

# Writing Practices and Student Achievement

## State-level Findings

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Office of Research and Policy

January 2014

To better understand writing instruction in Tennessee, we examined student responses to survey questions administered with the 2013 Writing Assessment. The questions asked about writing practices and practice using computers for writing. We also looked at 2012-13 school-level technology survey data to determine computer resources available to educators and students.

Students responded to 10 questions about their writing instruction and writing practice. The survey questions included in this research are listed below:

1. How often do you write in subjects other than Language Arts or English?
2. How often do you work in pairs or small groups to discuss each other's writing?
3. How frequently do you make notes or an outline before you begin writing a paper?
4. How often do you use a computer to aid in your writing assignments?

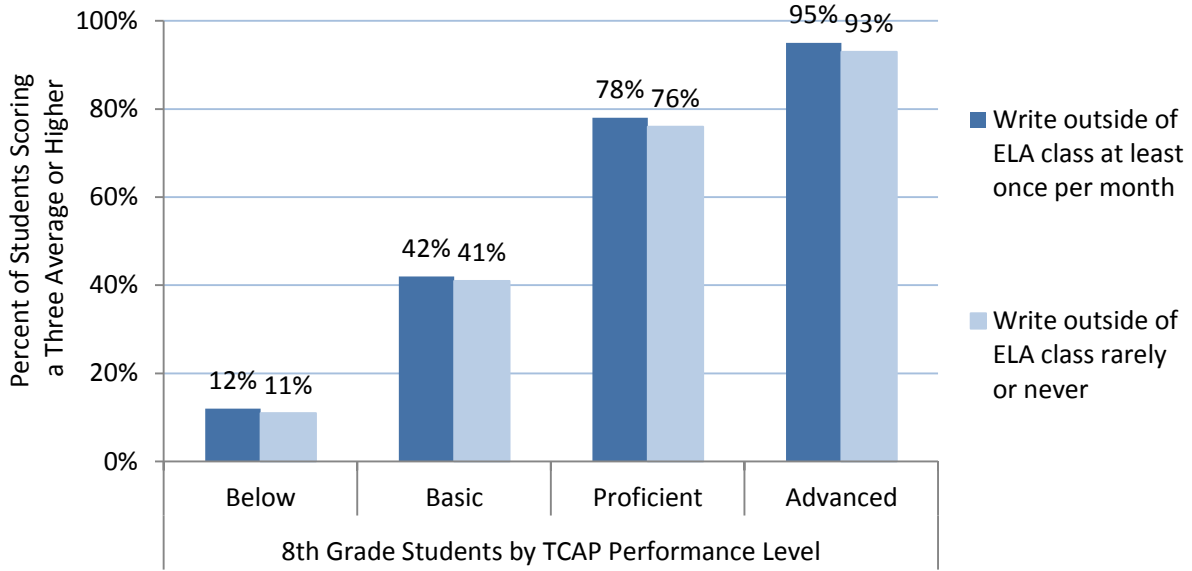
The first three questions were selected based on research that identifies writing across content, discussing writing with peers, and making notes or an outline before writing as key writing practices. The fourth question was included given the importance of computer literacy for college and career readiness and the move to online testing. For the 2013 Writing Assessment, 88 percent of eleventh graders, 86 percent of eighth graders, and 12 percent of fifth graders took the test online.

State-level findings showed that students who reported more frequently (a) writing in non-ELA courses, (b) working with peers to discuss writing, and (c) making notes or an outline before writing had higher Writing Assessment scores. The survey data also revealed that while some students in Tennessee are engaging in these practices, many others are not. Furthermore, economically disadvantaged students reported significantly less practice using computers for writing, although they have slightly more computers per student in their schools.

## Writing Practice Outside of English Language Arts Classes

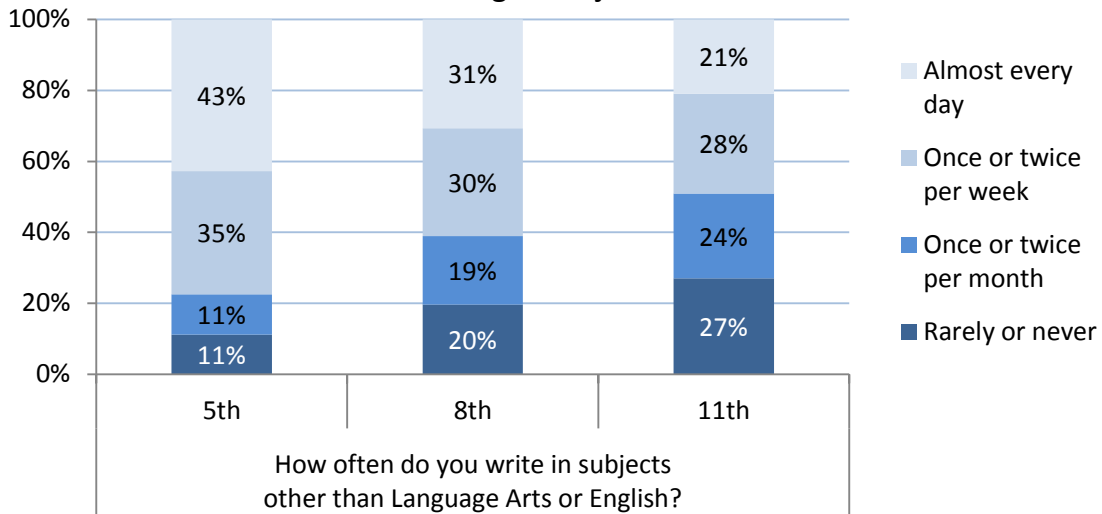
Students who reported more frequent writing practice outside of their English language arts classes received higher scores on the 2013 Writing Assessment compared to their peers with similar TCAP scores. The graph below includes grade 8 students, but the same trend was seen for students in grades 5 and 11 (see Appendix).

