School students who dropped out are still too many.

"This is a lot of children," said Sam Pernici, who is in charge of pupil research of the state Department of Education.

The figures were disclosed in the latest statewide version of the "report cards" on Louisiana's public schools.

The "report cards," which were called for in former Gov. Buddy Roemer's 1988 Children First Act, include information on school characteristics, student attendance, student expulsions and suspensions, student achievements, and scores on national standardized tests.

Reports on a school-by-school and district-by-district basis are to be released March 20, and shipped to parents throughout the state by sometime in early April.

The state Department of Education disclosed the statewide numbers on Friday.

In addition to disclosing percentages of students dropping out, the statewide report also revealed 55 percent of public school students who were first-time freshmen at a state public college or university needed to take at least one catch-up, or remedial, course.

That is up from the nearly 54 percent rate the previous school year, but Pernici said that is because the state included two community colleges that weren't included the previous year.

The report also noted that about 44 percent of public high school students who graduated with their class in 1994 attended a Louisiana college or university during the fall of 1994.

The 44 percent rate increased from nearly 39 percent the previous year, but again probably because the two community colleges were included in the latest report.

Here are some of the other findings of the Department of Education regarding public schools during the 1993-94 school year:

- Louisiana had 1,438 schools; 45 vocational-technical institutes; 46,837 full-time teachers; 1,443 principals; 773,779 students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

- The state had more students attending first grade than any other grade: 63,157.

- That number is in line with previous years. First-grade routinely has more students than any other public school grade.

- About 52 percent of public school students were white, 45 percent were black, 1 percent were Hispanic, 1 percent were Asian, and fewer than 1 percent were American Indian.

- The average public teacher salary was $25,285 per year, up from $23,074 per year during the 1992-93 school year.

- Louisiana public school students scored below the national average on the college-readiness American College Test, scoring a 19.4 on a scale of 30 compared with the national average of 20.8.

- The 19.4 composite score for Louisiana was down from a composite score of 19.5 during the 1992-93 school year.

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Report shows dropouts increase

By DOUG MYERS
Capitol news bureau

Nearly 12,000 middle and high school students dropped out of Louisiana public schools last school year, the largest number being from the ninth grade, according to a new state report.

This compares to about 11,200 students two years ago, the last time the state projected the number of dropouts in its "report cards" on Louisiana's 1,400-plus public schools.

More than 4,000 high school freshmen quit during the last school year, compared with 2,531 sophomores; 1,988 juniors; 1,433 seniors; 971 eighth-graders; and 904 seventh-graders, the report said.

That's a dropout rate of 6.5 percent for public school ninth-graders, meaning six of every 100 freshmen quit last school year.

The 6.5 percent rate is higher than two years ago, when 5.6 percent of the more than 60,000 ninth-graders dropped out.

However, data from previous school years may not be comparable to last school year because the state changed its way of estimating dropouts during the 1992-93 school year and has come up with a more precise method, officials said.

Nearly 5 percent of 10th-graders dropped out in 1993-94, compared with 4.6 percent of 11th-graders, 3.7 percent of 12th-graders, 1.7 percent of eighth-graders and 1.5 percent of seventh-graders, according to the report.

Although an overwhelming majority of students remain in school and don't drop out each year, a top state education official said the 12,000 middle and high school students who dropped out could have been prevented with better educational programs.