Program changes to mean fewer tests

A change in a controversial testing program will allow local school teachers to give fewer tests, according to a compromise agreement reached by administrators and teacher representatives Tuesday.

The agreement also allows teachers more flexibility in determining what tests they want to use from the Criterion-Reference Testing program in determining whether students have learned certain skills, according to discussion during an Instructional Services Committee meeting.

Donald Hoover, associate superintendent for instruction, acknowledged that “almost half of the CRT advisory committee is opposed to” changing requirements on using CRT skills tests.

But he said he thought the compromise required sacrifices from both sides.

“Our intent is to have something we can use, rather than it use us,” Hoover said. “Frankly, I believe what we have here is a good plan.”

The board committee did not vote on the changes in the program after committee chairman Robert Crawford said it was his understanding that neither the panel nor the full board need take any action on the matter.

Two board members expressed some concerns about the changes.

The changes were agreed upon by an advisory committee of teachers and administrators that was established last year because of criticism leveled at the CRT program by the East Baton Rouge Association of Educators.

The CRT program, a detailed teaching management system, drew fire from the EBRPAE and some teachers because of the demands it placed on teachers.

EBRPAE representatives complained that the system required teachers to spend too much time testing students. Teachers were required to test for as many as 80 or 90 skills on one grade level and to mark the results on large “pupil profile cards.”

The system is aimed at ensuring that all parish teachers drill specific reading and math skills into students at each grade level, according to administrators.

The program defines what skills need be taught and determines, through tests, if students are learning them.

However, the complaints prompted administrators to establish an advisory committee that worked to simplify the program.

The EBRPAE set up its own task force and issued its own set of proposals for changing the CRT program — recommendations that differed somewhat from the advisory committee’s proposals.

Hoover brought representatives from the two groups together recently. He said a compromise agreement was reached in the discussions.

The compromise limits the number of skills teachers are required to test their students during the year. Teachers also can mark pupil profile cards based on locally prepared CRT skills test sheets or on pre-packaged tests used with textbooks.

The CRT advisory committee earlier had wanted to require teachers to use the CRT skills test only in marking the “critical skills” on the pupil profile cards.

Mary Ellen Jordan, an instructional supervisor who coordinates the CRT program, said she could “live with” the compromise agreement.

In a separate matter Tuesday, the board’s Executive Committee voted to change its procedures so that vendors, in most instances, will not be required to submit bid bonds with their bids on materials for the school system.