**Percent of 8th Grade Students Scoring a Three Average or Higher by Writing Practice Outside of ELA**



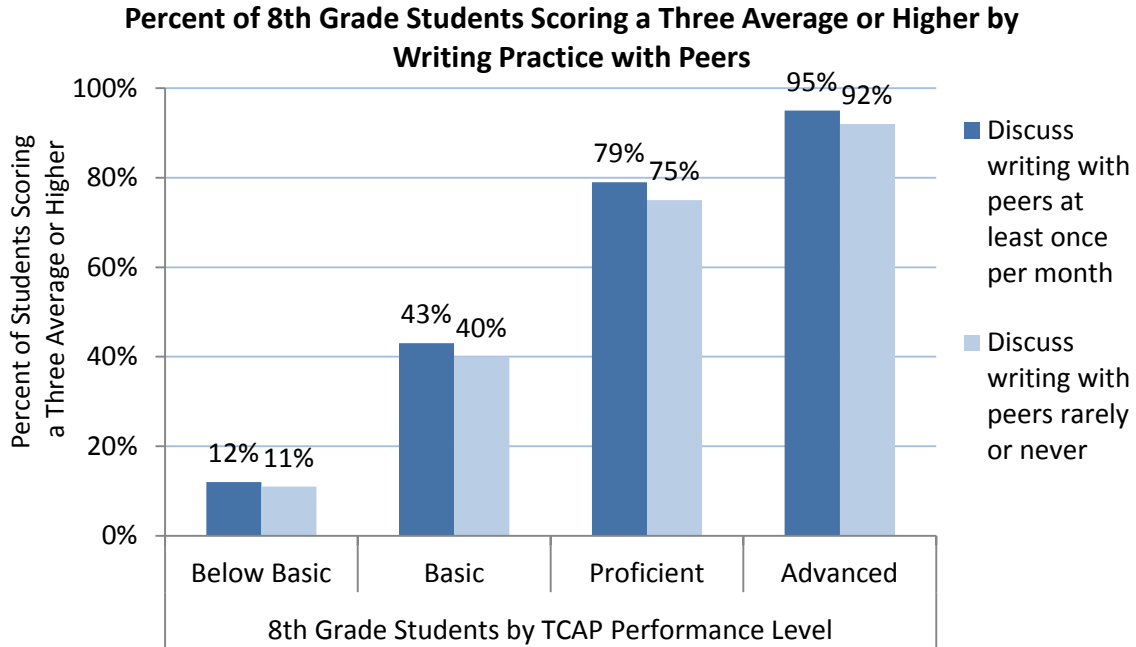
About half or more of the students in each grade reported writing in subjects other than ELA at least once or twice per week. About one-third of 11<sup>th</sup> graders reported rarely or never writing in subjects other than ELA.

**Percent of Students Writing in Subjects Other than ELA**

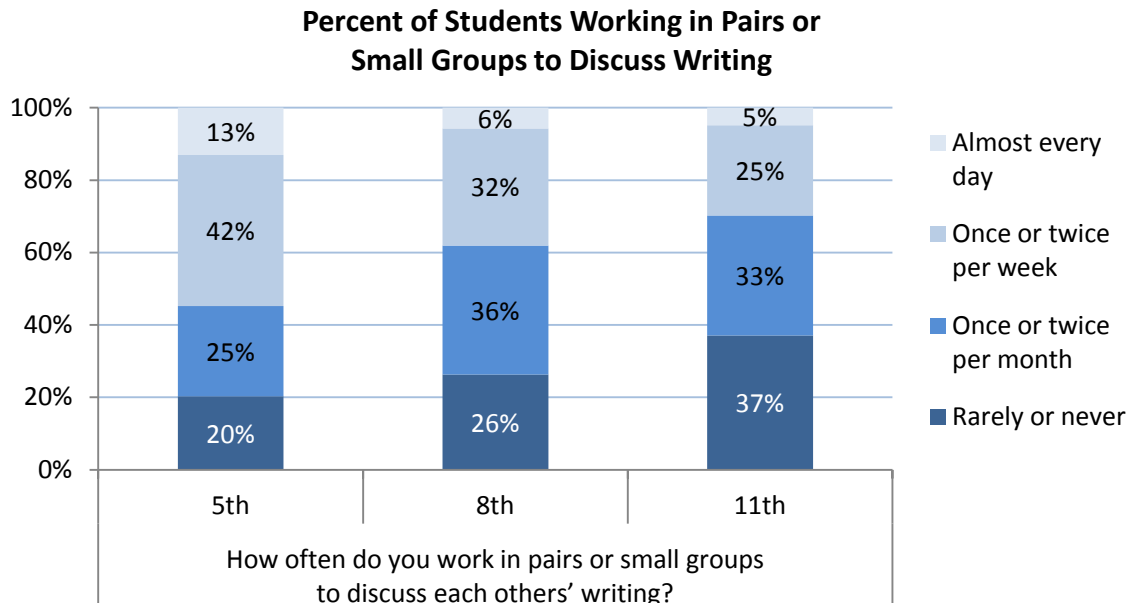


## Writing Practice with Peers

Students who reported more frequently working with peers to discuss their writing received higher scores on the 2013 Writing Assessment compared to their peers with similar TCAP scores. The graph below includes grade 8 students, but the same trend was seen for students in grades 5 and 11.

