Agency: La. test scores accurate enough

By BUSH BERNARD
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A preliminary investigation by the federal government has upheld Louisiana's results on a national fourth-grade reading test.

Louisiana was among three states whose test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress exam were questioned because of an increase in the number of students who were excluded from the test. The state’s overall score rose 7 points in 1998 compared to 1994 — one of the biggest gains turned in by any state.

State Superintendent of Education Cecil Picard has said the state was following the rules that the national testing organization established.

The National Center for Education Statistics, an agency of the U.S. Department of Education, reviewed the scores from 1998 and 1994 and found that excluding more students probably did not change the state’s scores, according to Marilyn McMillen, the agency’s chief statistician.

“We will never know exactly what the scores would have been if they had not excluded more students because we will never know how those students would have scored,” McMillen said.

The department did a “worst case” test, assuming that the extra people who were excluded would have scored poorly, McMillen said.

“In Louisiana, it was a case where it didn’t have an effect on the trend,” McMillen said.

The agency will continue to look at the exclusion information to determine how to handle mandates of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, which will require more students to be included on things such as standardized tests, McMillen said.

Picard said in a news release that the state will work with the testing organization “to ensure that we don’t have an exclusion rate that would cloud the results in the future.”

“We are pleased that Louisiana’s gains remain real and significant,” Picard said.