



NEW MEXICO MEASURES
OF STUDENT SUCCESS AND
ACHIEVEMENT

M

S

S

A

Released Item Booklet 2021

Writing Prompt

Support Materials

Grade 8

cognia™

In This Released Item Booklet

Writing Prompts

On the New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement (NM-MSSA) assessment, students in grades 3–8 receive one writing prompt (comprising a passage or passage set, a writing task, and other supporting information and instructions), either narrative, informative/explanatory, or opinion/argument. All three of these purposes for writing will be assessed at every grade level each year. The Common Core State Standard alignment assigned to each released writing prompt is displayed in the booklet.

There are a total of six released writing prompts, one for each of grades 3–8. There is one released item booklet per grade level, each containing one writing prompt. The writing prompts that appear in the released item booklets were among those piloted with a small sample of students in the spring of 2021. Similar writing prompts will appear in future administrations of the assessment. The writing prompts that will appear on future writing assessments may be subject to additional revision (for example, repositioning components of the prompt frame) before they appear in an operational administration and count toward a student’s score.

Stimuli

All NM-MSSA writing prompts are partnered with one to three brief text stimuli. The purpose of these passages is to “set the stage” by introducing a general topic and providing some ideas and information about it that students will draw upon when they write. The text stimuli associated with each of the released writing prompts has been included in the booklet for reference.

Student Responses and Annotations

One sample student response is provided for each possible Production of Writing score point with annotations that explain the reasoning behind the assigned score. It is important to note that the scores in each booklet are likely to have been assigned the designated score that is shown; however, a definitive identification cannot be made at this point because range-finding—the process by which New Mexico stakeholders, in conjunction with Cognia content and scoring specialists, will identify writing samples that establish the lines between score points—has not yet occurred.

If a sample response was not available for one of the score points, an annotation is included to indicate some ways in which a student response could be further developed to exhibit the characteristics of a specified score point in accordance with the scoring rubric. Reviewing the student responses and annotations within a grade band or across all grade levels will provide additional examples and insight into the expectations for student writing on the assessment.

Rubrics

There are six scoring rubrics associated with the writing prompts on the NM-MSSA writing assessment. These are distinct for each grade band (3–5 and 6–8) and purpose for writing (Narrative, Informative/Explanatory, and Opinion or Argument). The released writing prompt in each booklet is shown with its associated rubric.

Similar to the writing prompts, the scoring rubrics that are shown are currently considered provisional and may undergo further refinement prior to use with a later administration.

For questions about the New Mexico writing assessment, additional information is available at https://newmexico.onlinehelp.cognia.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/11/NM-MSSA_Writing-Assessment-Resources-for-Teachers.pdf

You are now going to read two brief passages and respond to a writing task. First, read the following passages about requirements for student participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities. Read Passage 1 and then click the Passage 2 tab at the top of the screen to read Passage 2.

Passage 1

Announcement about the State Policy on Extracurricular Activities

Dear Parents/Guardians and Students:

- 1 I am writing to inform you that the state education department is considering changing the requirements for students to participate in extracurricular activities. The new requirements would affect all students statewide who take part in school-sponsored extracurricular activities. As you know, many students in our district participate in extracurricular activities, like sports teams, debate club, drama club, foreign language clubs, student council, and band.
- 2 The information below shows the requirements of the current policy and the proposed new requirements for eligibility.

Proposed Changes to the State Policy on School-sponsored Extracurricular Activities

The first new requirement relates to the expectation for academic performance. It would raise the requirement for GPA (Grade Point Average) that students would need to maintain.

- **Current Requirement for Eligibility:** 2.0 GPA
- **Proposed New Requirement for Eligibility:** 3.0 GPA

The second new requirement relates to absences from school because of extracurricular activities.

- **Current Requirement for Eligibility:** no more than 15 absent days per semester
- **Proposed New Requirement for Eligibility:** no more than 13 days absent per semester

- 3 As your superintendent, I understand how important extracurricular activities are to students. I want you to know that the new requirements are not intended to hinder students' ability to participate in extracurricular activities, but to help them to excel in their schoolwork and the things they enjoy doing.
- 4 The new requirements would improve students' learning and make the whole experience of being in school even better. Students would find that getting better grades and learning more is extremely satisfying.
- 5 Under the state laws governing education, participation in extracurricular activities is considered a privilege, not a right. To earn the privilege, students are supposed to work hard in school to achieve the level of academic performance mandated by the state. The

Grade 8

new more rigorous requirements are more in keeping with the achievement the state intends, in order that students get the most benefits from their educations.

