



Montana University System Writing Assessment

Delivering Data and
Professional Development



Writing Proficiency: A brief history

- 1995: Board of Regents (BOR) approves “Proficiency Admissions Requirements and Developmental Education in the MUS”
- 1998: OPI convenes Composition Transition Team
- 2000: BOR approves Joint K-16 Composition Standards Committee recommendation to field test a writing assessment
- 2001: Montana/ACT Field Test begins
- 2003: ACT and SAT announce new Essay Sections
- 2004: BOR passes Writing Proficiency Policy
- 2007: Writing Proficiency Policy applies to incoming freshmen
- 2007: BOR passes Composition Placement Policy, which applies to two-year and four-year campuses of the MUS
- 2009: Writing Proficiency Policy reaches “proficient levels” (3.5 or 7) for FULL admission to the four-year programs of the MUS

Policy defines Writing Proficiency

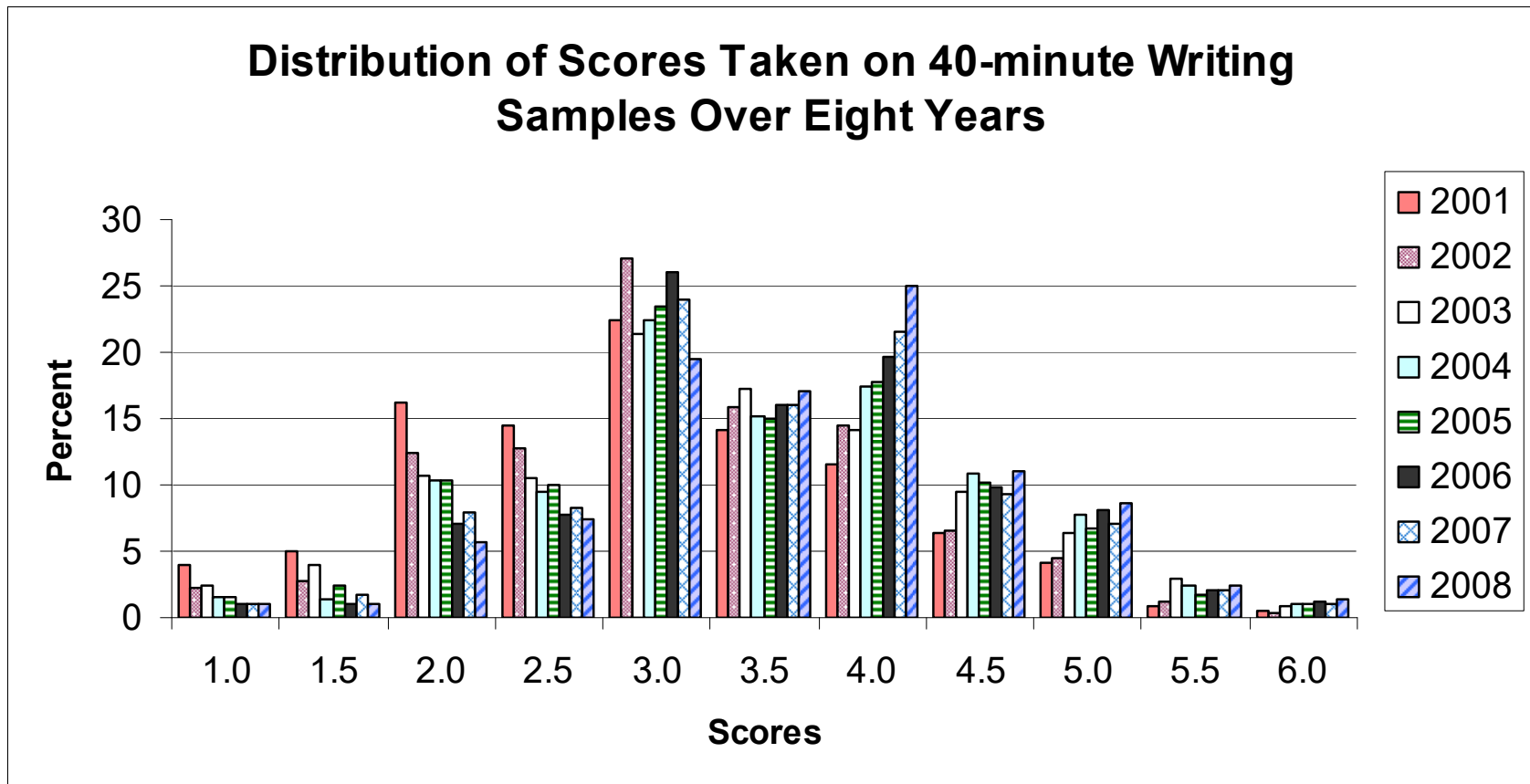
Any student granted **full** admission to a four-year degree program at MSU, MSU-B, MSU-N, UM, UM-Tech, or UM-W must satisfy a writing proficiency standard.