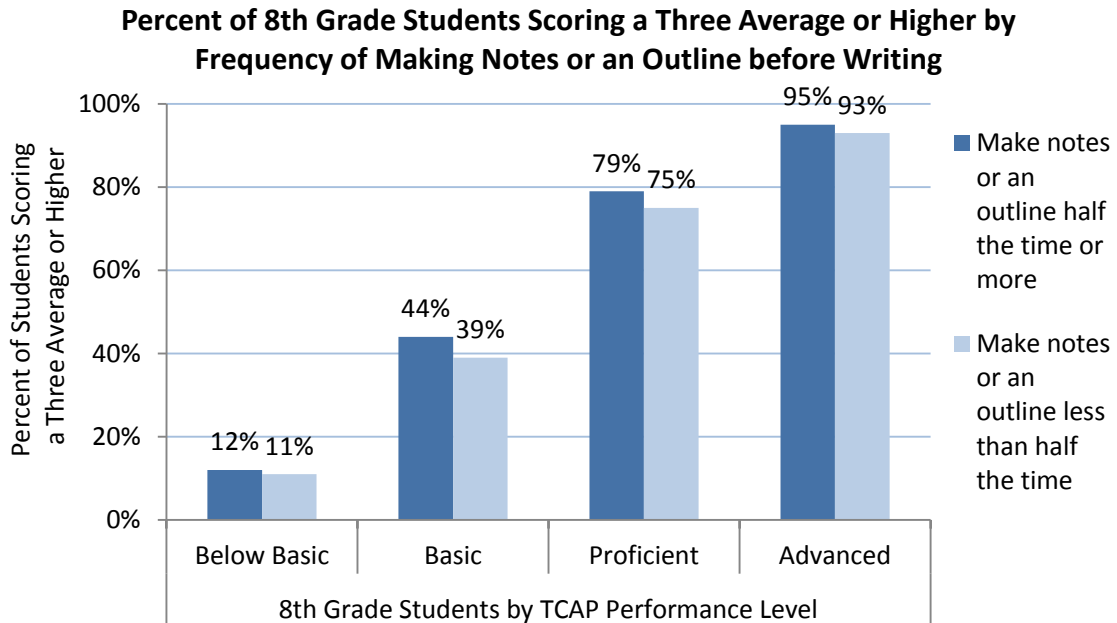


Over half of the students in grade 5 and about one-third of students in grades 8 and 11 reported working in pairs to discuss writing at least once or twice per week. Twenty percent or more of students in each grade reported rarely or never doing so.

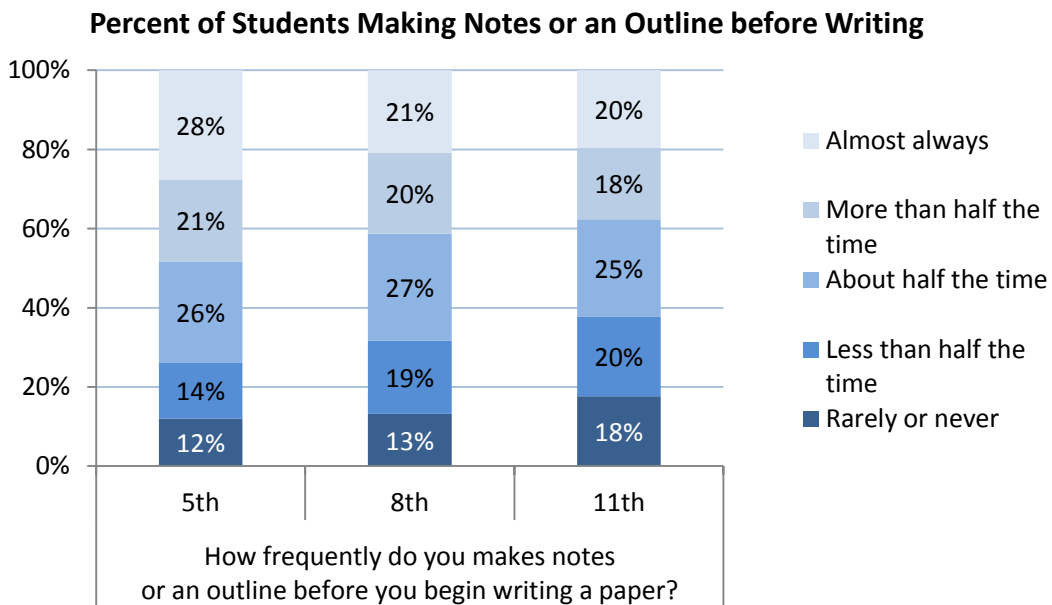


## Making Notes or an Outline before Writing

Students who reported more frequently making notes or an outline before writing received higher scores on the 2013 Writing Assessment compared to their peers with similar TCAP scores. The graph below includes grade 8 students, but the same trend was seen for students in grades 5 and 11.

