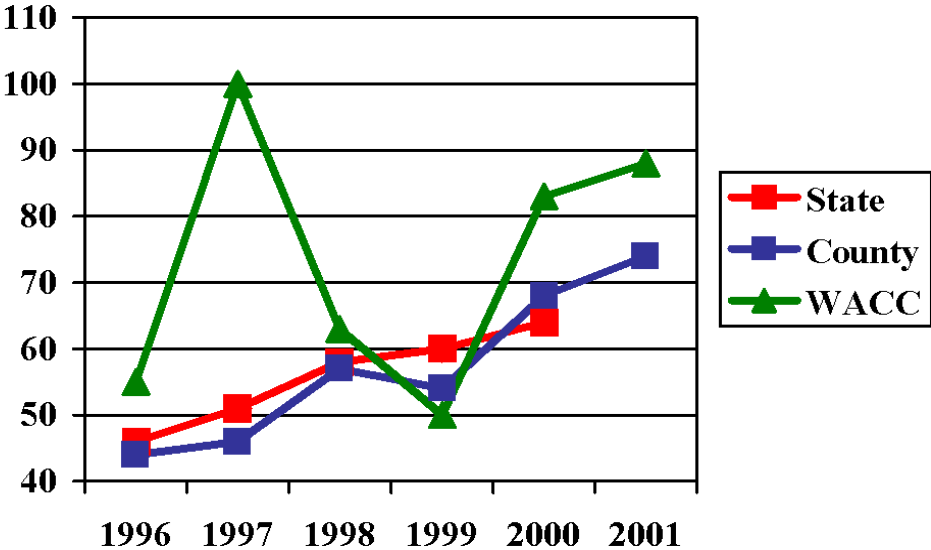
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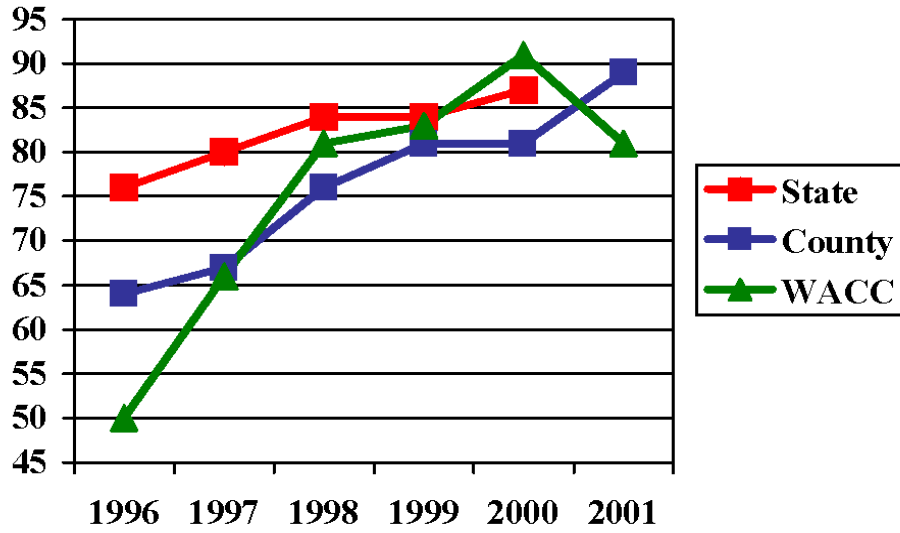
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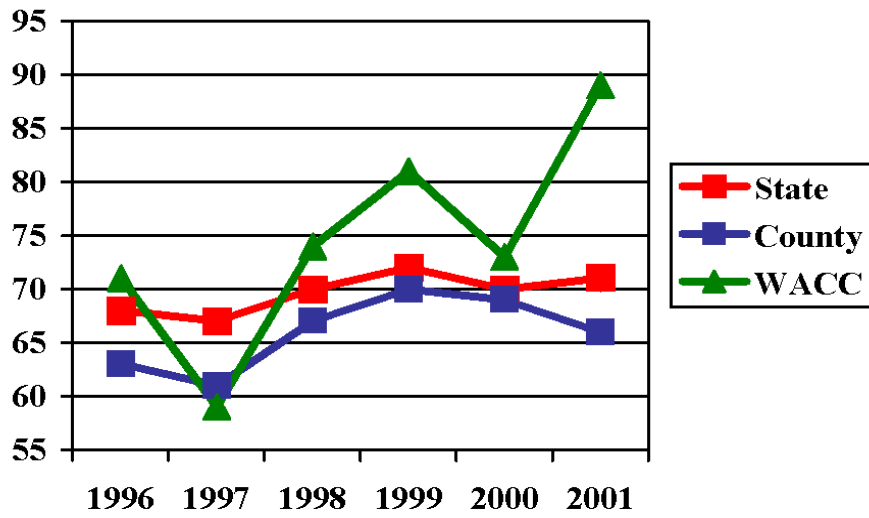
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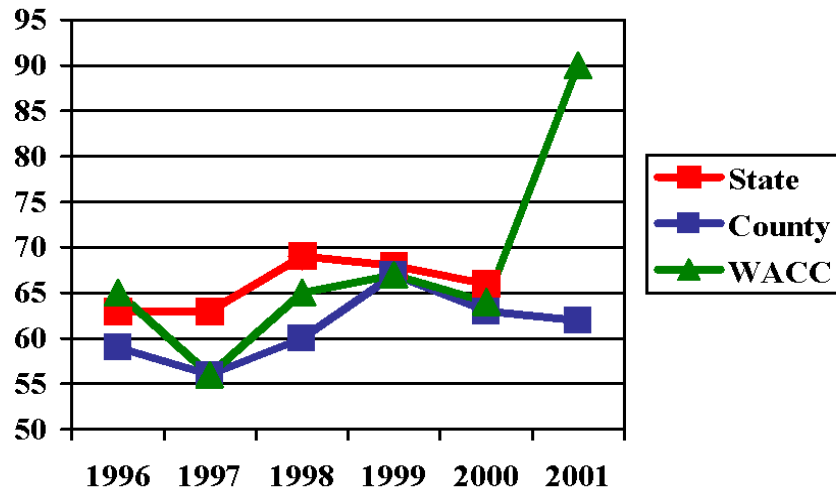
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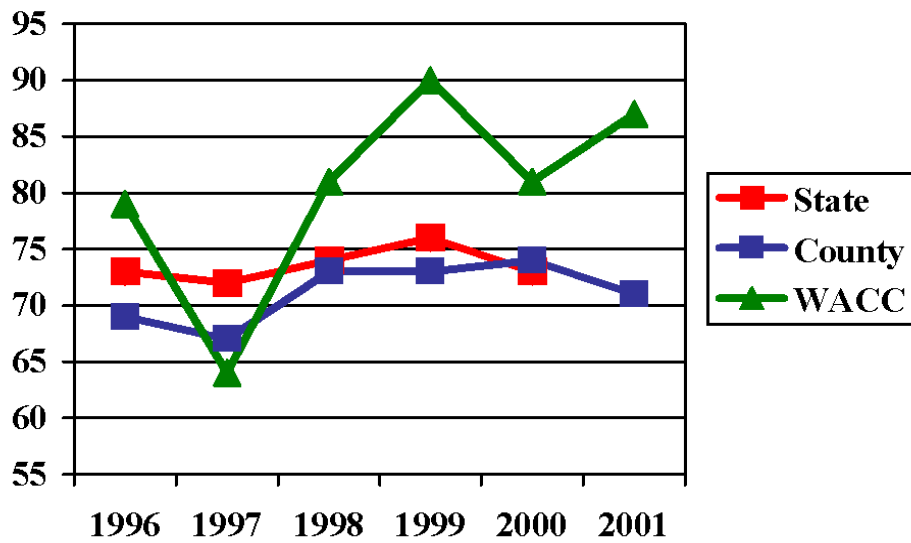
Sixth Grade Reading



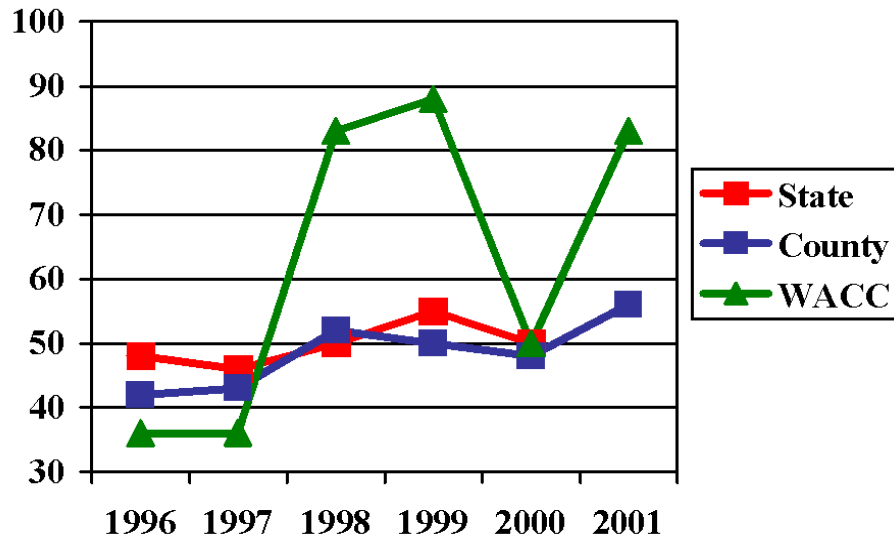
Sixth Grade Males



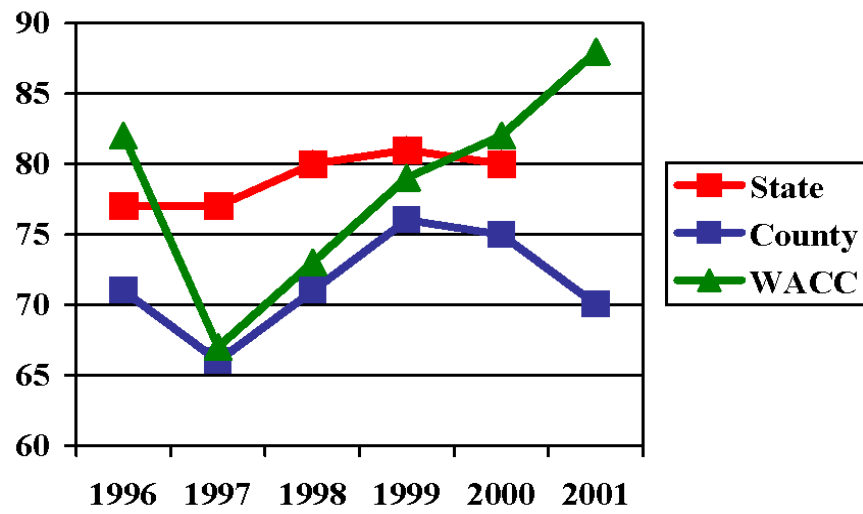
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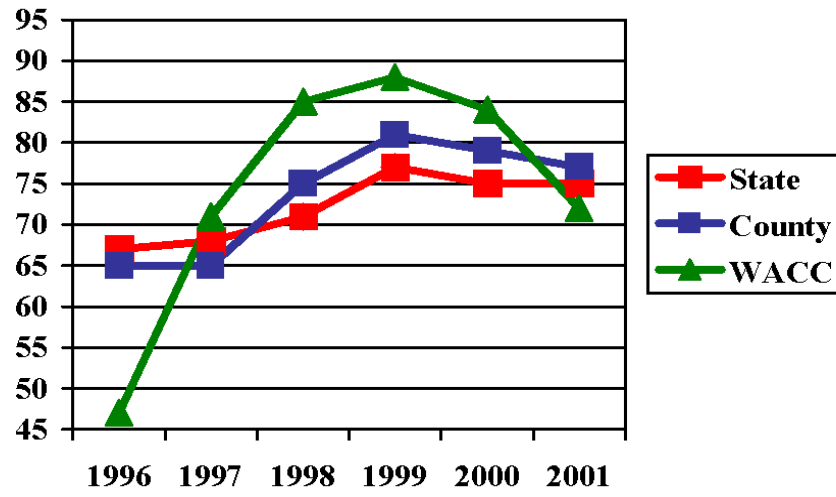
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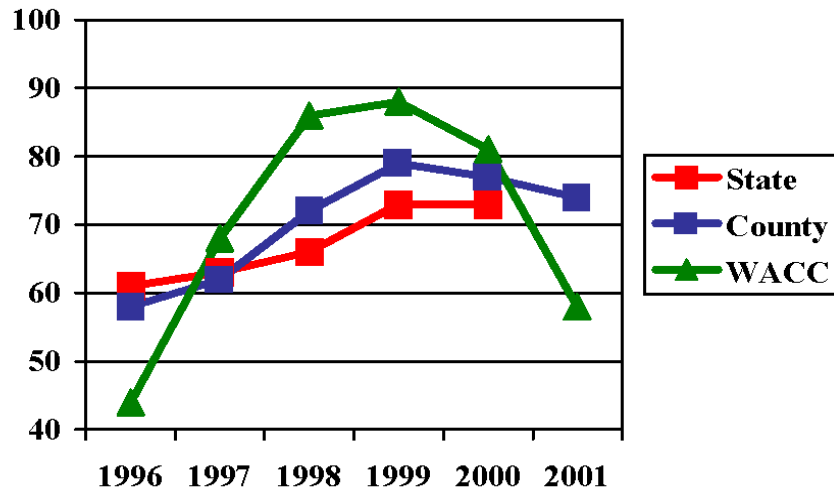
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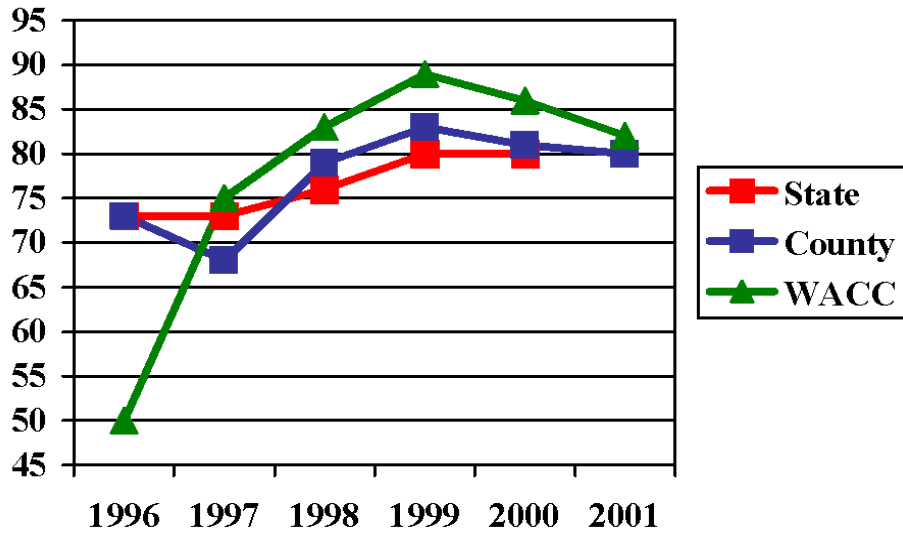
Seventh Grade Reading



