Officials predict increase in remedial class programs

By JOHN SEMIEN
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Requiring higher passing scores on a state fourth grade promotion test will mean an increase in parish students assigned to remedial courses, local school officials said Friday.

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education last Thursday unanimously approved a cutoff score of 80 percent on both the math and language portions of the basic skills test for fourth grade.

Officials estimated that 20 percent of the fourth-graders taking the test will score below 75 percent. Raising the cutoff score to 80 percent will increase the estimated failure rate to 31 percent, they said.

East Baton Rouge Parish Associate Superintendent Donald Hoover said he expects the increase in the local failure rate to be about the same as the state predictions.

“It will mean more students to remediate. The local failure rate in lower grades taking the state tests have come close to the state average, Hoover said.

“It doesn’t change our emphasis because our emphasis is there now,” Hoover said of the higher passing score. “We’re working as hard as we can.”

Hoover said the failure rate will increase “unless we can do more before the test.”

Superintendent of Schools Raymond Arveson agreed.

“What it means is students who fall in that range (below 80 percent), it will mean they will have to be given remedial work,” he said. “This could mean summer school programs or in-school-year remediation.”

Arveson said school officials do not see the higher cutoff rate as a concern, but he plans to look into what impact the change will have locally.

The remedial programs required to bring the students up to standards are funded by the state, he said.

“It’s not a concern,” he said about the new standard. “We will deal with that regulation, and as long as they (the state) provide the funds, we’ll provide the remedial help.”

Local fourth graders will take the test later this year.

The test is being given for the first time this year. The program envisions testing one more grade each year until the high school graduating class of 1992, which is this year’s fourth graders, are required to take a standardized test to earn a high school diploma.

Procedural rules will prevent the board from taking final action on the fourth-grade cutoff score for another two months. Technically, the board voted only to publish the score as a proposed policy, but the board rarely changes policies after they are tentatively approved.

The passing scores for the basic skills tests given to second- and third-graders, the only other grades so far affected by the state’s competency-based testing program, will remain at 75 percent.