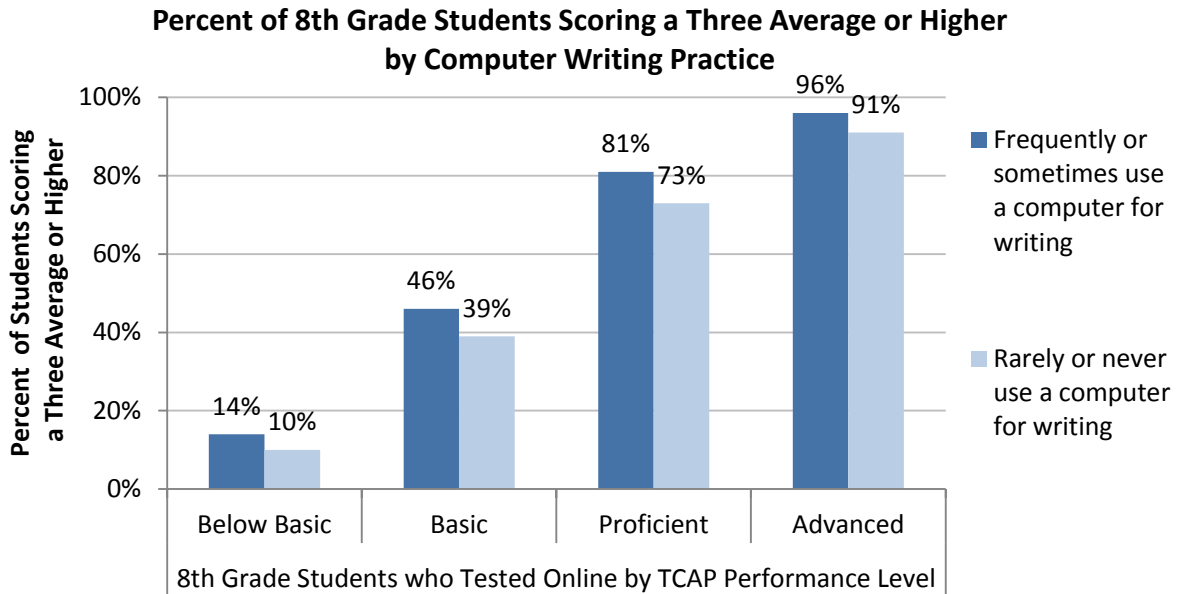


Less than one-third of students from each grade level reported almost always making notes or an outline before writing.

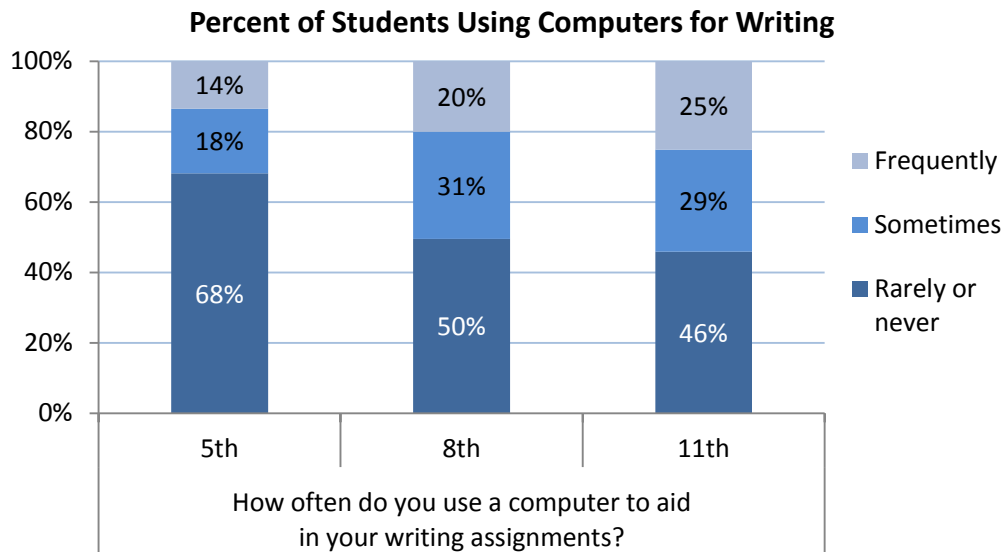


## Computer Writing Practice

When taking the 2013 Writing Assessment online, students who reported frequently or sometimes using computers for writing assignments received higher scores than their peers with similar TCAP scores. The graph below includes grade 8 students, but the same trend was seen for students in grades 5 and 11.