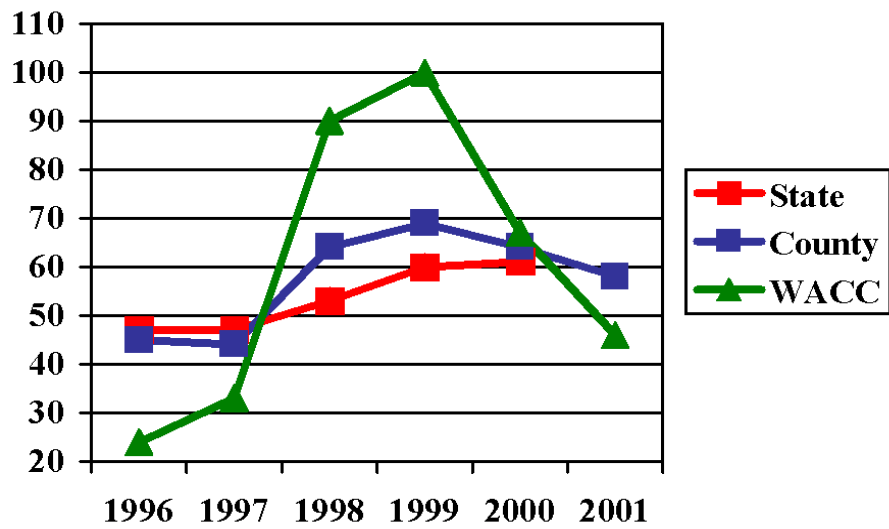
Seventh Grade Males



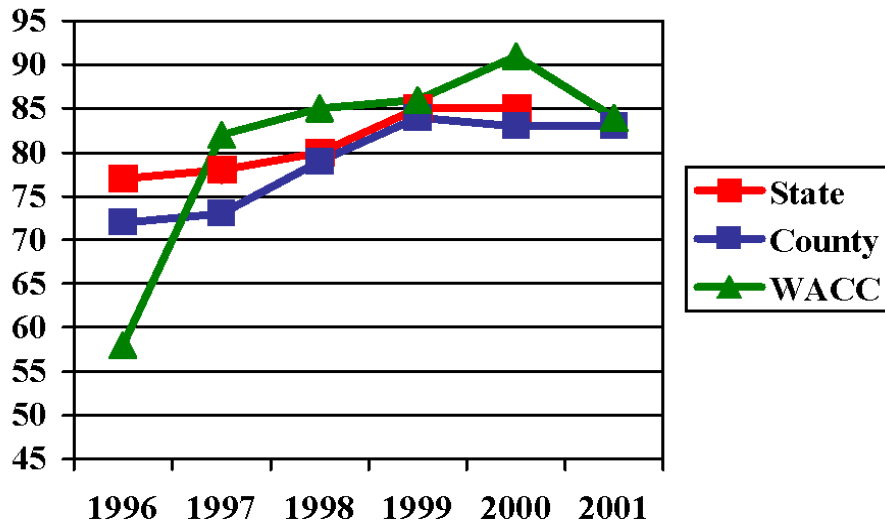
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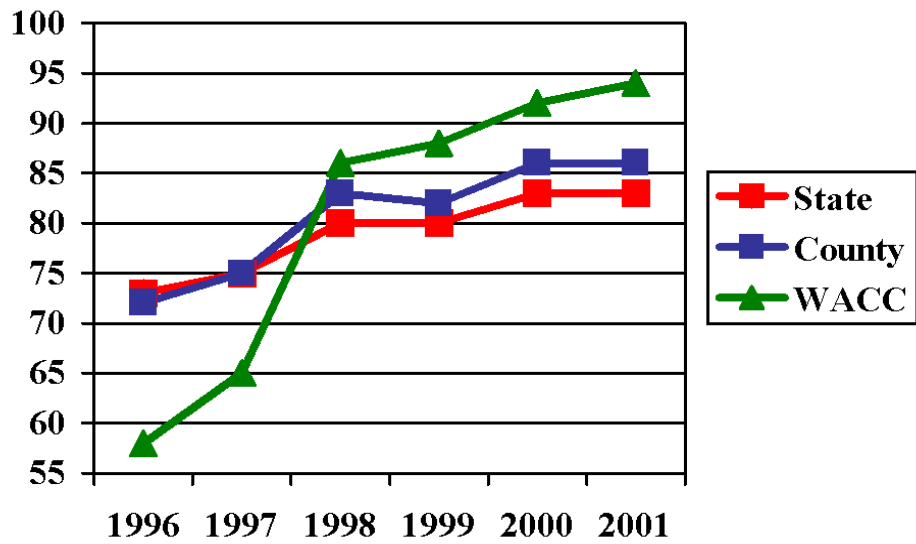
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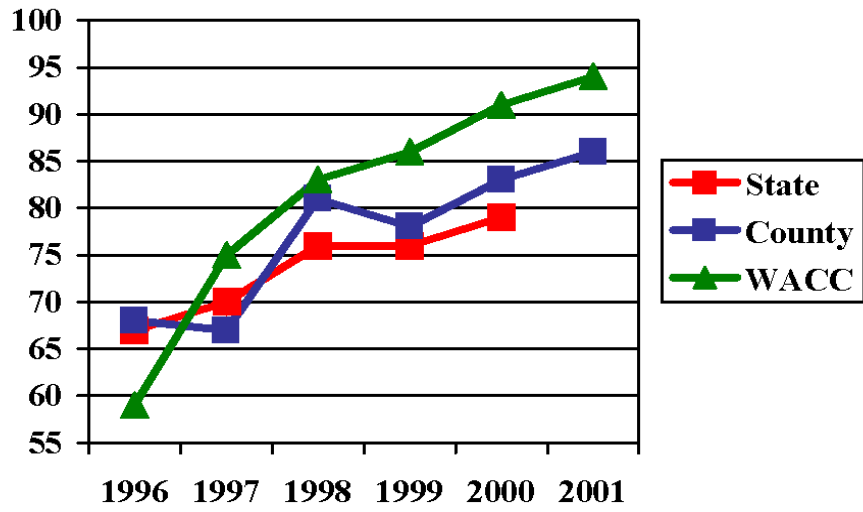
Seventh Grade Whites



