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## Reading's easy, math less so for sophs on '06 WASL

By **DOUGLAS CRIST** Staff Writer

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*Exam scores are up across the board for BHS students.*

Good news for the Bainbridge High School Class of 2008: It looks like you'll be graduating en masse.

This year's sophomores showed overwhelming proficiency on the reading and writing portions of this year's Washington Assessment of Student Learning, the first time the standardized exam has been required for graduation.

Just eight of the 394 BHS 10th-graders who turned in test booklets failed to pass the reading portion of the state-administered exam, while only nine did not pass the writing portion, according to preliminary results released by the Bainbridge Island School District this week.

The mathematics battery proved a bit more challenging, with 333 BHS sophomores passing and 56 needing improvement. But even those numbers were up, as they were in all subjects.

"We are very pleased with our reading and writing results in particular – they're better than in past years," said Faith Chapel, assistant superintendent of instruction for the school district. "We've always had strong results in the past, but these are indicating another level of improvement."

Chapel attributed the aggregate improvement to the fact that more sophomores took the WASL this time, given that they won't get a diploma in two years without passing it. And with the stakes higher, those who took it put more into their effort.

"A high percentage of students requested additional time on the writing test," Chapel said. "What that indicates to us is that they were taking the test even more seriously than they have in the past, and wanted to put their best effort forward."

A handful of students in each of the three categories recorded no score because of absences on test day, name discrepancies on test booklets or families having moved away before the WASL was administered earlier this year. School officials were still reconciling those discrepancies, with final results to be published this fall.

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As usual, Bainbridge students scored ahead of their peers statewide. About 86 percent of Washington sophomores passed the reading exam and 84 percent passed the writing.

Just 54 percent of Washington students showed mathematics proficiency, although one-third fewer sophomores performed at the lowest level of proficiency than in the previous year, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction noted.

While the Class of 2008 must pass all three portions of the WASL exam to graduate, failure this time around doesn't mean all is lost. The state Legislature this year allocated \$28.5 million to pay for remedial instruction and retesting, with money to be distributed among individual districts.

Bainbridge students can retake the WASL in August, in spring and fall of 2007, and again in spring 2008 if need be, with extra instruction available through the high school this summer. The Washington State Board of Education is also developing alternative methods of assessing student competence in the three subjects, although a student must take and fail the test twice before being channeled into that track.

"The staff really reinforced with students that this is a graduation requirement," Chapel said. "I do believe that our teachers are trying to teach not just to WASL standards, but trying to get students to reach a very high standard in their academic work."

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