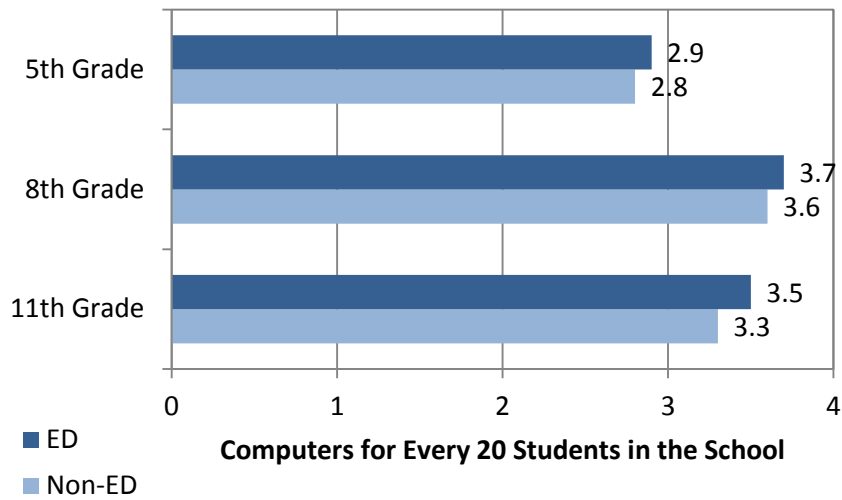
About half of students or more in grades 5, 8, and 11 reported rarely or never using computers for writing assignments. Older students reported more frequent use of computers for writing assignments. The survey question did not specify whether this computer use was occurring at home or school; therefore, it is difficult to determine where this practice is occurring.



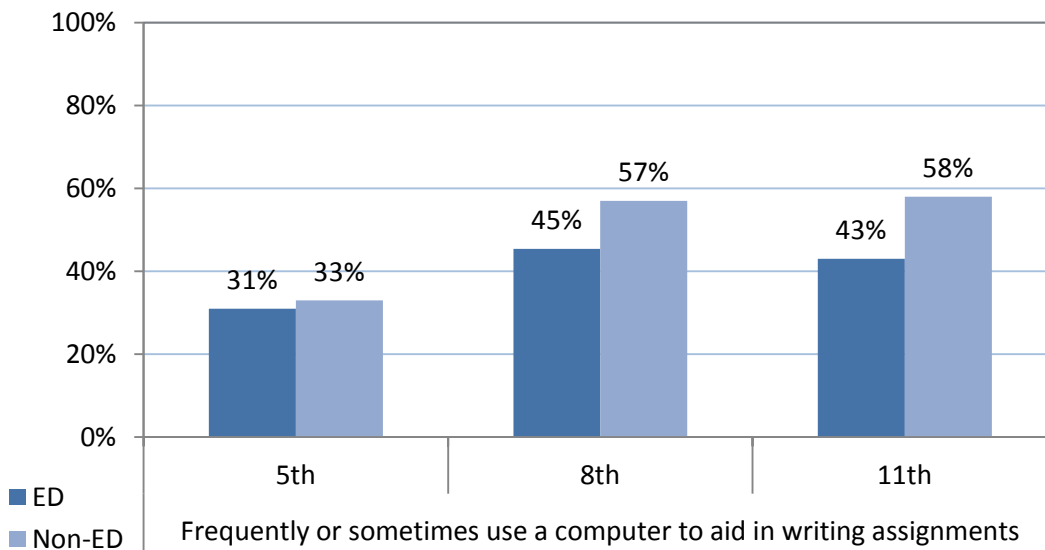
## Differences in Technology Resources and Computer Writing Practice by Economically Disadvantaged (ED) Status

On average, ED students had slightly more computers per student in their schools than non-ED students. However, ED students reported significantly less practice using computers for writing. ED and non-ED students gave similar responses regarding frequency of writing practice outside of ELA classes, writing practice with peers, and making notes or an outline before writing (not shown).

**Number of Computers per 20 Students by ED Status**



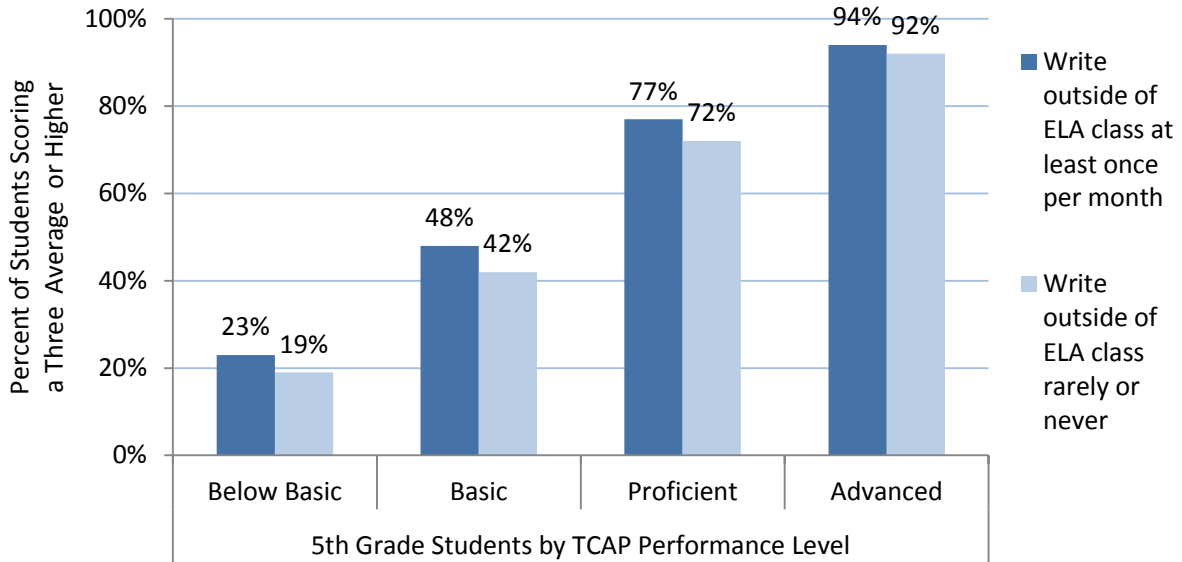
**Percent of Students Using Computers for Writing by ED Status**