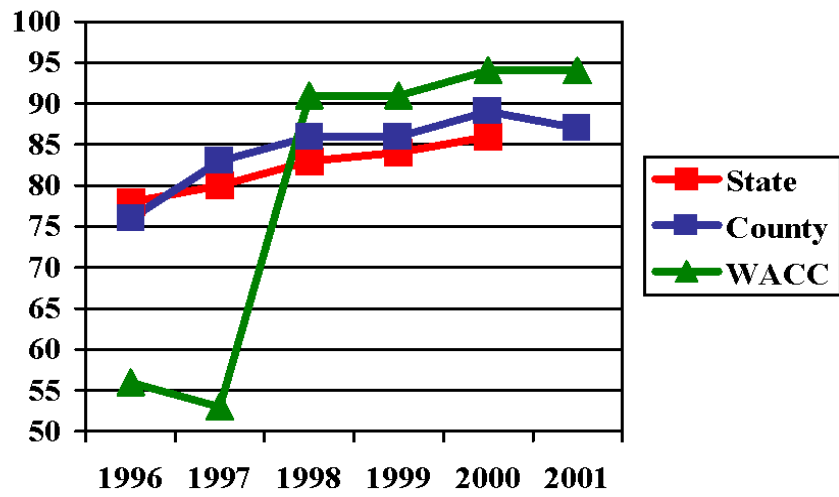
Eighth Grade Reading



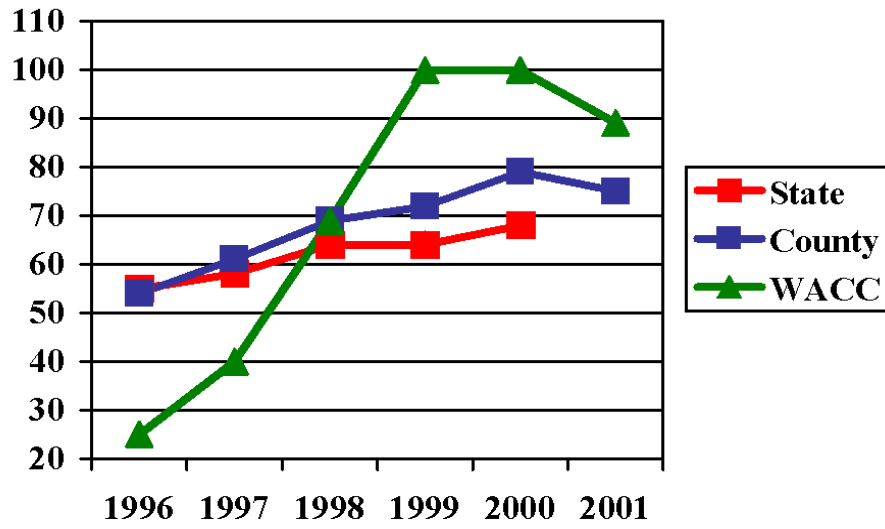
Eighth Grade Males



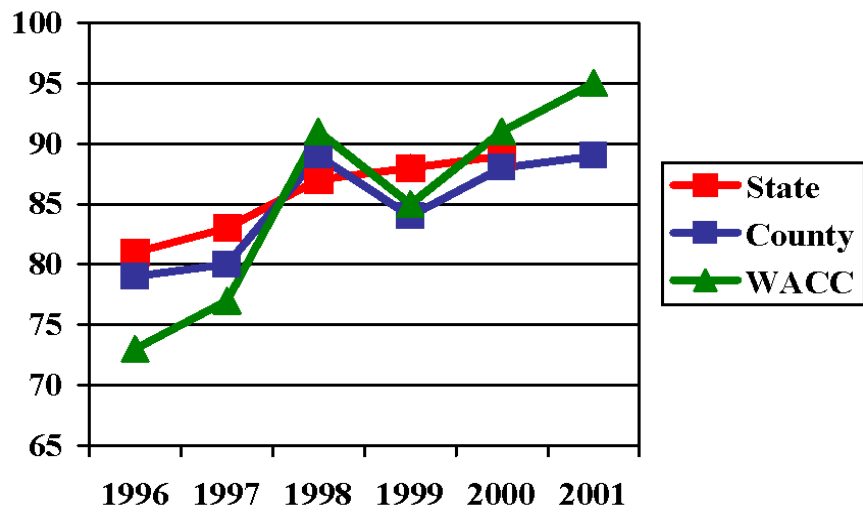
Eighth Grade Females



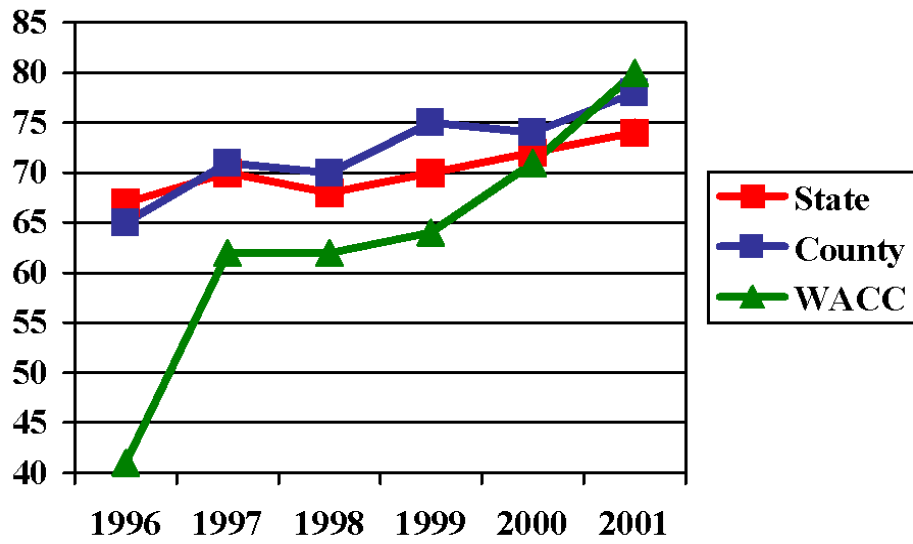
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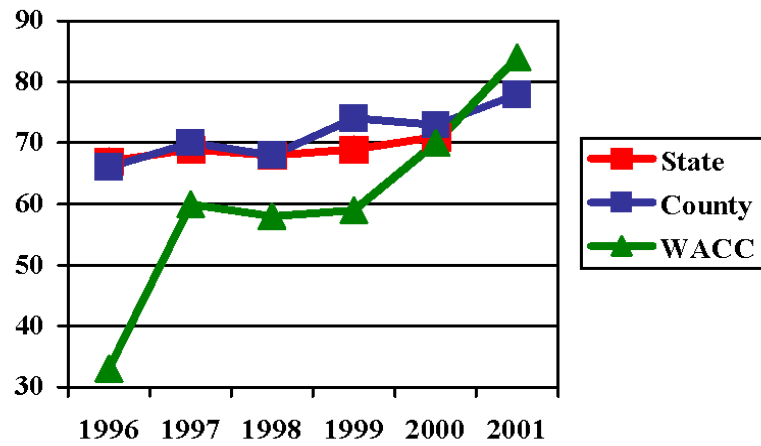
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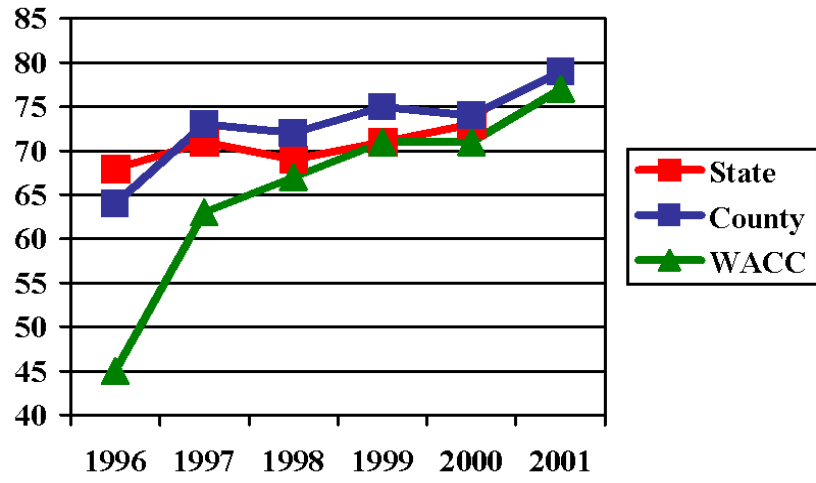
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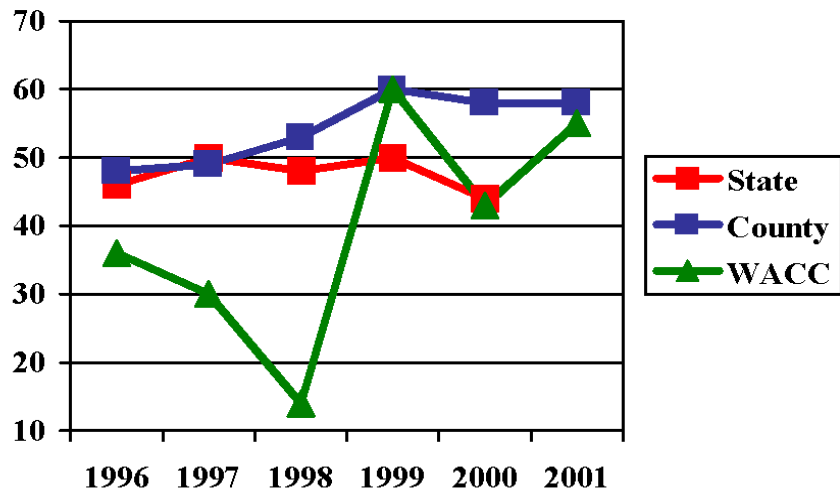
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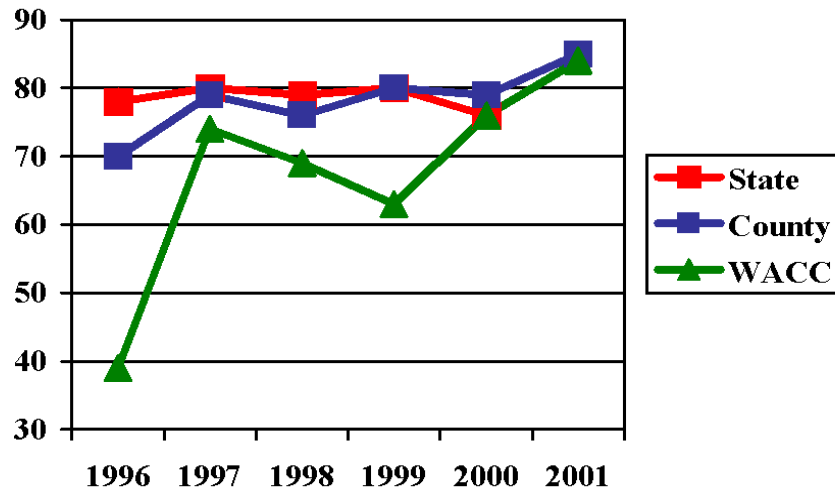
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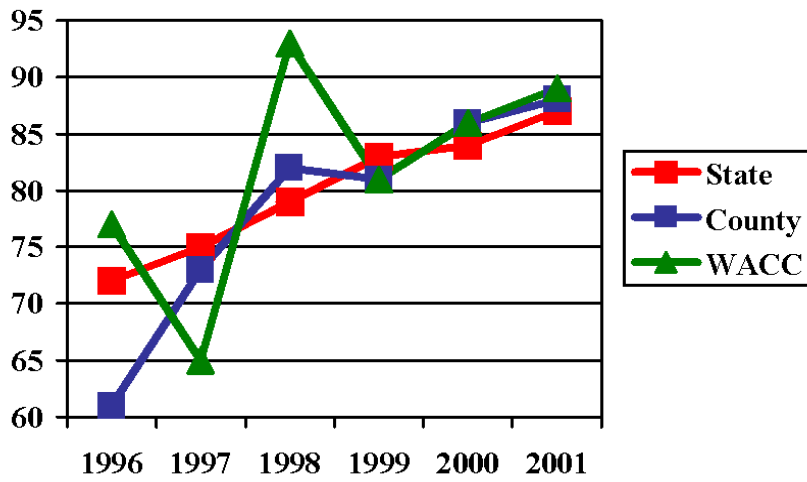
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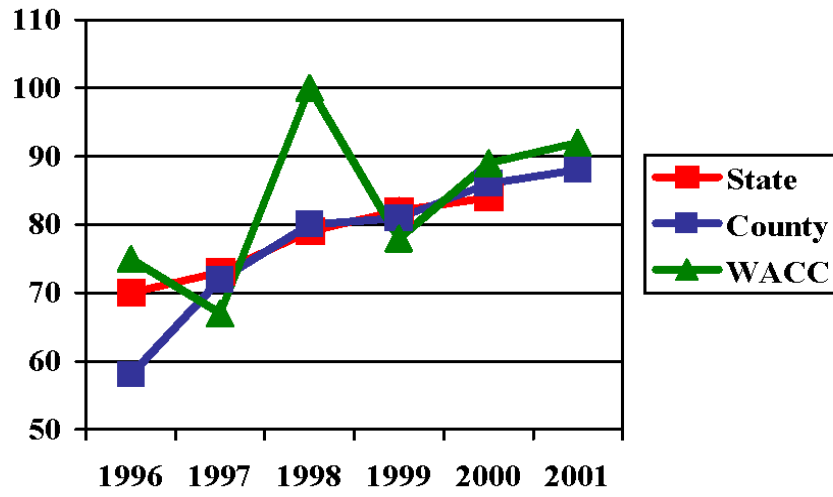
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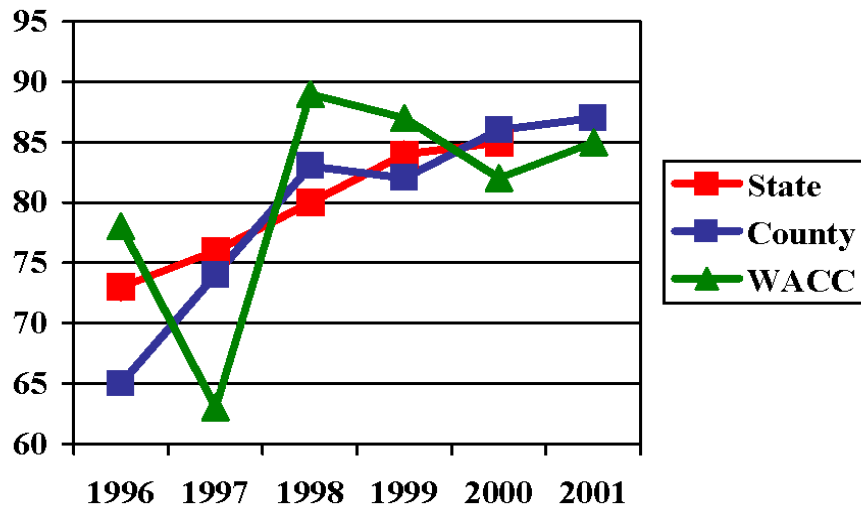
Fourth Grade Math