- 6 I assure you that if the new requirements are adopted the teachers, principals, and I are here to help. We will offer more tutoring and other academic support where and when it is needed.
- 7 We are committed to providing our students with a good education. We are also committed to helping them so they do well enough in their courses to participate in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities are beneficial in that they provide students with opportunities for making new friends, learning new and interesting experiences and opportunities that current course offerings do not, such as the performing arts, and extracurricular activities like debate club and technology club support students' learning in their core subjects.
- 8 I will notify you as soon as the state education department announces its decision. Please contact me if you have any questions in the meantime.

Sincerely,

Mary Martinez, Ph.D

Superintendent of Schools

"Announcement about the State Policy on Extracurricular Activities" © 2020 by Cognia, Inc.

Passage 2

The State May Update the Requirements for Extracurricular Activities

- 1 In 2018, the U.S. Census Bureau published a report on a nationwide study about students who participate in extracurricular activities. The study showed that children tend to have higher levels of school engagement when involved in one or more activities, like sports, lessons, or clubs; it also found that 42 percent of children who took lessons like music and art were highly engaged compared to 33 percent of children who did not. The study presented this statistical trend: “Forty-two percent of school-aged children were involved in sports, 30 percent were involved in lessons, and 28 percent were involved in clubs. Nine percent of children participated in all three extracurricular activities.”
- 2 Now the state education department is considering changing the eligibility requirements for participating in extracurricular activities in school. The officials think this would encourage students to put more effort into their schoolwork and improve student learning. The allowed absences for extracurricular activities would change from 15 days per semester to 13 days. Students would also need to have a 3.0 GPA (a grade B average) in order to participate. The new requirement for the GPA is controversial and would likely cause unintended problems for students and schools.
- 3 Years ago, when the first in the nation eligibility requirements were adopted in Texas, the French High School marching band in the Beaumont school district lost 70% of the musicians because their grades fell below the required GPA. Eligibility requirements can be hard on students, and some people think that is unfair. When they affect athletic programs, often there is even more controversy. In Ashland school district in Massachusetts, there was a public disagreement about requirements between educators and parents from the community. Superintendent Richard Hoffman tried to find something the two sides could agree on, but he finally had to back away from raising requirements. “You talk about the budget and there are five people in the audience, and you talk about sports and there are 20. I couldn’t stop the momentum,” Hoffman said.
- 4 Many parents/guardians are passionate about making sure their children have access to extracurricular activities because the interactions and achievements have positive effects on the students. There is a lot of research that extracurricular activities are good for children. A study by the University of Southern Mississippi showed that grade point averages and SAT scores are slightly higher for high school students who participate in sports, music programs, and academic clubs. Another study by Texas A&M University suggests that middle school students in extracurricular activities do better in reading and math and are more social than students not in extracurricular activities.
- 5 Some students would probably be motivated by more rigorous requirements to work harder in their classes. There is research that suggests extracurricular activities help

Grade 8

students feel a stronger connection to school. Since that is the case, it probably means that some students would do whatever it takes to improve their grades.

- 6 If the state education department changes the requirements, there should be tutoring and extra academic support offered to the students. That would make a big difference as to whether the changes work as intended. At any rate, updating the academic requirements for extracurricular activities will be a period of adjustment for everyone.

"The State May Update the Requirements for Extracurricular Activities" © 2020 by Cognia, Inc.

Grade 8

Alignment
Standard: W.08.01

1. Now read the writing task and draft a response. As you write, think about what makes writing successful.

Features of Successful Writing

Clearly addresses the topic and purpose identified in the prompt
Includes relevant and specific details and examples in support of ideas
Has a clear focus and an organizational plan
Uses language that is engaging and contributes to a style and tone appropriate to the task
Shows attention to sentence structure, sentence variety, and conventions (grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation)

Writing Task

Suppose you have heard a news story on the radio that reported school officials are considering changing some state-wide school policies. One of the proposed changes would be to the eligibility requirements for participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities.

You have just read an announcement from a superintendent of schools and an article about the eligibility requirements for participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities.

You have decided to write a letter to the superintendent of schools at your district. In the letter, you state your position and present your argument about whether the GPA and attendance requirements for student participation in extracurricular activities should change. Use examples and evidence from the passages, along with your own ideas and experience, to state your position and support your argument.

Today you will be writing an argument. When you write an argument, you

- make and support a claim based on factual evidence.
- gather and present reasons for making that claim.
- use specific facts, examples, and details to support and elaborate upon those reasons.

Grade 8

After you have read the passages, and before you begin writing, think about

- what evidence in the passages leads you to make your claim about whether the GPA and attendance requirements for student participation in extracurricular activities should change.
- what you already know and what fact-based evidence you have to support your claim about whether the GPA and attendance requirements for student participation in extracurricular activities should change.
- how you might address evidence that supports a different idea or position.

Now write your response in the space provided.

