BEGINNING THIS YEAR

New Measure Scores
La. Education System

Louisiana’s progress in upgrading education will be measured in a new way beginning this year.
As part of the educational accountability legislation (Act 709) passed in 1976, progress in reading, writing and arithmetic will be evaluated by using “well constructed criterion-referenced tests,” say the State Planning Office.

Testing and other aspects of the accountability program are explained in the office’s new publication, “The State of the State 1977, an Economic and Social Report to the Governor.”

Testing, beginning with reading this year, “will be used to establish the initial set of minimum proficiency standards for pupils,” planners explain.

“Results...can serve as baseline data against which future trends in education can be measured. If cooperation is obtained from the local level during the testing process, valid historical data can be accumulated against which equitable, pertinent, educational, cost control and administrative decisions can be made.”

Accountability will include assessment of student progress and evaluation of “the quality of performance of professional personnel,” the planning office points out.

Evaluation requires the state “to develop a model containing the recognized goals for all school personnel in the state and to serve as the framework for the performance criteria.”

The planning office contends that “need for educational ‘output’ information was surely responsible for Act 709.”

“Any meaningful analysis with the intent to promote constructive change will have to start with the summaries of test results for individual districts. Properly presented, the data could serve as a source of encouragement to make obvious changes toward improvement.”

The planning office points out that Louisiana began statewide testing of pupils in 1973. Results were reported in the 1976 “State of the State” report and “clearly indicate the gross disparities in educational attainment in different parts of Louisiana.”

Planners say, “The basic goal of the accountability programs is the determination of causes of the differences so that all levels of performance can be improved.”

Data from the initial testing program “were useful in providing a statewide indication of educational status but proved to have limited value in telling individual parishes the strengths and weaknesses in their particular educational programs,” the planning agency explains.

The agency contends the accountability law “may well be the most significant piece of educational legislation in the history of the state.”

The 1977 “State of the State” report covers other phases of education, including a detailed analysis of how schools are financed and an examination of the relationship between unemployment and educational attainment of the state’s population.