For Fall 2009 and the following years, students must earn a minimum score of:

- 7** on the Writing Subscore or 18 Combined English/Writing section of the Optional Writing Test of the ACT; or
- 7** on the Essay or 440 on the Writing Section of the SAT; or
- 3.5** on the Montana University System Writing Assessment; or
- 3** on the AP English Language or English Literature Examination.

With these minimum scores, students can be placed directly into college-level composition.

Percent of Proficient Essays Increasing Over Time





On a Six-Point Rubric, How is Proficiency Described?

- These papers state and support a position on the issue defined in the prompt with some elaboration or relevant explanation.
- Organization is generally clear.
- Sentences are usually well controlled, expression of ideas is usually clear, and word choice is appropriate for the topic.
- A competency with language is apparent, even though there may be some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.



Provisional Admission = Placement into Developmental Coursework

A student who has not yet demonstrated the ability to meet these standards may be admitted (without condition) to a two-year degree program or admitted **provisionally** to a four-year degree program on any campus of the Montana University System.



Composition Placement Policy

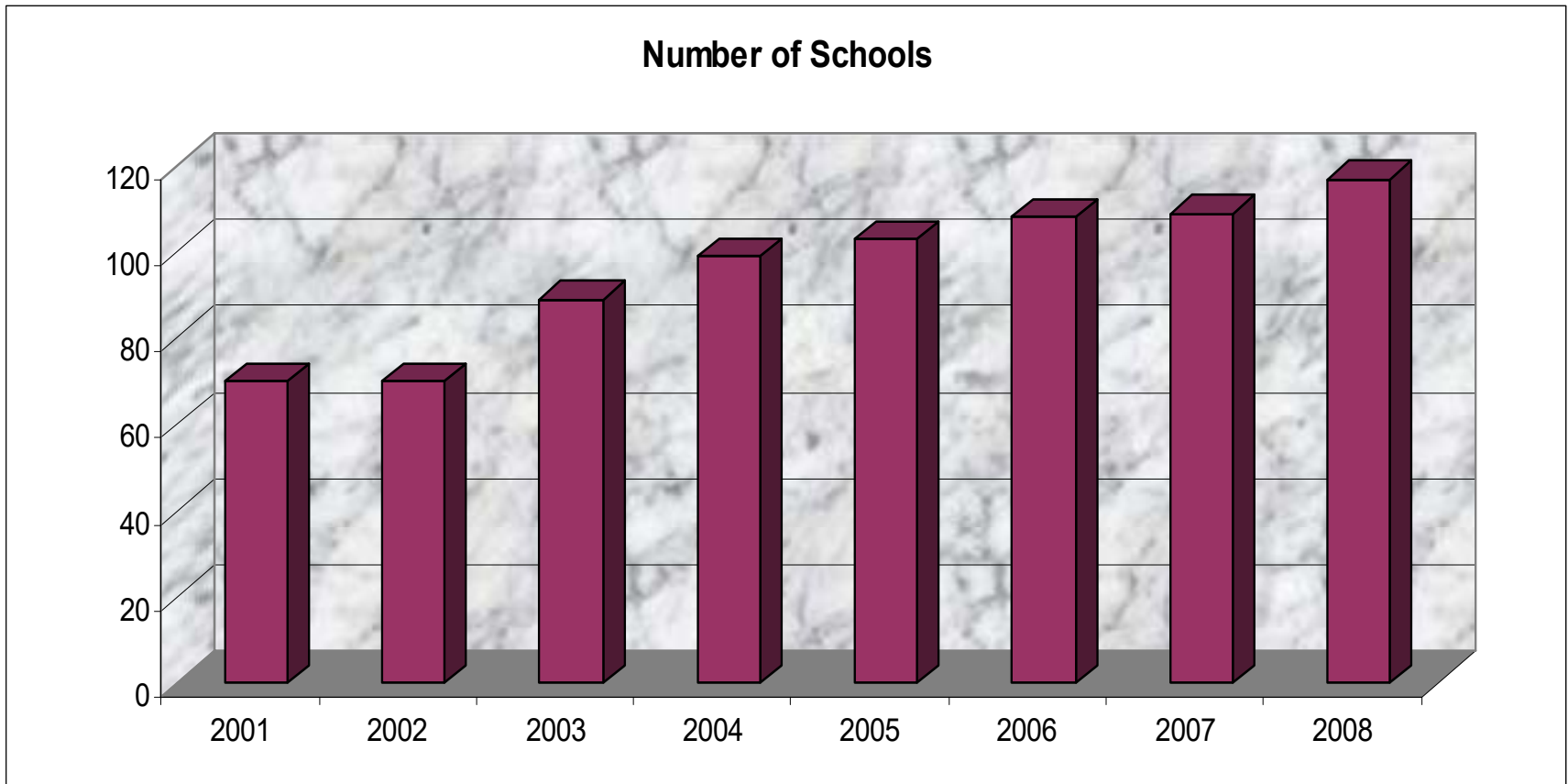
- Applies Policy 301.16 to exempted students and two-year students
- Aligns writing placement exams on campuses with the MUSWA
- Sets thresholds based on writing assessment taken in high school (MUSWA, ACT, SAT, AP):
 - students can skip on-campus placement exam with entry scores
 - students can challenge placement
 - students can be placed directly into developmental or advanced courses
- Aligns placement practices in two-year and four-year programs
- Eases transferability through consistent placement practices