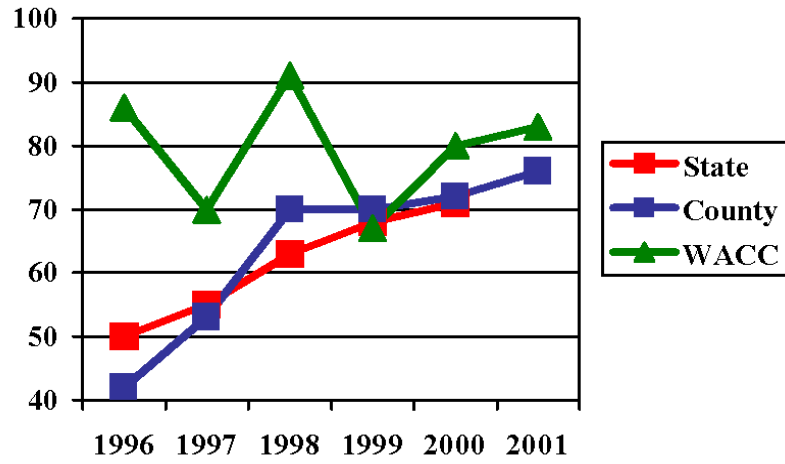
Fourth Grade Males



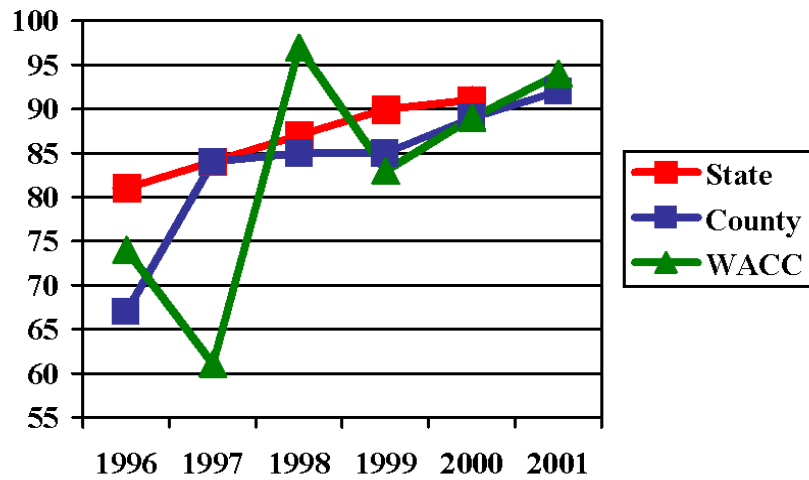
Fourth Grade Females



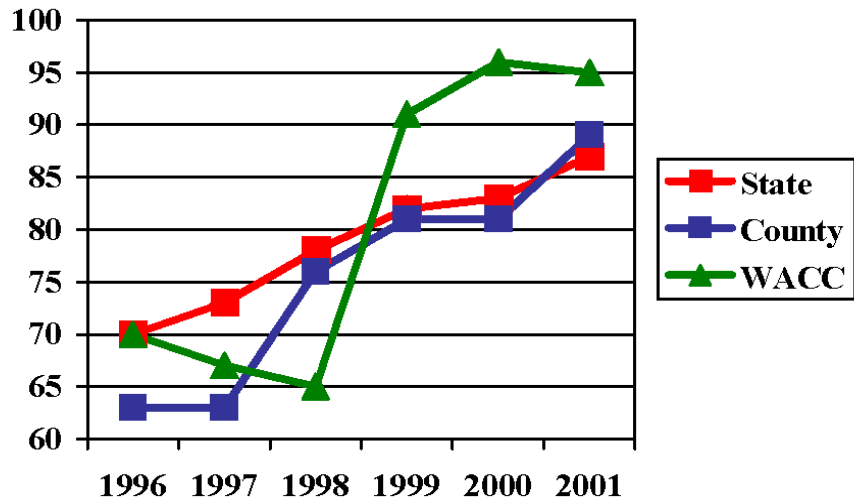
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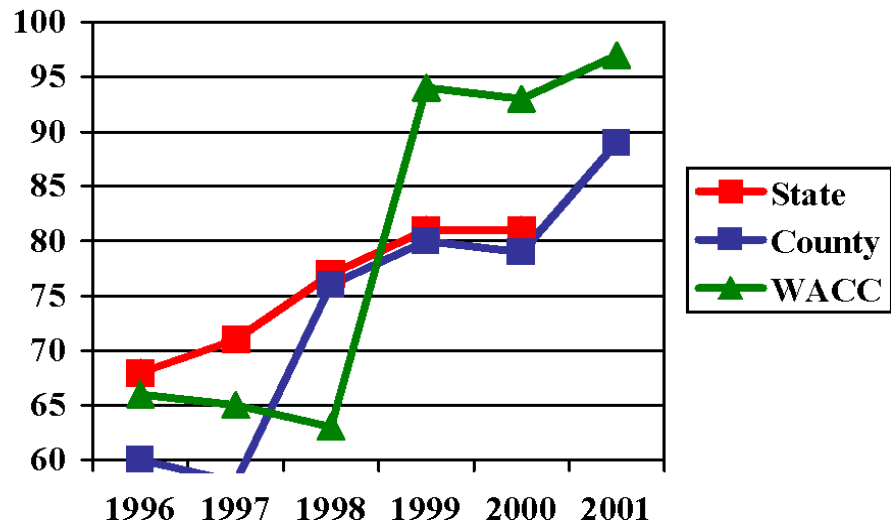
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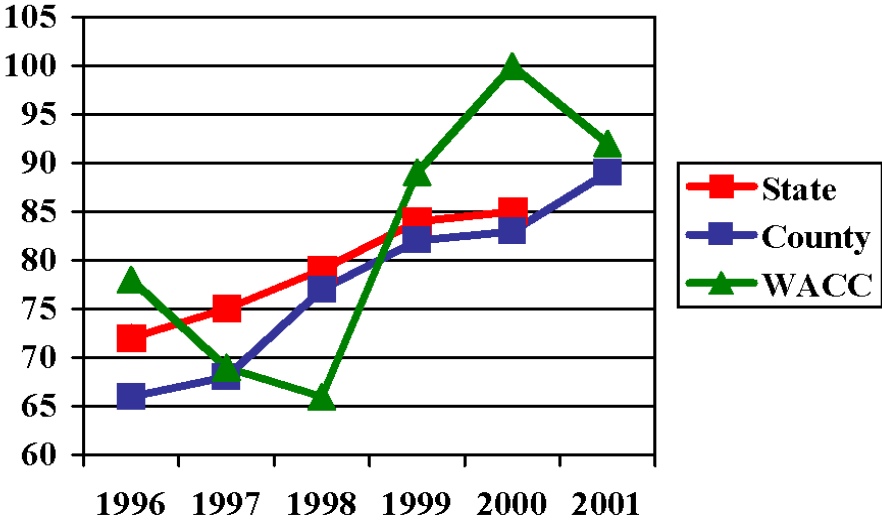
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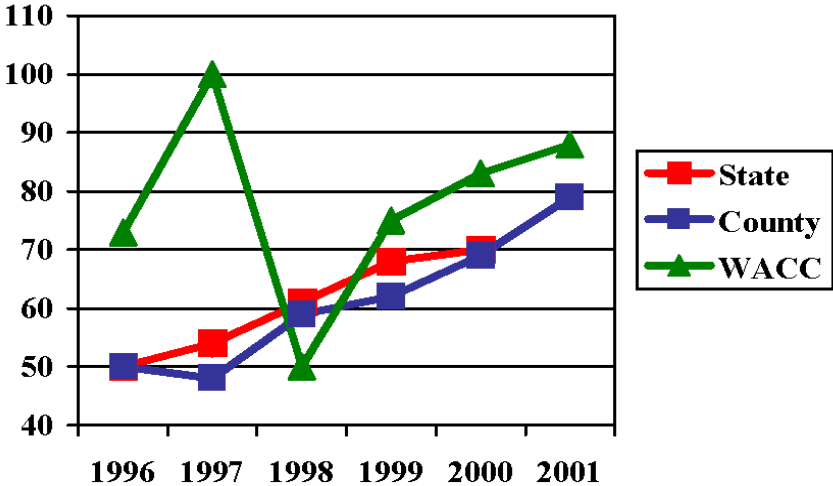
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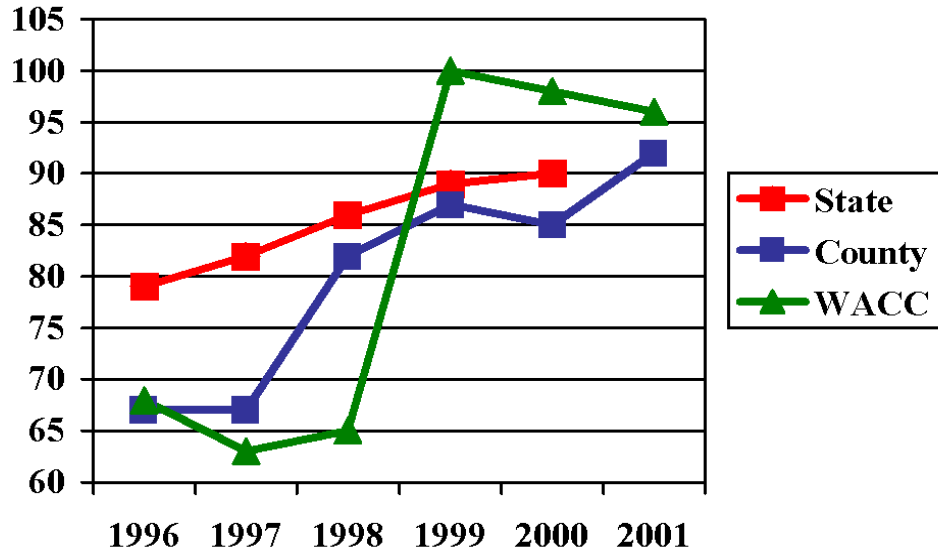
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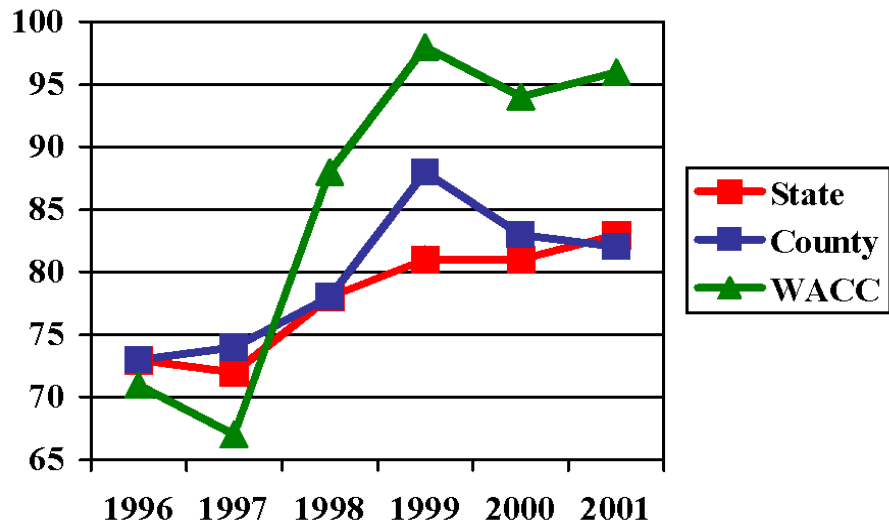
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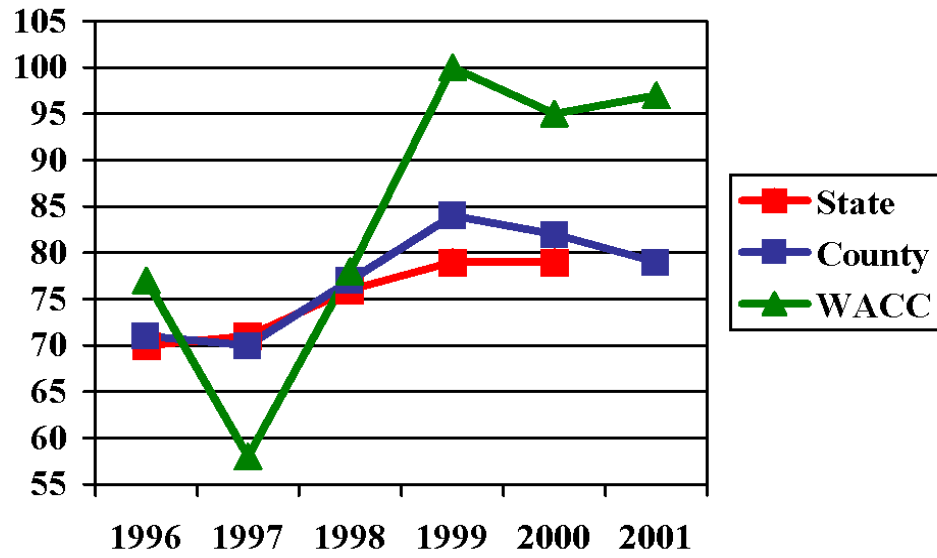
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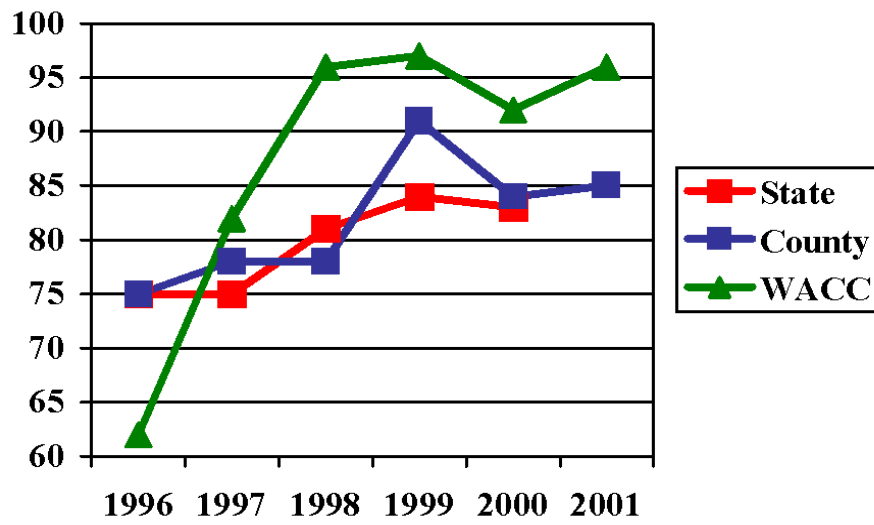
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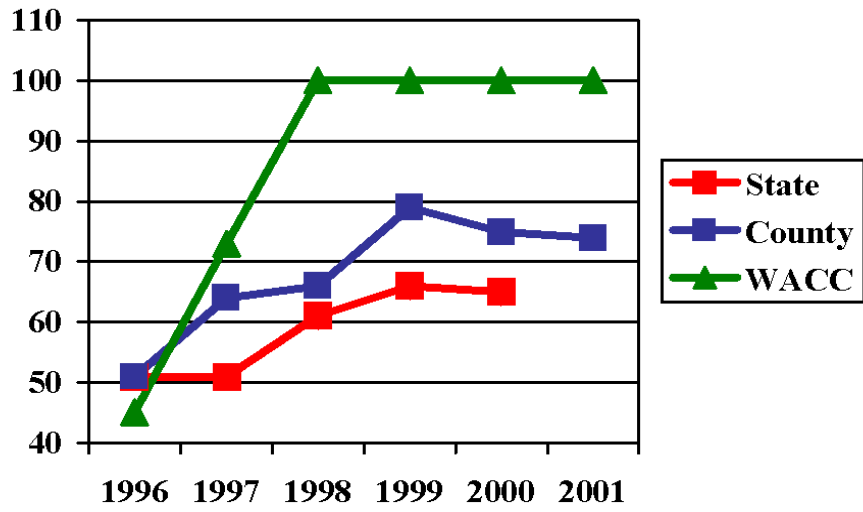
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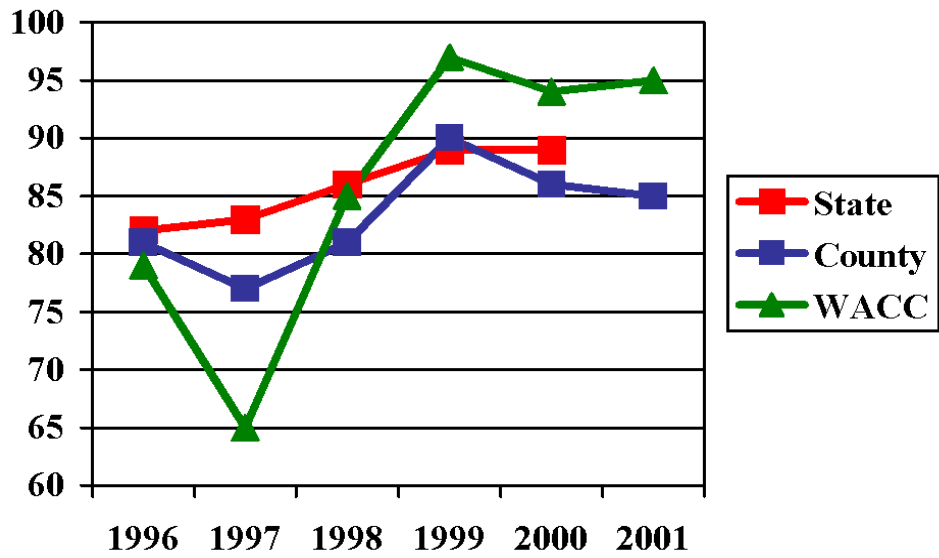
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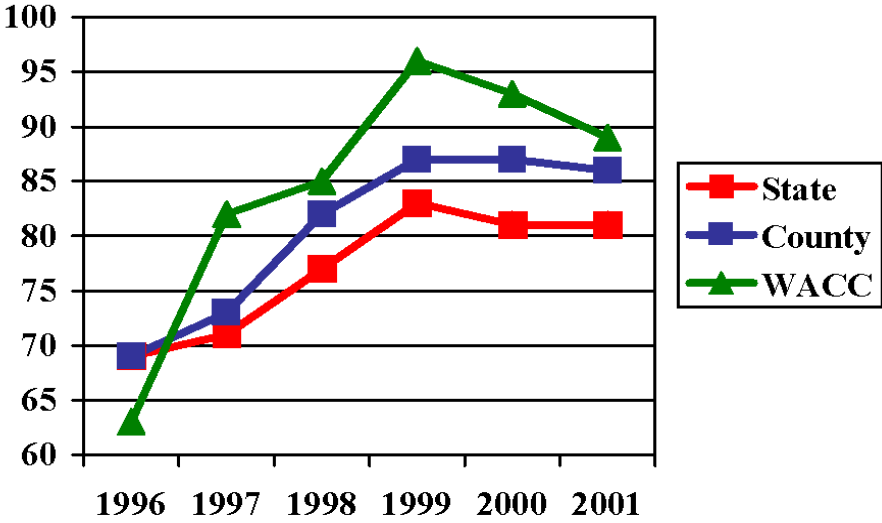
Sixth Grade Blacks