Production of Writing: NM-MSSA Argumentative Writing Rubric (Grades 6-8)			
	Score Point 4	Score Point 3	Score Point 2
Development/ Content	<p>The Writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a claim that fully addresses the topic. Develops the argument with consistently logical reasons and consistently relevant evidence. Uses consistently accurate and credible sources and demonstrates substantial understanding of the topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a claim that generally addresses the topic. Develops the argument with generally logical reasons and generally relevant evidence. Uses generally accurate and credible sources and demonstrates general understanding of the topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a claim that partially addresses the topic. Develops the argument with only some logical reasons and partially relevant evidence. Uses partially accurate and/or credible sources and demonstrates limited understanding of the topic.
Organization/ Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a clear and engaging introduction of the claim(s) and a concluding statement or section that logically follows from and supports the argument presented. Consistently organizes reasons and evidence logically. Substantially acknowledges alternate or opposing claims.* Consistently demonstrates effective use of words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among the claim(s), reasons, and evidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a generally clear introduction of the claim(s) and a concluding statement or section that adequately follows from and supports the argument presented. Generally organizes reasons and evidence logically. Generally acknowledges alternate or opposing claims.* Generally demonstrates effective use of words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among the claim(s), reasons, and evidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a partially clear introduction of the claim(s) and a concluding statement or section that partially follows from and supports the argument presented. Sometimes organizes reasons and evidence logically. Sometimes acknowledges alternate or opposing claims.* Sometimes demonstrates effective use of words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among the claim(s), reasons, and evidence.
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes language choices that establish and consistently maintain a style and tone appropriate to the task. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes language choices that generally contribute to a style and tone appropriate to the task. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely includes/does not include language choices that contribute to a style and tone appropriate to the task and/or includes language that is inappropriate to the task.

Use of Conventions: NM-MSSA Conventions Rubric (Grades 3-8)	
	Score Point 1
Grammar/ Usage	<p>The Writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates general command of standard English grammar and usage.
Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates little command of standard English grammar and usage. Demonstrates little command of standard English conventions relative to the length and complexity of the text. May have errors that interfere with meaning or confuse the reader.

*Only assessed at grades 7 & 8

Grade 8

Score Point 3+;3

Dr. Mary Martinez,

4/27/2021

In light of the proposal for new requirements, I have decided to write you this letter to share my opinion on the matter at hand. Extracurriculars are, in my opinion, one of the most important parts of the school experience. I think every student should have the opportunity to participate in an extracurricular activity. Because of this, I have to inform you that I think that the new requirements are too demanding of students.

Extracurriculars, despite what some people may think, do not actually distract students from schoolwork, but help them engage in it. Studies from the University of Southern Mississippi and Texas A&M University have shown that students in extracurriculars receive higher grades in reading, math, and even receive slightly higher SAT scores. Furthermore, the extra activity provided by sports helps reduce stress and keep students healthy.

And when below requirement GPAs do occur, they often stem from a student not understanding one or two subjects in particular, which reduces their grade significantly; even if they are straight A in all their other subjects. This can be caused by lack of engagement or poor instruction from the teacher. How can you be sure that all students who need help can receive adequate help, especially if the same teacher who is teaching them poorly is tutoring them?

Lastly, you can claim that extracurriculars are a privilege and not a right, but that "privilege" is what gets many students scholarships or provides them with the experience they need to get a good job after college. Think of all the students whose families cannot afford to send them to college, and because they do not have access to the help they need to raise one bad grade in chemistry, they will have to go into student debt to pay for college when instead they could have been playing their favorite sport while also receiving the funding they needed for their higher education.

There is good reason to push students to try harder and work smarter, but the extra stress and hardship that I think the requirements would cause do not justify the changes. The experience of participating in extracurriculars is too great to be stifled by unnecessary regulations. Do not change the requirements; students' careers depend on it.

With all hope that the correct decision will be made,
A

ANNOTATIONS

Production of Writing: 3 (High)

The response is on the higher end of the 3-score range. The response makes the claim that that GPA and attendance requirements for student participation in extracurricular activities should not change. The introduction and conclusion are clear, and the argument is developed with logical reasons (students who participate in extracurricular activities often perform better in certain subjects, students may fare worse in certain areas due to lack of quality instruction, and restricting extracurricular activities would limit students' opportunities for scholarships). In the second paragraph, the response cites studies from the University of Southern Mississippi and Texas A&M University to support the student's argument that extracurricular activities engage students in schoolwork; other arguments throughout the response would benefit from additional support in the form of either fact-based evidence or personal experience. Although the third paragraph transitions somewhat abruptly ("And when below requirement GPAs do occur..."), overall the response demonstrates effective use of words and phrases to construct a cohesive argument. Language choices are appropriate to the task and help clarify the letter's position.