The Montana University System Writing Assessment (MUSWA)

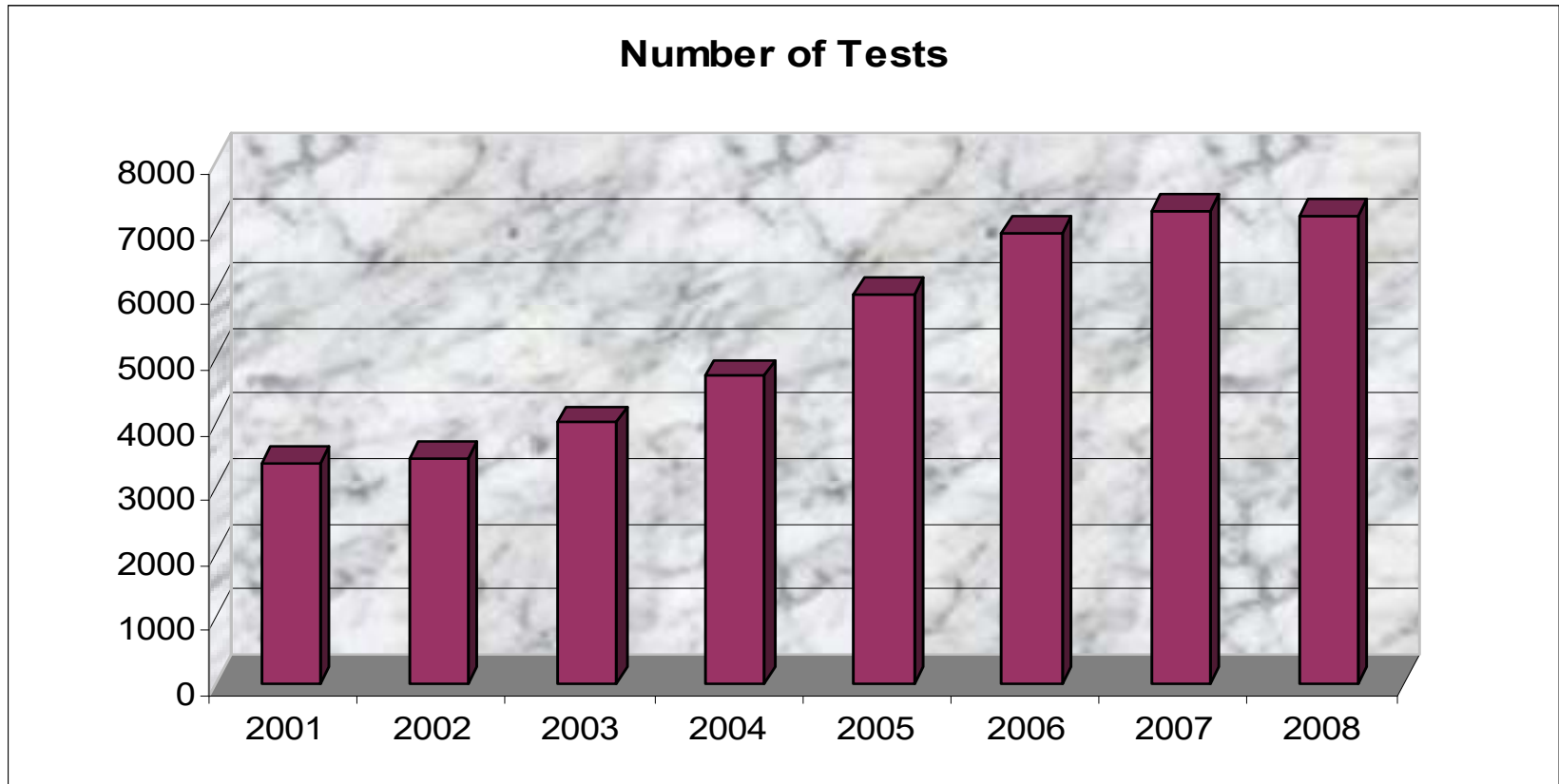
- Voluntary Participation
- Collaboration of K-12 and Higher Education
- Professional development
 - To clarify and share standards across levels
 - To improve curriculum and instruction
 - To bring consistency to grading and placement practices
 - To establish networks of learning communities