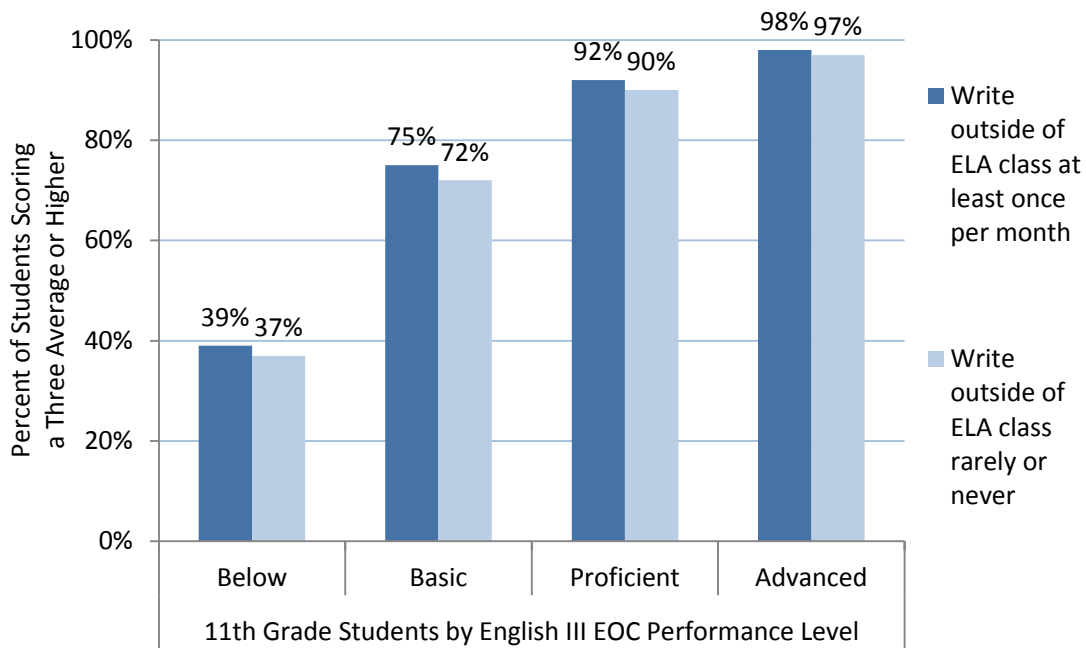
## APPENDIX

### Writing Practice Outside of English Language Arts Classes

**Percent of 5th Grade Students Scoring a Three Average or Higher by Writing Practice Outside of ELA**

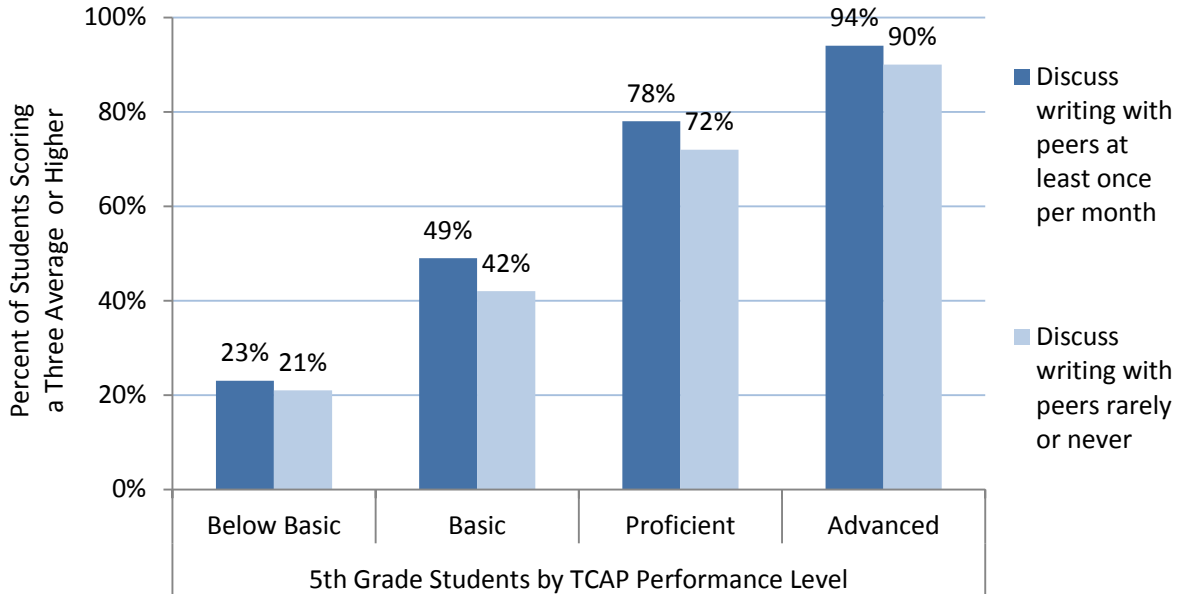


**Percent of 11th Grade Students Scoring a Three Average or Higher by Writing