Use of Conventions: 3

The response demonstrates a general command of conventions. The response effectively provides a variety of complex sentence structures and is relatively free of errors in spelling, grammar, and mechanics.

A response with a score of 4 for Production of Writing would demonstrate a more substantial development of the argument. This might be achieved by including more fact-based evidence from the passages, or from the student's own experience, in order to support the student's reasoning and further demonstrate understanding of the topic. For instance, the response might relate a personal experience that supports the argument that students fare worse in certain subjects due to poor instruction. This would also allow more opportunity to assess the student's ability to effectively clarify relationships between claims, reasons, and evidence in constructing a cohesive argument. Additionally, the response would benefit from a more substantial acknowledgment of opposing claims, as the response addresses counterclaims in a somewhat cursory manner.

Grade 8

Score Point 2;2

Dear Superintendent,

Hello, I am S an 8th grade extracurricular activity participant. I think that you trying to make the GPA to play sports higher isn't a bad thing, I'm not saying that I agree with it but I'm also not saying it's the right thing to do. Many kids try their hardest to maintain a passing grade so that they can play sports. I believe that I can maintain a 3.0 GPA, but what about the other kids who are struggling now to keep up with their work and get passing grades? Why make it harder on them when they are having a hard time but doing a good job. I understand that you believe that people participating in sports and things are capable of doing better but I honestly think that you should just leave it at having to have a 2.0 GPA instead of a 3.0 GPA.

For us small schools we need all the players we can get just to barely make a team. We don't want to loose players because they aren't getting the grades they need. If you think about those little things it really makes to logical sense to make it harder on the students when we are already succeeding. For only missing so many days per semester I really dont see the problem with that. But that is out of our control. I don't want to have to cancel games because we have already missed 13 days of school. We like to have as many possible games as we can, yes we are out of school quite a bit but its not continuous all year. There shouldn't be a problem with us having to miss a couple of classes in the afternoon. Afterall, we didn't schedule the games.

This is just my opinion on your thinking about changing things. I will work harder if you do change it to a 3.0 GPA because I want to participate in sports as much as I can. Thank you for listening!

Sincerely,
S

ANNOTATIONS

Production of Writing: 2

The response partially develops the claim that that GPA and attendance requirements for student participation in extracurricular activities should not change. The response provides some logical reasons for why requirements should not change (e.g., it would make participation harder for students who are already struggling), but overall would benefit from additional relevant evidence to support the claim. The letter includes language choices that are occasionally vague (“But that is out of our control.”); more precise language would help clarify the argument. The conclusion partially follows from the argument presented, but does little to support it.

Use of Conventions: 2

The response demonstrates partial command of standard English conventions. Spelling errors are minor and infrequent (“loose”). Errors with end punctuation and comma splicing are present but do not interfere with communication. Sentence construction is somewhat repetitive and simplistic. Given the length and complexity, the response would benefit from additional development to more fully demonstrate sustained command of conventions over a variety of sentence constructions.

Grade 8

Score Point 1;1+

Dear superintendent,

I am writing this letter to inform you that I think that it is a great idea to make a new policy for the student's extracurricular activities. Like you said in paragraph 3, "I want you to know that the new requirements are not intended to hinder students' ability to participate in extracurricular activities, but to help them to excel in their schoolwork and the things they enjoy doing." I completely agree with that statement because education is the most important thing. The students need to excel in school before they exceed in their activities. This policy can help students with becoming more responsible also. Thank you for your time.

ANNOTATIONS

Production of Writing: 1

The response minimally addresses the topic by making a claim that GPA and attendance requirements for student participation in extracurricular activities should change. Few reasons or pieces of evidence are provided to develop the argument. There is too little writing to demonstrate whether the student could have maintained organizational focus and used transitions effectively, and the conclusion is abrupt. Alternate and opposing claims are not acknowledged.

Use of Conventions: 1 (high)

Though the response is relatively free of grammatical errors and misspellings are minor ("Thiis"), little complexity in sentence construction has been attempted, and the response does not provide enough original writing to demonstrate more than a minimal command of standard English conventions. A more developed argument with a variety of sentence constructions would give this response more opportunity to demonstrate command of grammar and mechanics.

Grade 8

Score Point

In the passages GPA is important because I read that a shcool in "Texas the french high school marching band in the Beaumont school district lost 70% of the musicians because thier grades fell below the required GPA."GPA is very important because it will help your grades and life in the future and you should attendeance shcool so you won't fall be hide.

ANNOTATIONS

This response does not receive a score in Production of Writing or Use of Conventions. The response does not provide an argument related to the task, but rather provides commentary on the passage. The context of the quoted material is unclear and does not support a claim for/or against additional extracurricular requirements. In addition, the writing is too brief to demonstrate awareness of letter writing.