Voluntary Participation Increasing



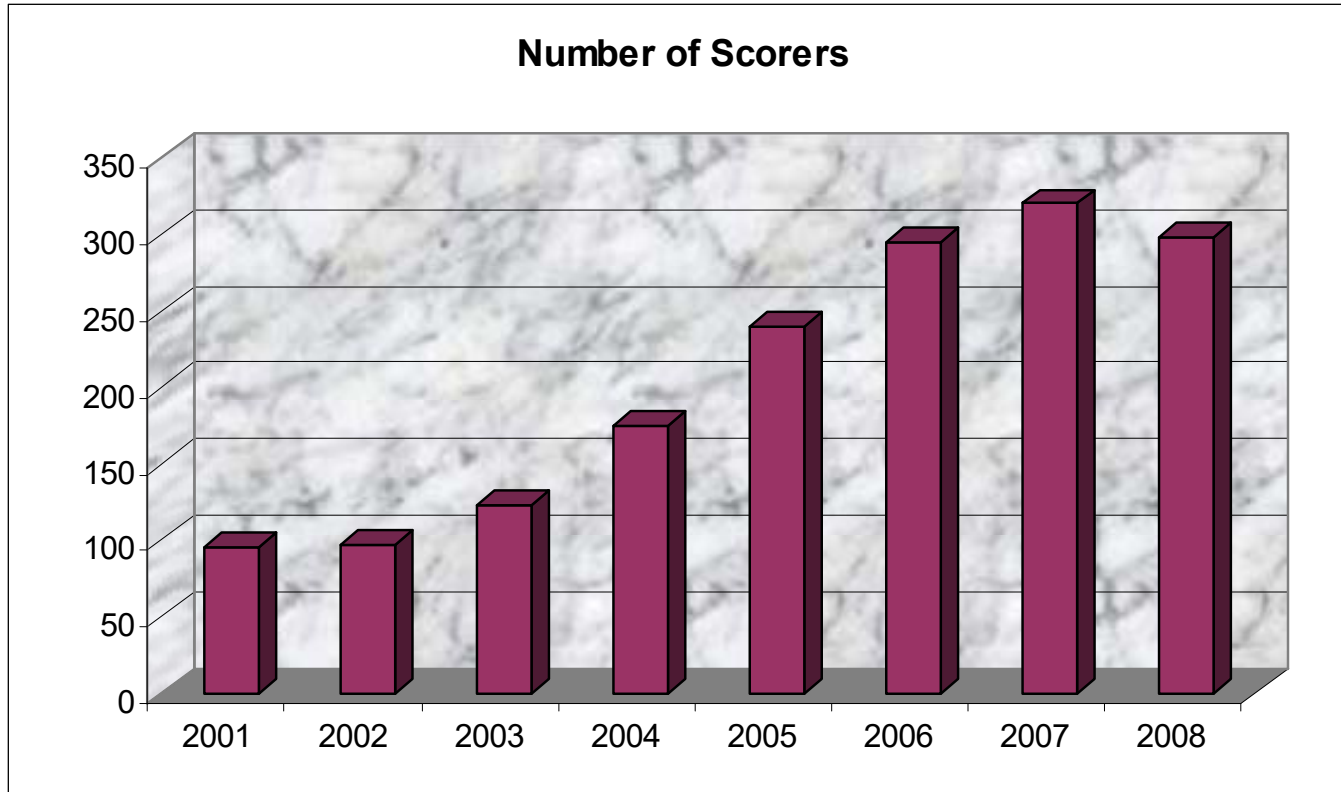
MUSWA is voluntarily used in 69% of Montana's 170 High Schools.

71% of Junior Class Tested in 08



In 2007, MUSWA reported 7,270 scores; ACT reported 6,066 scores, and SAT reported 2,873 scores for Montana students.

K-12 and College Staff Collaborate to Score



In 2001-02, Writing Workshops were held in three sites; in 2003, five sites; in 2004-06, seven sites; and 2007-08, eight sites.



What Do Teachers get from the MUSWA?

- Student, class, school data
- Analysis of writing strengths and weaknesses
- Regional collaboration
- OPI renewal units or college credits
- Sharing of standards, curriculum, and instructional practices across K-16
- Alignment of placement and admission practices
- Opportunity to pre-test students on WebWriters

2008 School Data

- 21 schools had average scores of 4.0 or above, compared to 13 in 2007
- 2008's highest scoring schools had averages of 4.2 – 4.6
- Awards of Merit went to 31 schools:
 - 13 C schools (4.0 – 4.6)
 - 7 B schools (4.0 – 4.2)
 - 7 A schools (3.9 – 4.1)
 - 4 AA schools (3.8 – 3.9)
 - 1 school for improvement of 1.6 points over 4 years



What do Students get from MUSWA?