Practice Outside of ELA**

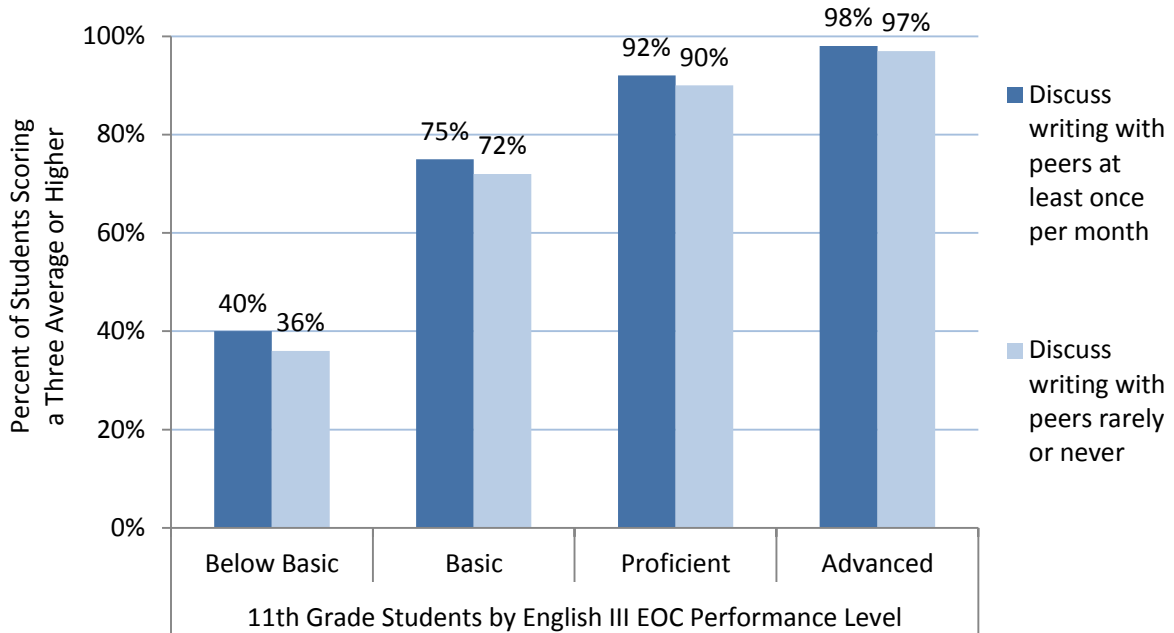


## Writing Practice with Peers

**Percent of 5th Grade Students Scoring a Three Average or Higher by Writing Practice with Peers**



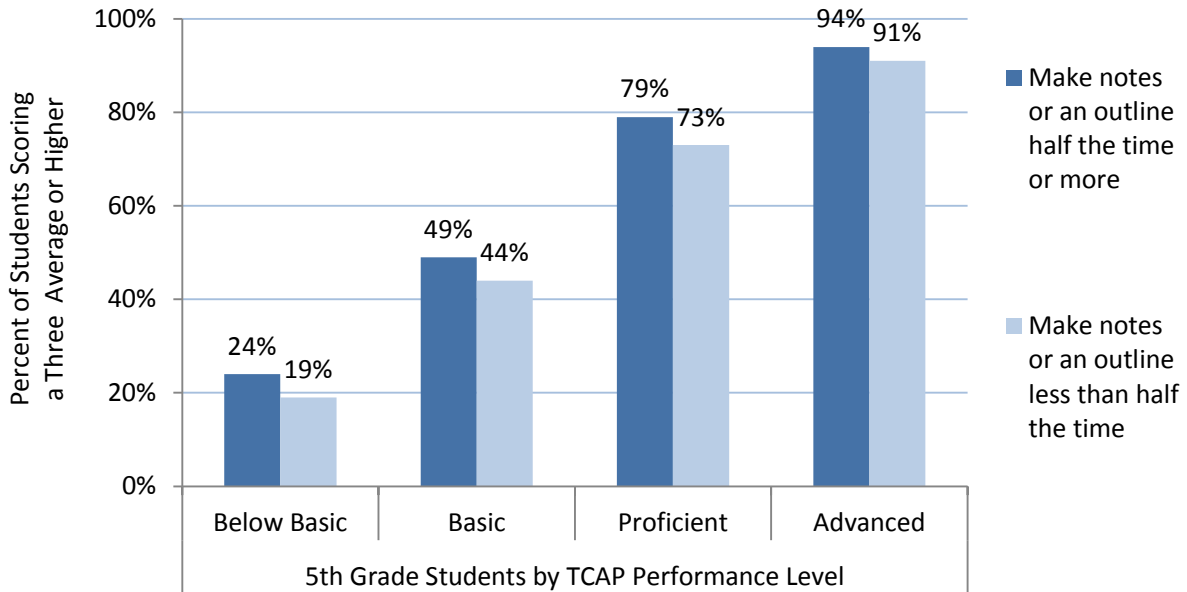
**Percent of 11th Grade Students Scoring a Three Average or Higher by Writing Practice with Peers**