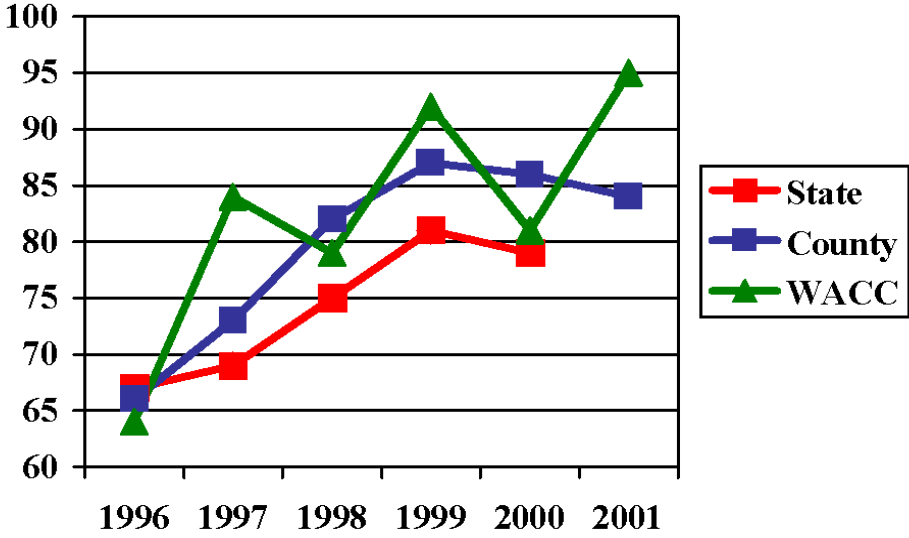
Sixth Grade Whites



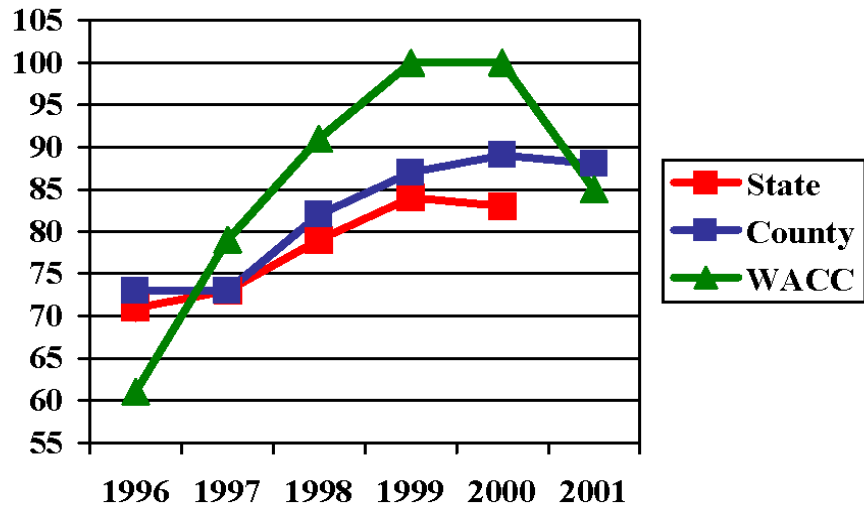
Seventh Grade Math



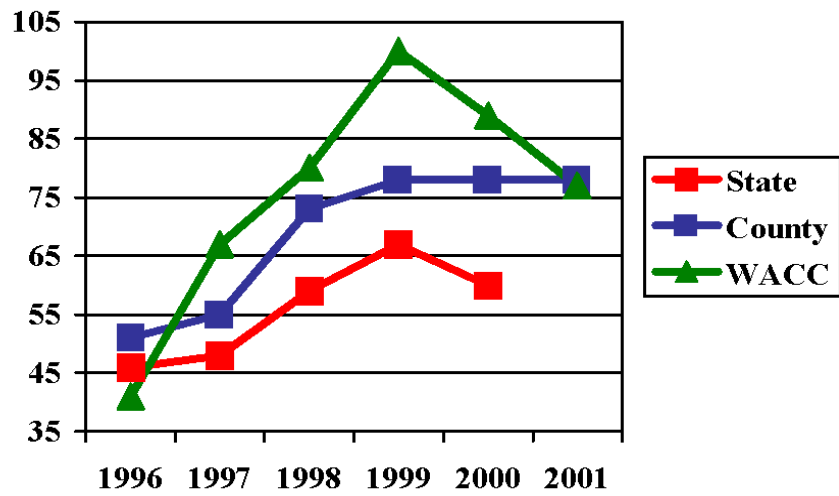
Seventh Grade Males



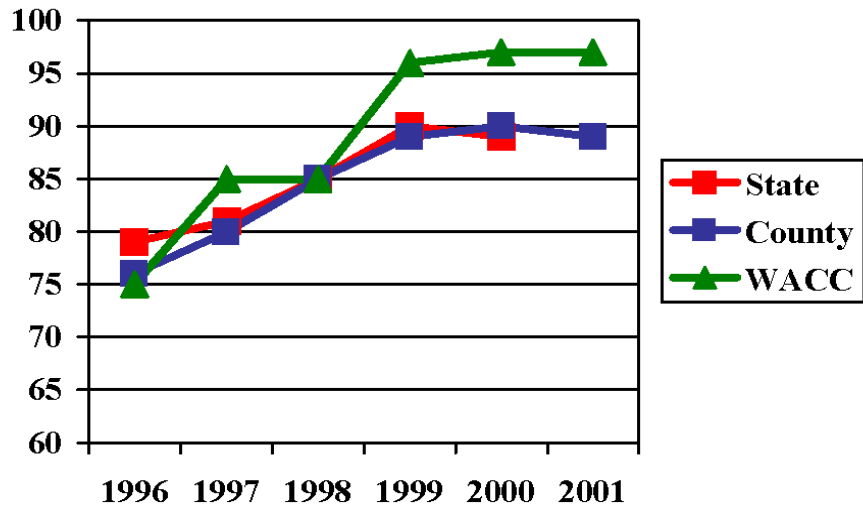
Seventh Grade Females



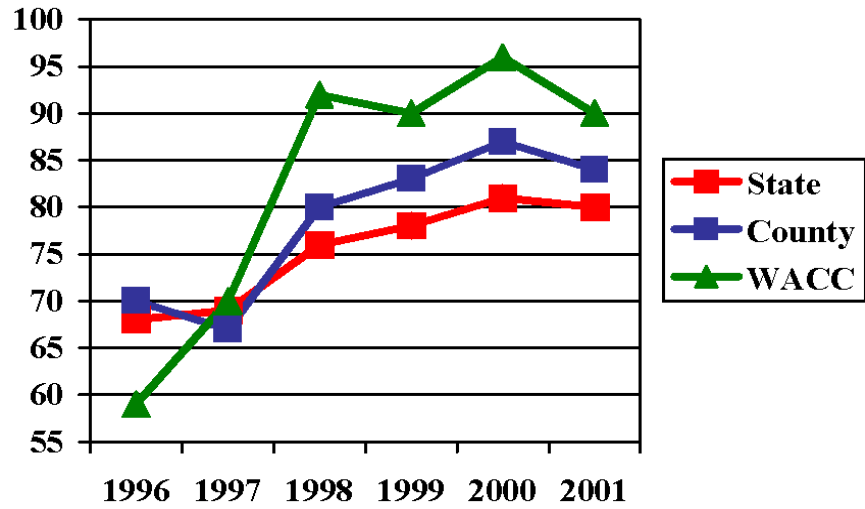
Seventh Grade Blacks



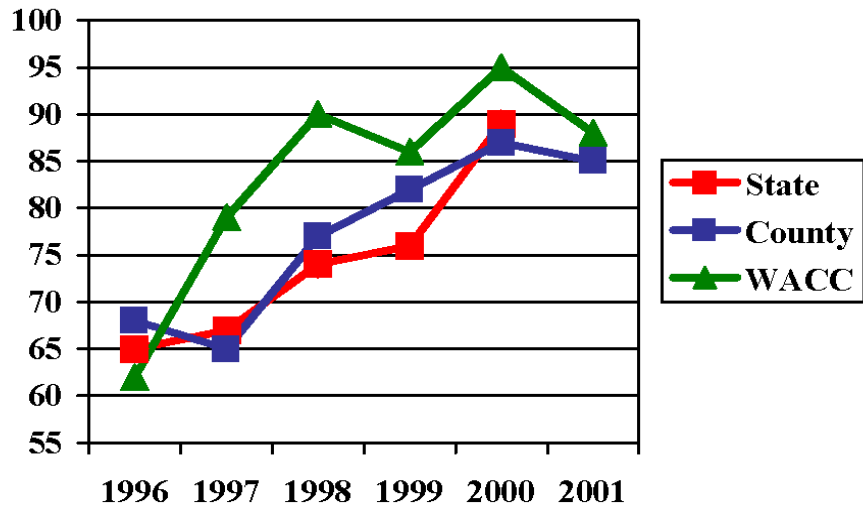
Seventh Grade Whites



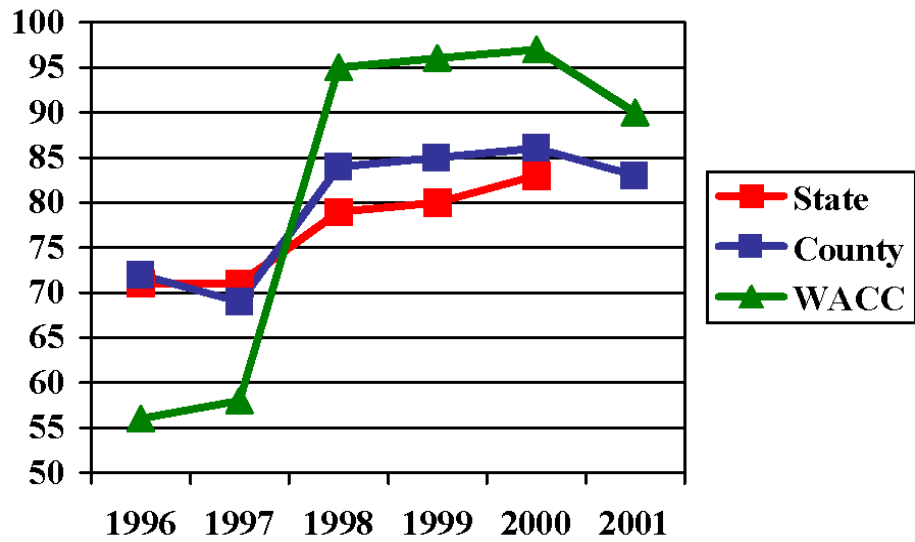
Eighth Grade Math



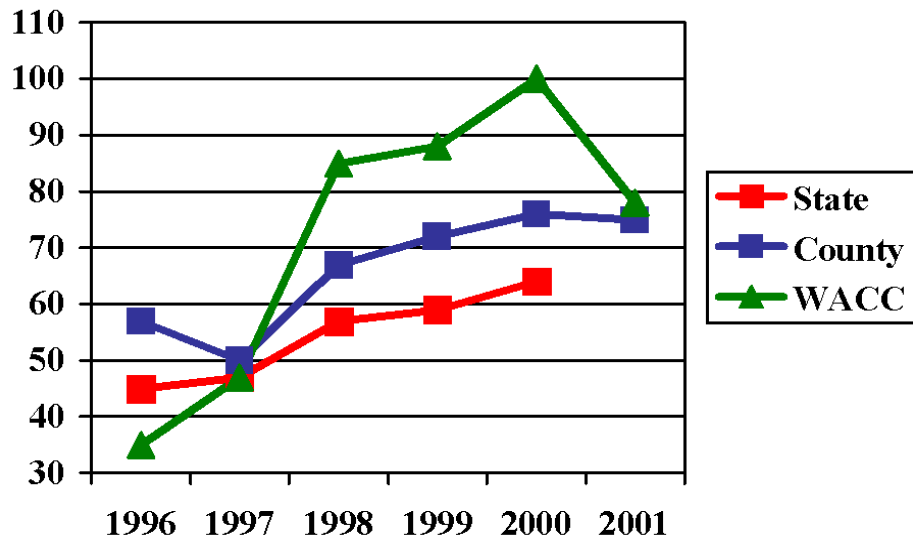