- Students with 5.5 and 6 scores receive **Letters of Recognition**
- Students bound for the MUS may save \$14.50 by avoiding the ACT Optional Writing Test
 - Potential statewide savings: \$49,300
- Students may use the MUSWA as practice for the ACT or SAT essays
- Students who earn scores at or above the threshold level know they will be placed into college-level composition
- Students who score below the threshold can improve their skills and retake as seniors



Outstanding Student Scores

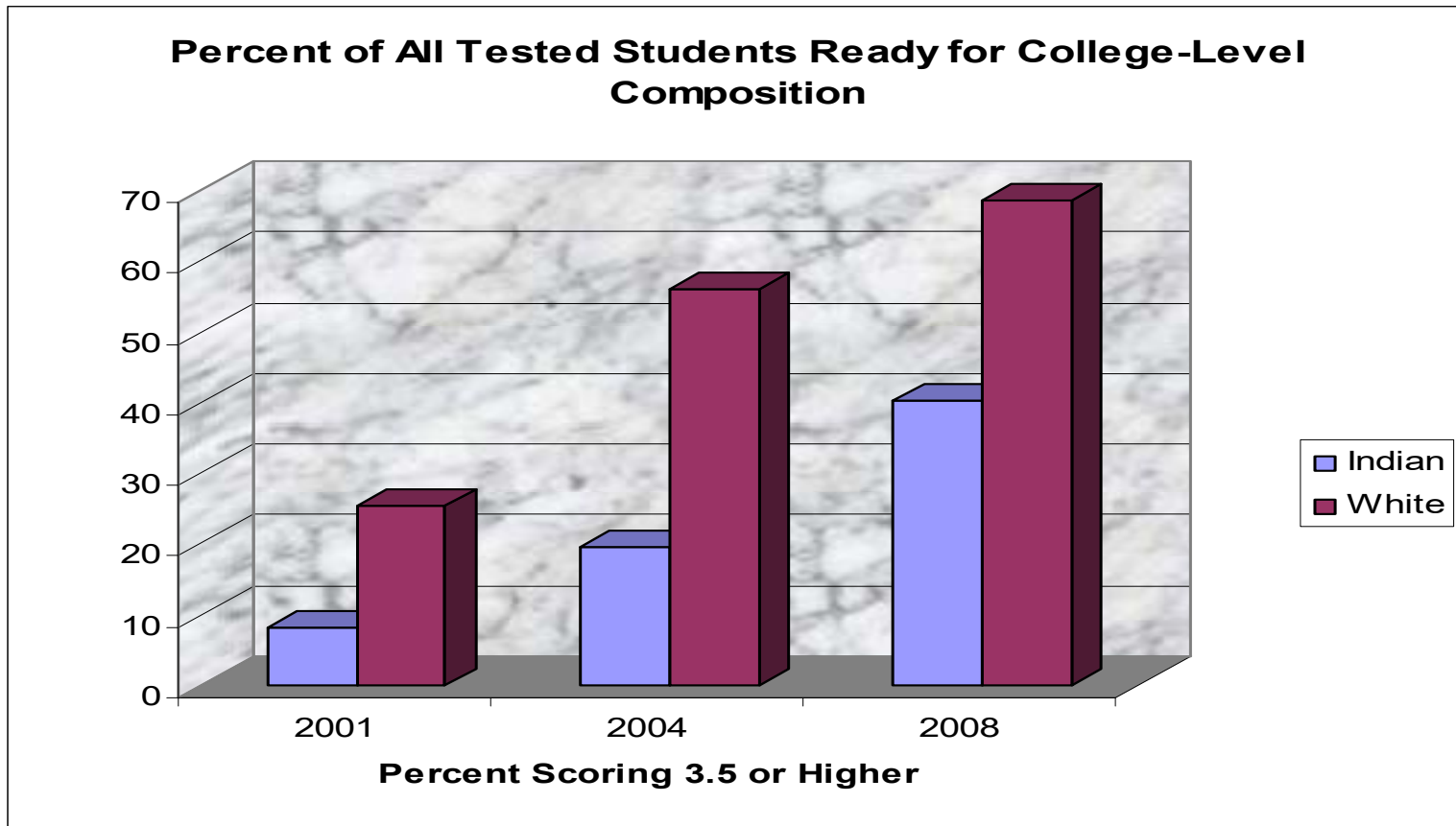
- 96 students scored “6,” compared to 76 in 2007, 66 in 2005, and 33 in 2003
- 177 students scored “5.5,” compared to 141 in 2007
- Experienced scorers express awe at the quality of writing now produced in 40 minutes



2008 Student Averages

- 3.7 average for juniors, 3.6 average for seniors
- 3.7 average for students planning to attend college in Montana
- 3.9 average for students planning college out of state
- 3.1 average for students planning to get jobs
- 3.2 average for students going into military
- 2.7 average for students planning to stay home