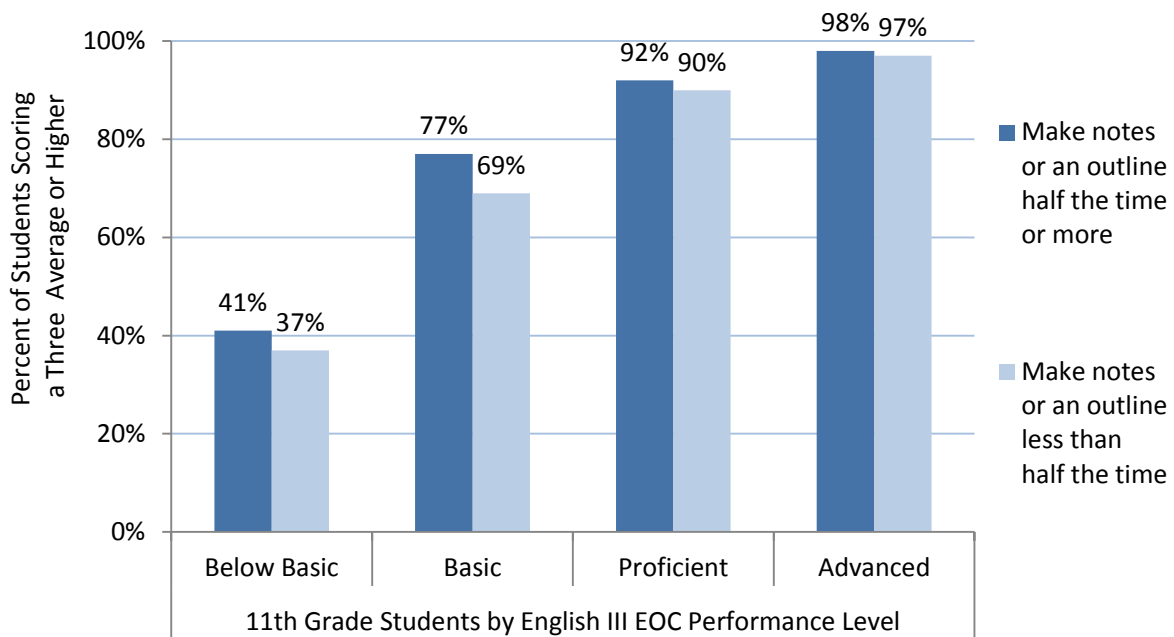


## Making Notes or an Outline before Writing

**Percent of 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Students Scoring a Three Average or Higher  
by Making Notes or an Outline before Writing**

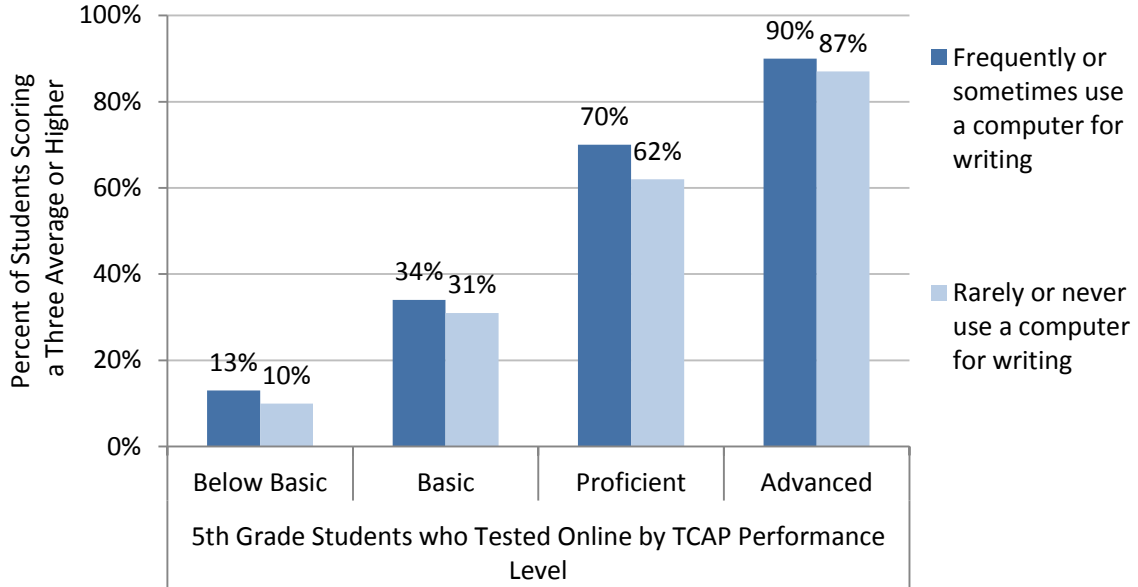


**Percent of 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Students Scoring a Three Average or Higher  
by Making Notes or an Outline before Writing**



## Computer Writing Practice

**Percent of 5th Grade Students Scoring a Three Average or Higher by Computer Writing Practice**



**Percent of 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Students Scoring a Three Average or Higher by Computer Writing Practice**

