Member believes in tests

By RANDY McCLAIN
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Although some educators doubt that statewide basic skills tests are an accurate gauge of how well students are learning, School Board member Donald Hunt believes good test scores can increase public confidence in the school system.

“These tests kind of give me the reds. Some other (parishes) are doing something with them. And doggone it, we’ve got some people right here who can do something with them, too,” Hunt told the School Board’s Instructional Services Committee this week.

“I want to start seeing some results,” he said.

Teachers in the public school system must prepare their students for the statewide basic skills exams, he said.

“I’ve got an apron at my home with the saying on it — ‘Anything worth having is worth cheating for,’” Hunt said jokingly.

“But some parishes, and I’m being quite honest with you, undoubtedly are teaching the test,” he said.

Hunt said he is not suggesting that East Baton Rouge Parish teach answers for the state test to improve scores, but he said basic skills on the tests should be taught in classrooms across the parish.

“I’m ready to get down to the point where we stress those, say 20, basic skills first and we stress them strong,” he said.

“I think we need that for the confidence of the people,” he said. “People use (scores) to judge the school system.”

“I want to be sure we meet basic needs first. We need to show some more positive results soon,” Hunt said.

The Zachary board member said Wednesday he thinks students in the public school system performed well on a recent basic skills test for second graders. More than 90 percent of the students tested in the parish achieved a passing score on math and language arts portions of the state exam.

However, Hunt said he would like to see East Baton Rouge consistently in the Top 10 when compared with other parishes in the state.

“I have been told by other parishes that they are aiming toward the state test,” Hunt said. “We have to be sure we have our children prepared to face the test.”

A portion of the instructional year should be set aside to teach children test-taking and study skills, Hunt said.

“I’m tired of being average,” he said.

The second-grade test, which was administered this spring under the direction of the State Department of Education, was the first step in development of basic skills exams that will eventually govern promotion of students from second grade through high school.

The test was given only to second graders across the state this year. In subsequent years, one additional grade will be added annually until a basic skills test becomes one of the major criteria governing high school graduation.