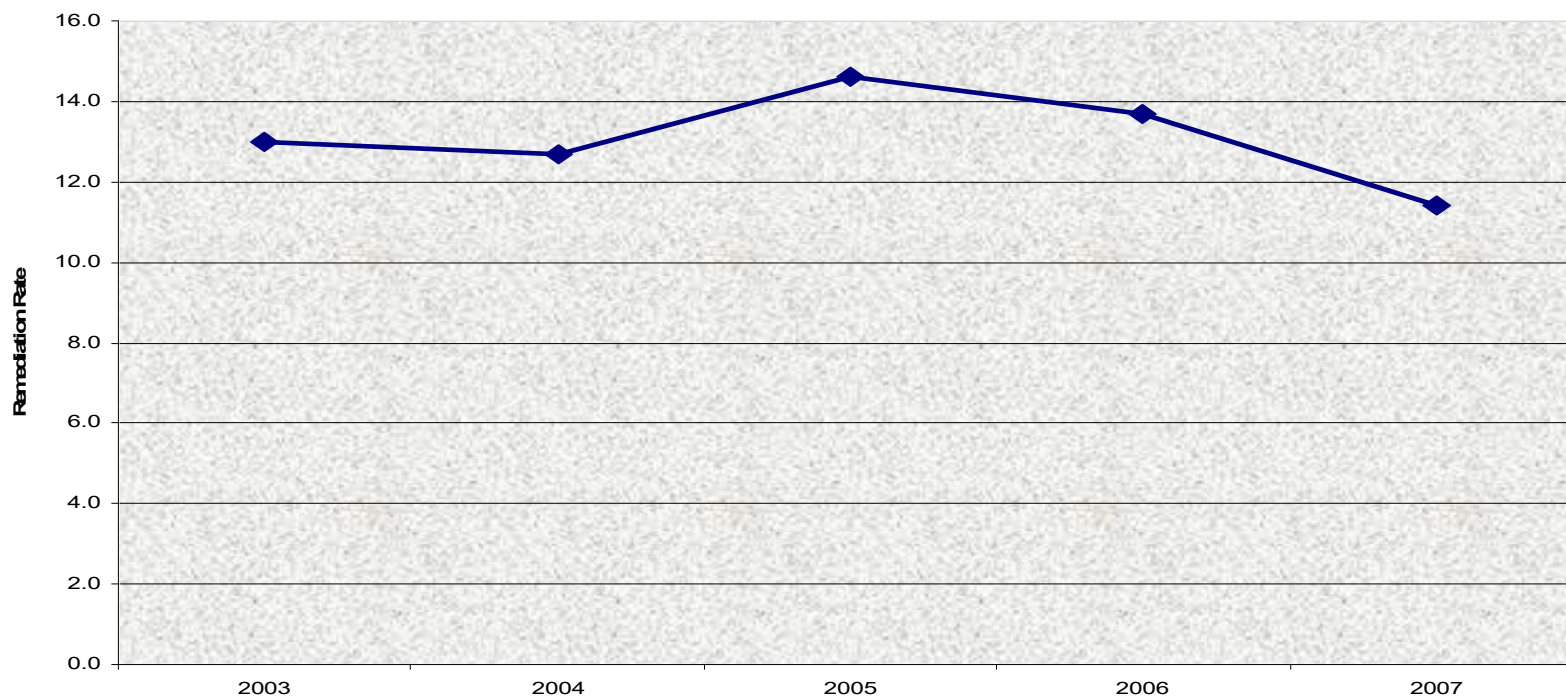
College-Readiness Increasing



These numbers include students who do not plan to attend college.

