La. public schools lag on ACT

By DOUG MYERS
Capitol news bureau

No Louisiana public school district reached the national average last school year on a test used to judge the readiness of students to attend college.

St. Tammany Parish public school students came the closest, achieving a composite score on the American College Test of 20.5 during the 1993-94 school year.

East Baton Rouge Parish ranked No. 12 among the state's public school districts.

The average national ACT composite score was 20.6. The highest possible composite score is 36.

"Certainly we want to do better," said James Stafford, president of the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Staf ford said state officials are "doing everything we can" to improve student scores on the test, including making students meet "higher standards," such as requiring them to pass a graduation test to garner a diploma.

However, public schools in Louisiana continue to lag behind the national ACT average, according to the figures released Monday by the state Department of Education.

The average score for Louisiana Asian-American students was 19.9, compared with 20.7 nationally.

The average score for Louisiana black students was 16.7, compared with 17.0 nationally.

The average score for white students in Louisiana was 20.3, compared with 21.4 nationally.

The statewide average takes into consideration the scores of both public and private school students.

The parish averages reflect the test scores of public school students only.

State Department of Education officials estimate that the composite score for public school students is less than 19.4 because private school students fare better overall.

However, the education officials said, no statistics to that effect have been made available by the ACT yet.

The average score for black students in Louisiana was 16.7 on the ACT in 1993-94, compared with 17.0 for black students nationally.

The average score for white students in Louisiana was 20.3, compared with 21.4 nationally.

The average score for Louisiana Asian-American students was 19.9, compared with 20.7 nationally.

The highest possible composite score is 36. Lafayette Parish ranked No. 3 at 20.3; Catahoula Parish ranked No. 4 at 20.0; and West Carroll Parish and St. Charles Parish tied for No. 5 at 19.8.


West Baton Rouge Parish ranked No. 40 at 18.4.

At the bottom of the list are No. 66 was East Carroll Parish with a score of 15.6.

Three area districts didn't do much better. East Feliciana ranked No. 65 at 16.1, and St. Helena and Pointe Coupee tied for No. 64 at 16.3.

The director of student services for the Lafayette Parish public schools, Betty Cooper, said her district wants its students' ACT scores to be above the national average.

But, Cooper said, she is pleased her district ranks near the top in Louisiana.

"It's nice to be on top of something," said Cooper, adding that about 60 percent of Lafayette Parish public school students go to college.

Cooper said her district has "put a lot of effort into working and looking into student performance" and has had counselors working with students on Saturdays to help them prepare for taking the ACT.

Overall, Louisiana students scored lower on the national college readiness test in 1993-94 than in the previous school year. The average composite score for the state dipped from 19.5 in 1992-93 to 19.4 during the 1993-94 school year.

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