Eighth Grade Males



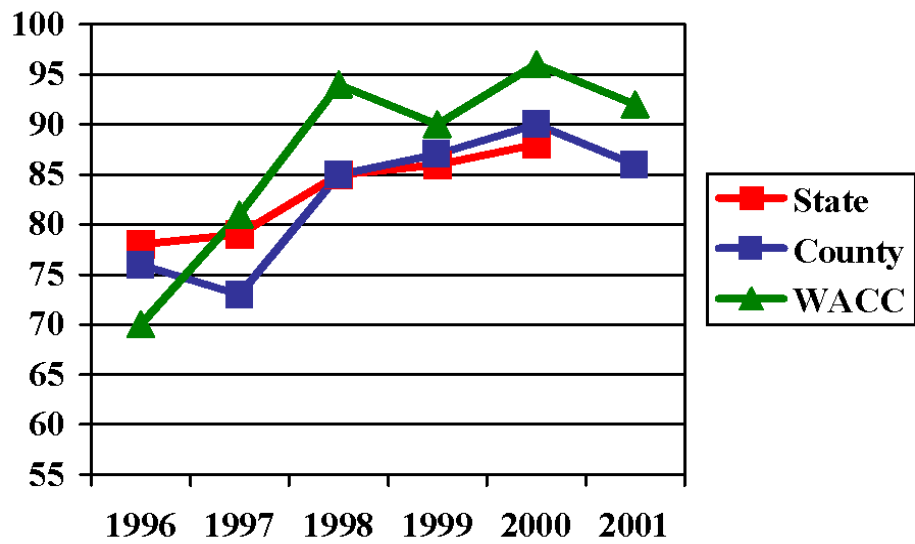
Eighth Grade Females



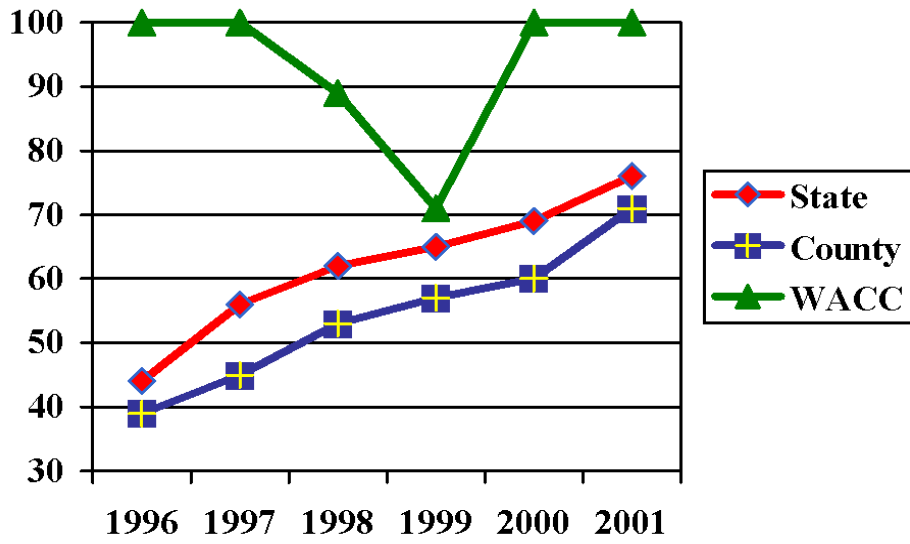
Eighth Grade Blacks



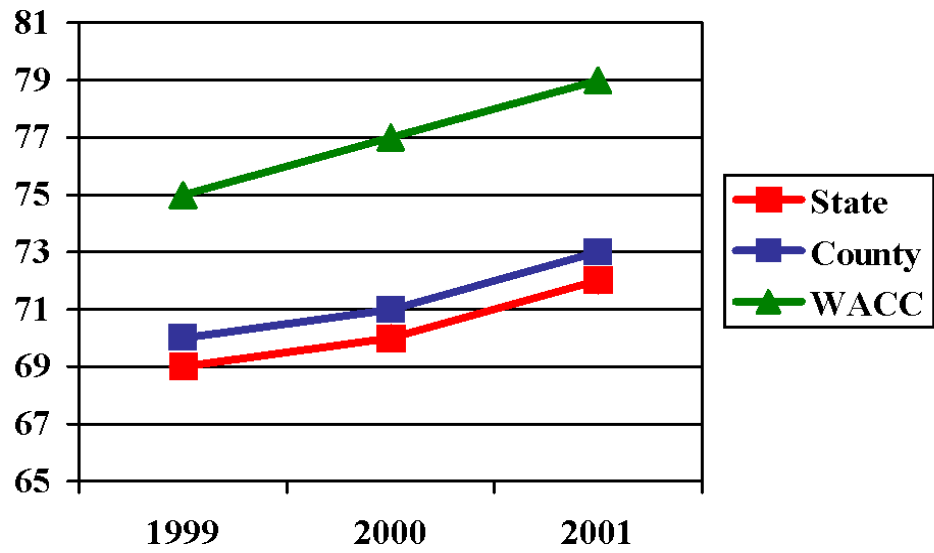
Eighth Grade Whites



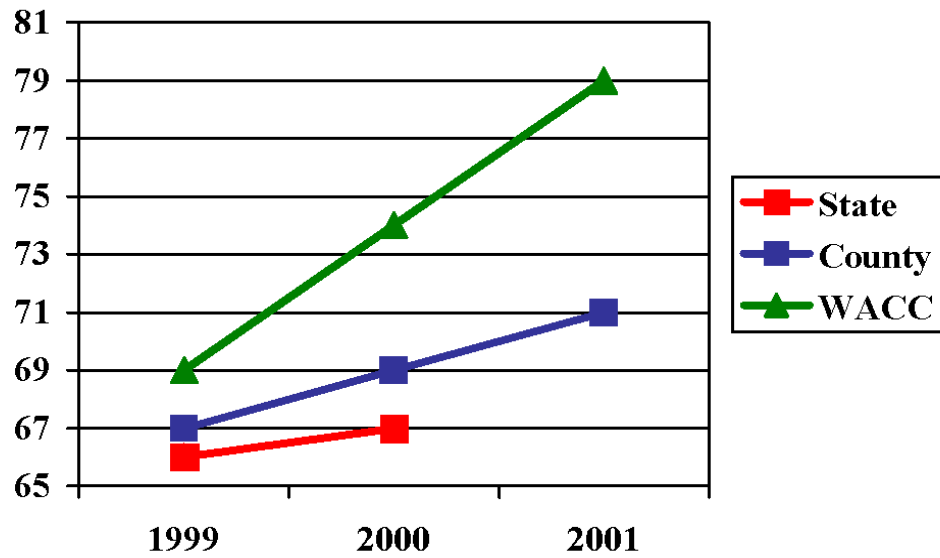
Algebra I



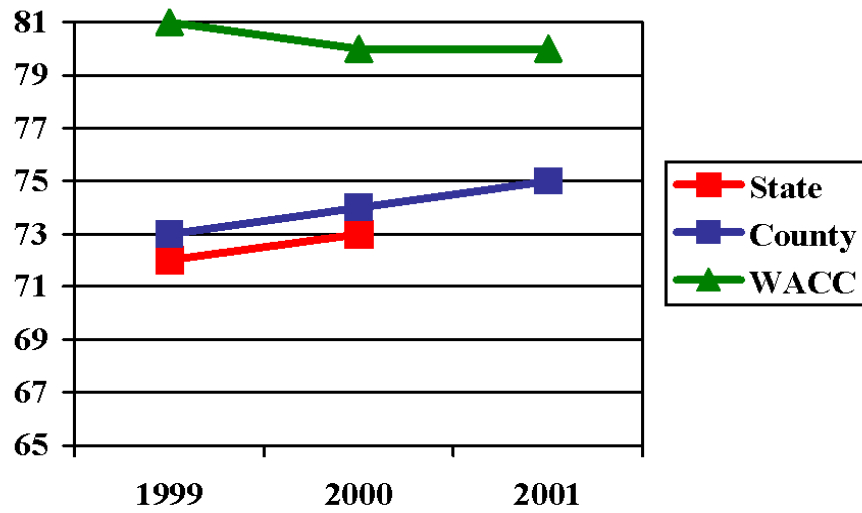
Composite Percent Proficient in Both Reading & Math



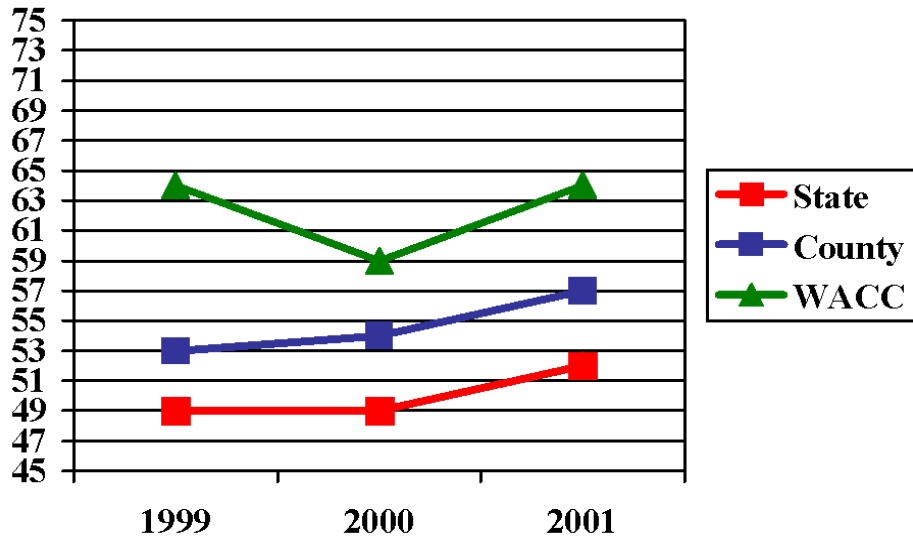
Composite Percent Proficient in Both Reading & Math Male