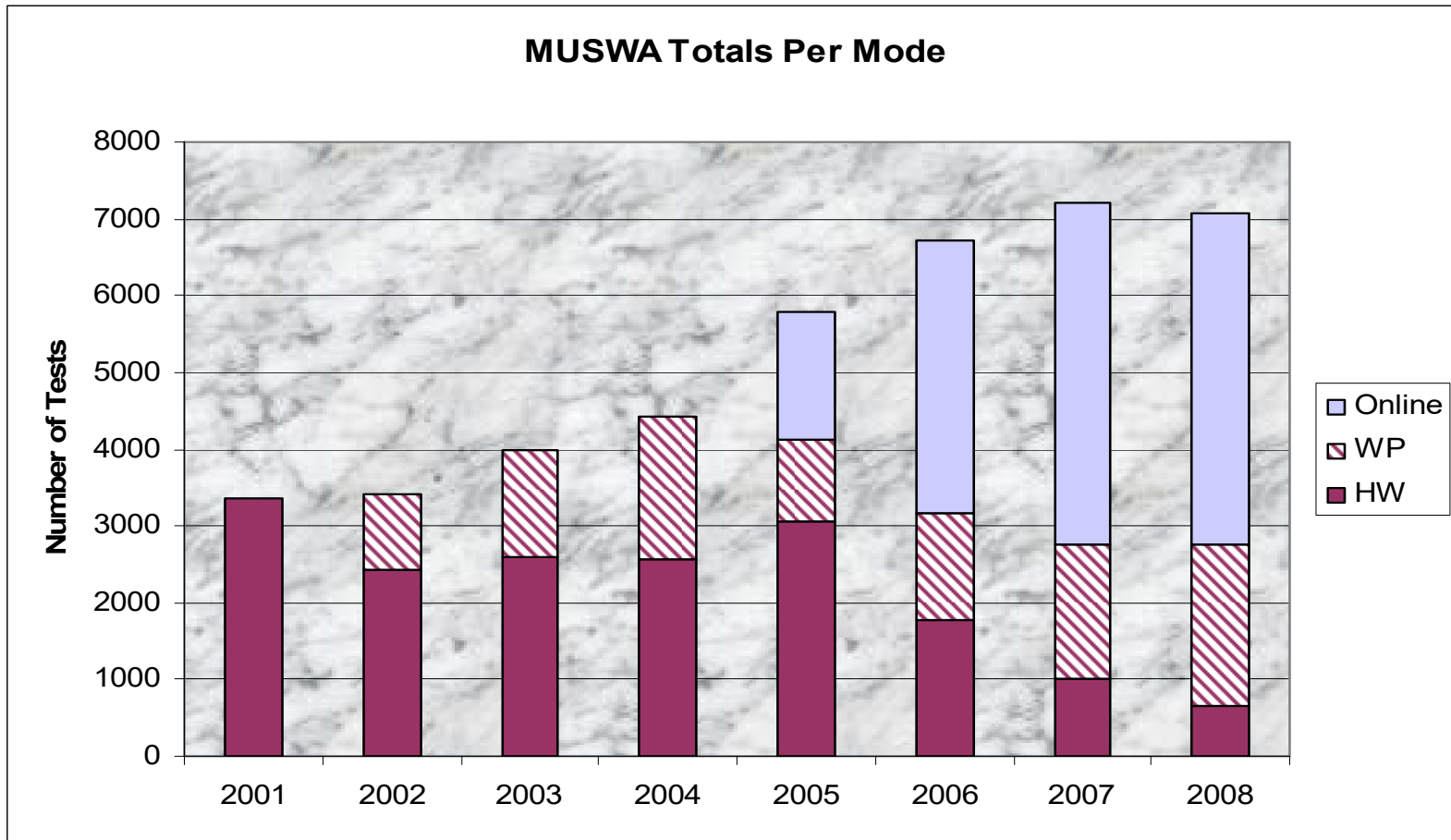
Remediation in English Composition of Montana's HS Graduates: Fall Semester in the MUS

System-wide English Composition Remediation Rates



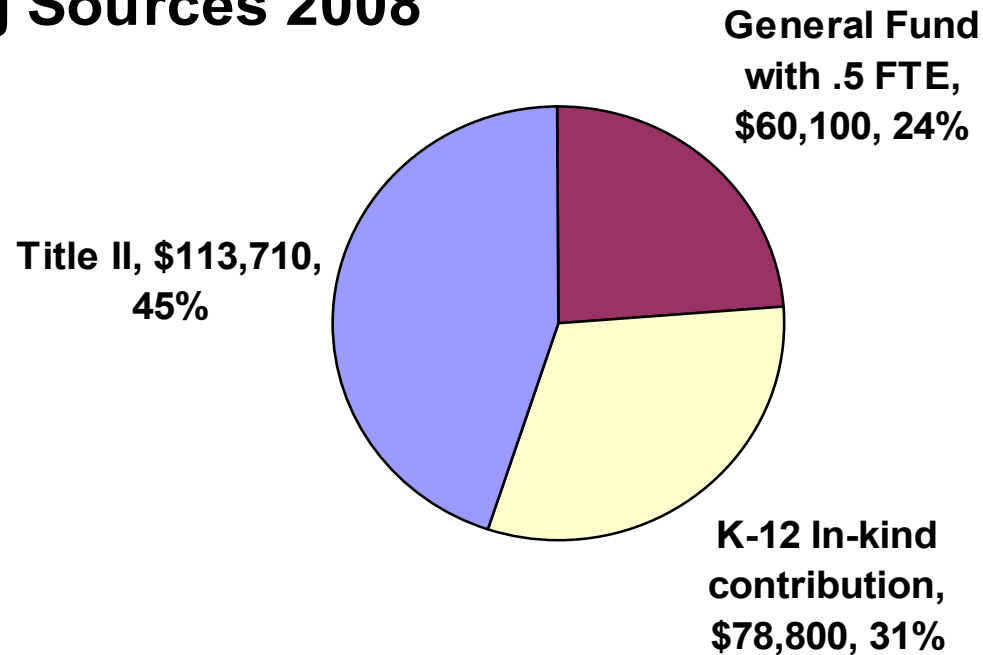
After the Writing Proficiency Policy was adopted in 2004, composition remediation spiked to 14.6%, but with implementation in 2007, it has dropped to 11.4%, 1.6 percentage points below the 2003 level.

MUSWA Uses New Technology



MUSWA Costs Leveraged

Funding Sources 2008



The graph includes all operating costs and .5 FTE for Academic Initiatives; Title II Improving Teacher Quality grants to campuses for onsite facilitators, training costs and college credits; and an estimate for the cost to K-12 schools for substitute teachers and teacher travel

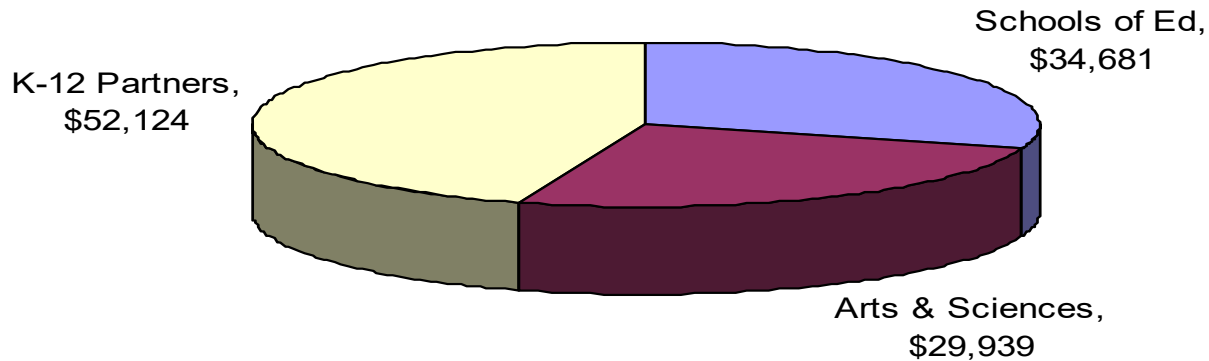


Title II Improving Teacher Quality Requirements:

- Partnership of School of Ed, College of Arts and Sciences, & High-need School
- High-need school with 20% poverty and teachers who are NOT highly qualified
- Professional development designed to improve teacher quality and student achievement in a content area
- Data to show improving teacher quality and/or student achievement

How are Funds Divided Among Partners?

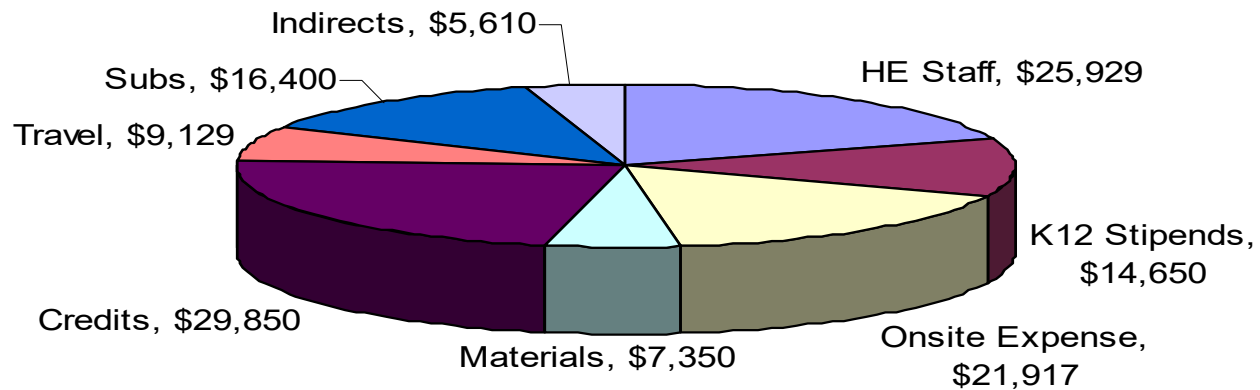
Title II Partnership Distributions in Three Grants



2008 Title II Grants: Campuses Serving Eight Workshops Sites

How are Title II Funds Used?

Title II Expenses: Three Grants Serving Eight Sites



2008 Title II Grants to UM-Missoula; MSU Bozeman/GF; and MSU Billings



Other SAHE Title II Projects for Improving Teacher Quality

Before It's Too Late

Algebra, geometry, statistics for middle and high school
UM, MSU, and six school districts
\$121,674 per year

Writing Intervention Now

Writing Assessment Development for middle schools
UM, Western, MSSA, and 18 schools
\$97,430 per year

Technical Writing Essentials for Math and Science

Tech writing for middle and high school math and science teachers
MSU-Northern, MNCESR, Golden Triangle, and 10 schools
\$111,827 per year



Proposed Initiative

- To communicate Admissions, Placement, and Remediation Policies to K-12
- To continue use of “highly qualified” teachers, who are experienced scorers, maintaining MUSWA’s accuracy and reliability
- To provide support for high school students taking developmental courses online
- To balance funding commitment among partners: MUS, USDOE (Title II), and K-12



Achieving Transparency

Young people should not have to wait until they have a high school diploma in hand to learn that they are unqualified for college-level courses or for work.

If democracy is to prosper in this new age, all Americans must possess the high levels of literacy and logic and the capacity to think critically that were once thought to be at the command of only a select few.

The Lost Opportunity of Senior Year: Finding A Better Way
(2001)