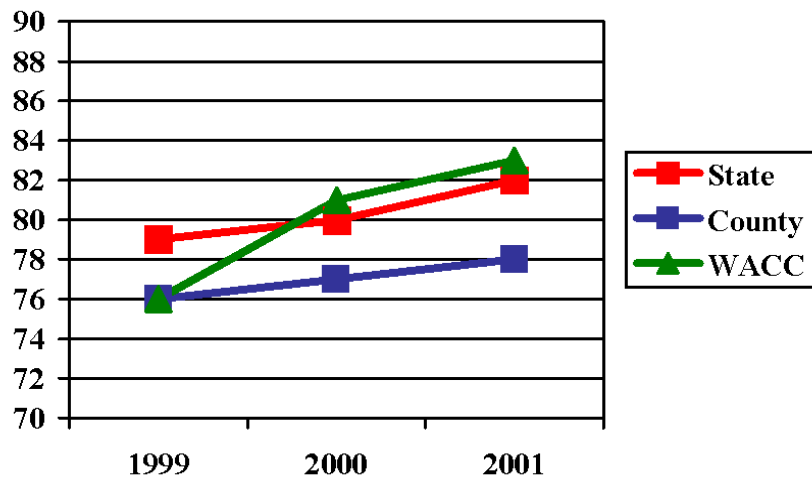
Composite Percent Proficient in Both Reading & Math Female



Composite Percent Proficient in Both Reading & Math Black



Composite Percent Proficient in Both Reading & Math White



CHAPTER 2

FOCUS AND EXPLANATION OF THE DATA

The major purpose of the graphs is to show how Waccamaw School has steadily improved its scores on end of grade tests in math and reading during the last six years. Although there are some fluctuations during some years, the scores did steadily increase. By reviewing the overall scores it is evident that this school successfully achieved year after year. As previously stated, Waccamaw School has been an Exemplary School for three years (1996, 1997 and 1998) and a School of Distinction from 1999 to 2001. The graphs show how this school has steadily met and exceeded both the state and the county in scores on the areas tested. Even though the graphs show and explain a lot, they are not the most revealing indicators of how Waccamaw has steadily achieved these several years.

The primary focus of this study was information taken from one on one interviews with the teachers and other staff members at site. These interviews were conducted during planning periods, workdays and after school hours, whenever the teachers or staff members could find the time. Each interview took an average of an hour to an hour and a half. I began interviewing in September of 2001 and concluded in May of 2002. The same interview instrument was used with all stakeholders; it can be located at the end of this chapter.

Interviews with the faculty and staff were done informally in order to make the interview session as relaxed as possible. The sessions conducted with parents and community volunteers were more formally structured to emphasize the importance and magnitude of the data being obtained. The purpose of the interviews was to determine

what the factors were that led to the improved and consistent test scores that made Waccamaw School a success anomaly. Each stakeholder's input was carefully scrutinized and only those replies that were consistently repeated by every stakeholder were noted as possible factors. The interviews with the school's administration and central office personnel solidified those answers that led to the conclusions stated.

Figure 2

The Interview Instrument

To Teachers, staff, and stakeholders of Waccamaw School: This interview instrument will be used to gather data for a study of Waccamaw school. Your input will be most beneficial to the success of this study. Please answer each question as sincerely and accurately as you can.

- Q1. How successful do you feel Waccamaw School has been during the last five years?
- Q2. In what ways or in what areas would you consider it to be successful?
- Q3. How do you account for the successes you just mentioned? What do you think caused the successes or helped them along?
- Q4. Do you believe that interpersonal relations --- for example, between teachers, or between teachers and assistants ... contribute to the successes at Waccamaw School?
- Q5. How would you describe the way Waccamaw School is managed? How are decisions made? What about the consistency of the rules and procedures, about their clarity?
- Q6. How much would you say that these features of management that were just discussed affect the success at Waccamaw School?
- Q7. Tell me about the relationship between Waccamaw School and the community. Tell me about the connection between businesses and Waccamaw School.... about churches and Waccamaw School. What other activities or organizations are connected or associated with Waccamaw School.
- Q8. Talk to me about the cultural diversity in the community here. Do you feel that diversity is increasing? Do you feel that diversity is becoming more of an issue?
- Q9. Tell me about the achievement of different groups.... i.e. girl's and boy minority children and non-minority children at Waccamaw School. Do you feel that Waccamaw School does anything to prevent or close and achievement gap?
- Q10. Do you feel that Waccamaw School has a mission? What do you feel that mission is? Do folks know about the mission and, if so, do they share in the mission?

Q11. Tell me about the leadership of Waccamaw School, its organization, and style?

Q12. Tell me about the curriculum at Waccamaw School, how it is organized e.g., clarity, practice, phonics, teachers' satisfaction with the curricula they use compared to what other teachers use. Does the curriculum prepare children in early elementary for upper elementary, middle school, and high school?

Q13. The final question asked of the stakeholders was as follows: What did they believe to be the decisive factors of Waccamaw's success, and summarize that success and its accountability to its stakeholders.

These interview questions were created on the basis of recent research data on the factors that influence school achievement. The format of these questions was to specifically and intensively examine the factors attributed to the development of successful schools.

Examples of prior research are listed:

- Promoting Managerial Involvement in Instructional Improvement (Sulzer-Azaroff and Gillat, 1994.)
- School Leadership and Performance: a Social Network Approach (Friedkin and Slater. 1994). (Laumann and Pappi, 1976.)
- A Case Study of Empowering Principal Behavior (Reitzug, 1994.)
- Working with Families: A cross-cultural perspective (Salend & Taylor, 1993.)
- At- risk students and school restructuring (Kershner & Connolly,1991.)
- The relationship between families and schools (Goldring & Shapira, 1993.)
- School based management, Team management (Lindelow and Heynderickx 1991)
- School Climate (Lindelow,Mazzarella,Scott,Ellis and Smith 1991)
- The Growth of Assessment (Madaus and Tan, 1993)

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH STUDY AND DESIGN

This case study was designed and conducted to identify the factors that appear to have contributed to the success of Waccamaw School. This school has been labeled an educational anomaly because it does not fit the normal criteria for schools that have experienced the same level of successes over an extended period of time on a consistent basis. For example, three years Exemplary School, three years, North Carolina School of Distinction, 1999-2000 National Title One School, and 1999-2000 National Blue Ribbon School. This school is seventy-two percent free and reduced lunches, only one out of fifteen of its parents have post high school education, three out of five of its parents finished high school, and forty-one percent of the community live below the national poverty level. These figures make Waccamaw a success anomaly. It was hoped that the information gained from the study would enable stakeholders to work in a more focused fashion to sustain the factors that account for this school's success. Moreover, the findings might be useful more generally to assist planners and school leaders in other schools to increase student achievement. Furthermore the concept of k-8 schools could possibly be renewed based on the success of this school.

Thirty-three individuals, all primary stakeholders in this school, were interviewed intensely. Their responses were recorded, scripted, and some (such as students) were given take-home questions so that they could think about their replies and write their answers. Data from the school's archives, newspapers, and educational journals were also collected to supplement the interview data. Some interviews were conducted two and three times to clarify answers from the first round. The interview questions were

developed so that the stakeholders could plainly understand exactly what they were being asked and the purpose of and for the data. All interview questions were formulated to be clear and unbiased. The questions were developed from a format used in a previous class and approved by my thesis advisor and Dr. J. Gearhart who agreed to be my on site reader.

CHAPTER FOUR

QUALITATIVE DATA AND RESEARCH ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the data from the research questions will be discussed. The question will be stated and the analyzed response of the interviewees will be discussed. Once again, all respondents are primary stakeholders.

Question number one asked; “How successful do you feel Waccamaw School has been over the last five years?” One hundred percent of the respondents said they felt Waccamaw had been very successful. Being very adamant in their replies, they said they felt that the success this school is having shows the all out effort by the teachers and staff at this school. A comment of one teacher was that “as hard as everyone here works to get these kids prepared, success is virtually guaranteed.” All respondents agreed that the success this school is having has been a joint effort of everyone involved: teachers, children, and the school community.

Question number two asked, “In what areas would you consider Waccamaw School to be successful?” The majority of the respondents, eighty-five percent, said test scores. They referred to the state’s ABC’s of Public Education as the standard of that success. Students are tested on state mandated tests and the results of those tests determined whether or not the school meets or exceeds predetermined proficiencies. The other fifteen percent of the stakeholders said that student conduct and school safety are also areas in which this school has been successful. Waccamaw School takes pride in its rural, community setting. The people here believe this to be one of the school’s greatest assets. Question three asked, “How you would account for those successes that were just mentioned and what do you think caused the success or helped it along?” The

overwhelming majority stated that the most decisive key to Waccamaw's' success in respect to its academic accomplishments were, "time on task" and the "hard work and commitment" of the faculty. This includes enhancement classes that teachers did during their planning periods, after school tutoring done by individual teachers and in the Communities In Schools program, and also one-on-one math and reading sessions by community volunteers. Ninety percent of those interviewed said that the amount of time students spent on task and in remediation was the most important factor in those students performance on end of grade and also during the year. Other factors stated by parents and teachers were smaller class sizes and the open lines of communication between parents and teachers.

Question four; do you believe that interpersonal relations, for example, between teachers, or between teachers and assistants ...contribute to successes at Waccamaw School. After clarifying exactly what this question was asking and explaining to some of the respondents what interpersonal relationships are, I received some mixed replies. The parents said they felt that the relations between teachers and the administrative staff were excellent. The administration said that for the most part relations were good. About seventy percent of the teachers interviewed stated that relations among teachers and the administration were great. Unfortunately, only one out of two felt that teacher to teacher relations were great. A number of reasons were stated. These included extra duty assignments like coaching, sponsoring clubs, and chairing committees. The greatest dissent came from teachers and their aides on the lower levels. Only one of three said that they worked really well together. The biggest factors were workloads and breaks. Even though there maybe some conflicts of personalities, all those interviewed agree that

above all else the education of Waccamaw's children is always first and foremost. One hundred percent of all stakeholders interviewed stated that this school's morale is much, much better than it was six or seven years ago, and the success that this school is having is a direct reflection of this school's higher morale. A comment by one of the respondents put everything in perspective. He said, "The success of any institution is ninety-five percent of the time a direct reflection of the leadership of that institution. In essence the attitudes of the subordinates reflect the attitude of the leadership."

Question five asks; how would you describe the way Waccamaw School is managed, how are decisions made. What can you tell me about the consistency of rules and procedures, about their clarity? All respondents stated that for the most part rules and procedures were clear and precise. At any time if there was a question pertaining to any rules, they were quickly addressed by the administration. Teacher responses were mostly directed towards rules and procedures involving discipline policies and procedures. The principal states that even though there are rules and procedures for practically every situation, they are only used as a guide and the circumstances surrounding each event are given careful consideration. All respondents stated that they were pleased with the way this school is managed. Typically referred to as site-based, all rules and procedures other than those set by local, state, or the federal government are determined by the school's site team. This site team also handles any projects or events that involve the school's faculty and staff. The site team also develops the school improvement plan which is in turn voted on for approval by the staff at this school. In circumstances involving community affairs there is also a community school advisory board which is made up of representatives from the school's community.

Question number six; “How much would you say that these features of management that were just discussed affect success at Waccamaw School?” All school and central office administration along with over sixty percent of others interviewed stated that the school’s vision and mission statements best answered this question. The vision states, “It is our goal to create a learning environment that embraces each student’s social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs. By creating a model school, we are committed to holding high expectations and utilizing innovative approaches to teaching and learning that will ensure the success needed to prepare students for the future in a highly diverse and competitive technological society.” Waccamaw's mission (which the principal stated) embodies the true ethical character of the teaching staff: “It is the mission of Waccamaw School to provide equitable, positive learning experiences that will enable all stakeholders to become productive citizens.” The fact that this school is site-managed, somewhat gives compromise to the administration’s management style. But everyone does agree that whatever it is, it’s working. Working cooperatively with families and community members, this school will always strive to be an inspiration and motivation for generations to come. Waccamaw’s stance has been proactive rather than reactive. All stakeholders agreed that the school’s vision/mission emphasize the direction and purpose of the people who manage this school in all aspects of its functions. All stakeholders stated their genuine belief in Waccamaw's’ mission to ensure that all children succeed.

Question seven asks; “Tell me about the relationship between Waccamaw School and the community. Tell me about the connection between businesses, churches, and other civic organizations affiliated with Waccamaw School.” As stated by the principal,

Waccamaw School has had tremendous support from the community, area churches, and civic organizations. Twelve churches have adopted the school; some churches have even gone so far as to adopt entire grade levels or individual classrooms. Along with several civic organizations such as Calabash and Shallotte VFW, the Shallotte Lions Club, Communities in Schools, the Optimist Club, the Waccamaw School Alumni Association and numerous other clubs and businesses, these organizations supply this school with a wealth of time, knowledge, funds, and materials that assist the faculty and staff in providing Waccamaw's children with a sound quality education." Ninety percent of the stakeholders interviewed stated that the community participation at this school is second to none. It's as though people are just eager to be affiliated with this school, which is justifiably so, since the reputation of this school has traveled all over the country. In our interviews, the principal continuously reiterated how he receives calls daily from educators and parents all over the country inquiring about Waccamaw School. As one parent stated, "I just want to be a part of a good thing not only for my children but for all those other parents who don't take an active roll in their children's education."

Question number eight asks the stakeholders to tell about the cultural diversity in the community. Is it increasing? Is it becoming more of an issue? Of all the questions asked, this one seemed the most difficult for the majority of the respondents. This may be due to the fact that most people just don't like to discuss ethnic or cultural issues. After a lengthy discussion about ethnic issues and how we need to deal with present and future issues, most of the people interviewed opened up for some serious and sincere answers to the questions asked. Most teachers stated that they felt the issue of cultural diversity is handled well at Waccamaw. The population at this school is nineteen percent

African-American, nine percent Hispanic, seventy-one percent white, and one-half percent multi-racial. Of these the Hispanic population has grown steadily from year to year, from about two percent in 1990 to about nine percent now. According to county census projections it will exceed the African-American population in a few years. An important fact about the rising Hispanic population is that at one time these people were migratory. Now they are settling down, finding jobs in sectors other than agriculture. The area that surrounds Waccamaw provides some of the least expensive housing and land sales in the county and a lot of people are moving in. Most stakeholders have acknowledged that we are in a new millennium and we must embrace our cultural differences and allow them to work for us. Most people interviewed believed that our future lies in the ability to learn from the past so those mistakes that have already been made will not be repeated. Of course, everyone doesn't have the same ideals, but they'll either have to get with the program or risk being left behind or more specifically they'll be asked to find somewhere else to go.

Question number nine: "Tell me about the achievement of different groups, specifically minorities and gender. Is Waccamaw doing anything to close the achievement gap between minorities and non-minority children?" When asked this question all the respondents with the exception of school personnel, needed to have the concept of an "achievement gap" explained. This was not a surprise. Most people are not aware that such a thing exists, which may be why school systems don't address this very real problem as much as it should be. Needless to say, they couldn't give a valid answer. The teachers and administrators at Waccamaw acknowledged that the achievement gap had been discussed in faculty meetings and at workshops. However,

when it pertains to Waccamaw, there is little evidence that an achievement gap does exist between minority children or children of different genders. Some disparity does exist especially in third grade, but as explained earlier third grade scores are somewhat misleading. Also, these scores are lower all around not just between genders or ethnic groups. On the contrary, in some grade levels, the minority scale exceeds both local and state mainstream scales. In some instances you also have to look at the number of students that were tested. The data that was taken from most interviews referred to the state curriculum and how it is taught, since it is the educational instrument all teachers who teach in North Carolina public schools should be using. All teachers interviewed acknowledged that they were aware of the statistical data relating to the achievement gap between Caucasian and African-American children, especially African-American males.

Personal individual education plans or, "I. E. Ps", was developed for every student, with special emphasis placed on those labeled to be "at risk." When asked why should every student have an I. E. P., both the administration and the guidance counselor stated that all students are "at risk" at some time. A student who scores in the fourth percentile is as much at risk as that student who scores a borderline three. If that "four" student loses focus and scores a three that could do more because that is not expected, whereas, the "three" student is assigned remediation and everything else is done to help that student improve. Their scores should and nine times out of ten, do improve. This is why teachers and administrators should concentrate the majority of their remediation efforts on the two to three level groups. According to the principal at Waccamaw, this has been another factor in Waccamaw's success. This is also a major

reason there is so little discrepancy between gender and minority achievement at this school.

Question ten asked the stakeholder, “Do you feel Waccamaw School has a mission? What do you feel that mission is and do you believe folks at this school shared in the mission”? One hundred percent of the respondents to this question stated that they know this school has a mission, and that all of the stakeholders share in the mission. Most could not remember word for word, but they did acknowledge that the school's mission is posted in every classroom and other visible places around the school. Every student receives a school printed calendar and the school's mission statement is on the second page. Each monthly newsletter has the school's mission printed on the first page. Does everyone share in the mission?

This question can be best answered by examining this school's successes, the magnitude of community support and involvement, and the dedication and commitment of its teachers. The students know this also. Every student that was interviewed, current and past, stated that they felt everyone's goal at this school was to ensure student success, which is Waccamaw's mission.

“Question eleven asks, "Describe the leadership of Waccamaw School.” Seven years ago when the previous principal elected to retire and the Brunswick County School board had to select a new principal for Waccamaw, the folks in the community started circulating a petition to promote Terry Chestnutt who was then an assistant principal. Practically all the staff and a huge majority of the community including the local school advisory board supported this. The rest is history. It was stated by the assistant superintendent of curriculum that followers often take on the persona of their leaders and

in this case this must be true. It seems that the teachers and staff at Waccamaw have taken on the personality of being “child advocates”. This is what the principal at Waccamaw sees himself as being. He stated during his interview that if you are a true educator there should be nothing more important than the success of the children you are responsible to and for. To do what’s best for the children, and to genuinely want to help people is the stance the leadership at this school takes.

Question twelve in the interview process asked about the curriculum at Waccamaw School, how it is organized, it’s clarity, and the use of programs such as phonics, direct instruction, cooperative and holistic learning, and other practices. It also asks about the overall teacher satisfaction with the curricula they use compared to what other teachers use.

There is no secret to what curriculum Waccamaw School follows as a public school. It has to follow the state curriculum just as other public schools in North Carolina. All teachers interviewed acknowledge this. The major differences that were ascertained from the interviews were the variety of strategies that the teachers at this school employ in order to stimulate and maintain the interest and focus of their students. Some used a variety of techniques depending on the intellectual level and the learning styles of their students. For example, student centered learning, phonics, and constant repetition drills are used in the pre-k through second grades. Direct instruction, inclusion, cooperative learning, and lecture practices are used in grades three through eight. All the enhancement classes use the direct instruction approach simply because those teachers feel the classical teaching approach gives the best results. Most of the parents interviewed didn’t know anything about teaching strategies or programs. They simply

said, "If the teachers are teaching, the children should be learning." All the teachers interviewed said that the curriculum provided by the state was clear and grade level appropriate, but they also said the state needs to come up with a better testing system other than the ones being used now. The students acknowledged the same feelings. In teaching the curriculum, the administration at Waccamaw stresses the importance of placing teachers in their best area of expertise. This insures the students are getting their optimal learning experience. These are examples of the little things, which in fact are huge factors in insuring that all children at this school are being given the opportunity to be successful.

The final question asked of the stakeholders was, "What do you believe are the decisive factors of a successful school and to summarize Waccamaw's success and it's accountability to its stakeholders." All stakeholders stated that time on task, implementation of strategies, proactive insight of the administration, and the commitment of a dedicated teaching staff placed in their individual spheres of expertise are the factors that stand out the most. You compound this with a community support system that is second to none, a safe nurturing environment that is conducive to learning, and most importantly a student body, which for the most part genuinely want to learn, the end product can only be success.

CHAPTER FIVE

ACCOUNTABILITY

It's one thing to achieve success one, two, maybe three years running, but six years is nothing short of phenomenal. Waccamaw School has been recognized as either "Exemplary" or as a school of "Distinction" for six years and this year makes the seventh year. The term "exemplary" is no longer used; it has been replaced as a school of high growth. How has this standard been maintained thus far? It has already been stated that, time on task, dedicated teachers, and a great community support system are the heart and soul of this school, but how is all this put into practice? What are the teachers teaching, how are they teaching and what are some of the programs and strategies used that have made this school so successful?

Let's start by addressing the curriculum, which is what children are supposed to be taught and what they are expected to learn. All public schools in North Carolina use the state mandated curriculum referred to as core courses. These as far as elementary and middle schools are math, communication skills (reading, writing, and language), science, and social studies. Grades three through eight are given an end-of-grade assessment test formulated by the state that measures each student's grade level knowledge according to a rubric based on student performance levels across the state. Grades four and seven take a state mandated writing test. The eighth graders take a state mandated Computer Skills test and some eighth graders who are in advanced studies take the Algebra 1 test.

These are the state mandated assessment tools that Waccamaw uses to gauge student knowledge and ability, but student success at Waccamaw extends far beyond this. As stated previously in this study, the children at this school are given everything they

could possibly need. Student tracking began back in 1994. Since the teaching staff at this school is so unique, the previous principal started tracking student progress from one grade level to the next. This helped to identify students who needed help. Every student who scored a borderline level three and below was assigned to enhancement in reading or math or both if they needed them. The teachers who were interviewed stated they use several different strategies in their regular classrooms.

In the tutoring and enhancement classes, the direct instruction model is used which seems to be very effective especially with the small numbers they have each day. Although students have to give up some enrichment classes, there have been no parent objections to this program. The enhancement classes begin the first week of school and after a five-week reassessment, we have three retired teachers who come in and do small group pullouts for grades four through eight until the week of the end-of-grade tests. This is basically the intervention plan at Waccamaw School. Every school in Brunswick County should and must have a similar plan in place to meet county and state guidelines.

There are no secrets to what Waccamaw does. Teachers are teaching the state curriculum. The programs being used are the same ones being used by the county and the state. These include Accelerated Reading, Accelerated Math, Write From the Beginning, Write From the Middle, Phonics, Learning Styles, Direct Instruction, and the Academically and Intellectually Gifted (A.I.G.) program. Before they can be accountable to the state or county, the teachers and staff at Waccamaw are accountable to the children and parents of the Waccamaw School District. Below is the most recent report put out by the State. It illustrates how Waccamaw has done this past year according to the State of

North Carolina's school performance report. Reports such as these also illustrate how accountability is maintained on the state, county, and school district level.

Figure 3a

| | Schools of Excellence | Schools of Distinction | Exemplary Growth | Expected Growth | Low Performing | No Recognition |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| DISTRICT Percent Number | 0 % 0 | 75% 3 | 25% 1 | 0% 0 | 0% 0 | 75% 3 |
| STATE Percent Number | 8.8% 52 | 37.7% 222 | 18.3% 108 | 27.5% 162 | 0.2% 1 | 54% 318 |

SCHOOL'S PERFORMANCE ON ABCs (2000-2001 School Year)

Figure 3b

| | Grade 6 Reading | Grade 6 Math | Grade 7 Reading | Grade 7 Math | Grade 8 Reading | Grade 8 Math |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| OUR SCHOOL Percent Number | 88.7% 47 | 96.2% 51 | 71.7% 33 | 89.1% 41 | 93.8% 45 | 89.6% 43 |
| DISTRICT | 66.2% | 82.3% | 77.3% | 86.1% | 86.1% | 83.8% |
| STATE | 70.6% | 82.9% | 75.3% | 81.3% | 83.3% | 79.4% |

STUDENT PERFORMANCE ON ABCs (2000-2001 School Year)

CHAPTER SIX

RESEARCH SUMMARY

In retrospect, this research reasserted what was already known throughout the Brunswick County Schools system. There are several ways a school can fail. Those factors can be individualized or grouped together. For a school or a school system to be successful there must be several factors leading to that success. Two of those factors are a unified effort by the stakeholders and a sincere and distinct commitment to the mission set forth by the school and the school system. A third factor is having the right leadership team to promote the school's vision and its mission.

All stakeholders at Waccamaw School, no matter how they are involved in its daily operation, have maintained a genuine interest in the success of this school. In all the interviews, the most repeated success factors that each individual stakeholder stated were: (first) student time on task, which includes regular class time, enhancement, study halls, student and volunteer tutoring, and after school programs. (Secondly) a faculty and staff that are totally committed to the schools vision/mission, this also includes the schools leadership standard of leading by example, and (thirdly) the overwhelming support of the community that the school serves, which includes residents, business and civic organizations, and volunteers. The support from outside the school environment has made Waccamaw a true community school.

This study also adds justification to the fact that when people truly take an interest and an active part in something, good things happen. But like a knight on a quest, the teachers and staff at this school are still pursuing success. Their ultimate goal is to be a school of excellence. According to Principal Terry Chestnutt who says, "Our ultimate

goal here at Waccamaw is to have ninety percent proficiency or better. That may seem unattainable to some people, but those same folks said eighty- five percent was impossible. Here at Waccamaw the belief is that if you work at something, it can be done. When you place children first and you do everything that can be done within perspective to guarantee success, the possibilities are limitless. Success may not happen the first year or even the next, but it will happen.” After conducting this study, reviewing the interviews, the schools archives, articles, and other data collected, I believe that the statement made by the principal reflects the spirit of those involved. Waccamaw Elementary School is truly an authentic anomaly and a genuine success story.

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