Results of Iowa skills tests point to future of education in Louisiana

Tests released last week give Louisiana school officials a first look at the state's new school accountability program. They also provide a glimpse of a school's "performance score," which state education officials will use to gauge a school's quality and how much it needs to improve.

The state has set performance goals for all schools to reach in the next 20 years. Seven parish systems have already exceeded the 10-year goal for third, fifth, sixth and seventh grades, Iowa test results released Thursday show.

Scores for ninth-graders will be released later this month. "We knew coming out of the box there were going to be some schools at the high end," said Louisiana Superintendent of Education Mike Folsom, who issued the first performance scores in response to the "high-stakes" test.

But Folsom said a clearer picture for accountability will emerge later this month when the results of the Louisiana Education Assessment Program for the 21st Century, or LEAP, are released.

The LEAP test, which makes up 60 percent of a school's accountability score, is given to fourth, eighth, 10th and 11th graders. It is referred to by education officials as the "high-stakes" test.

Folsom said the LEAP test will form the annual summer school and pass the test or they won't be promoted to the next grade.

The state's accountability program, schools that score below the average will get special attention in the form of training for teachers and programs for students. If the school's scores don't improve, the administration and faculty will be replaced.

Students at low-scoring schools will be asked to transfer to higher-scoring schools after two years into the accountability program.

The Iowa test and Iowa test deal with a student's knowledge of basic subjects such as math, science and language arts. The LEAP test is geared toward what officials feel Louisiana students should know. The Iowa test gauges Louisiana students' achievement against the rest of the nation.

The state has set goals for both tests, hoping to slightly exceed the average within 10 years. The 20-year goal is more lofty, requiring all schools to score in the "proficient" range.

State Education Superintendent Cecil Pearre said he is pleased with the results.

Iowa test score

Students in 21 area school districts generally scored below national norms on the so-called Iowa achievement test, given this year to Louisiana public school students in grades 3, 6, 8 and 10.

Pass scores are an average of all tests. Scores above 50 are better than the national median scores below 50. The state average is 50.

Some districts scored below the national median, but above the state average.

U.S. median 50 50 50 50 50 50

Louisiana average 45 44 44 44 44 44

East Baton Rouge 44 43 40 39 39 39

Acadia 40 30 34 31 31 31

Assumption 50 46 51 46 51 51

East Feliciana 40 34 43 33 33 33

Evangeline 40 37 42 31 31 31

Iberia 43 37 43 39 39 39

Berkeley 40 37 46 37 37 37

Lafayette 47 38 49 39 39 39

Livingston 59 60 56 56 56 56

Pointe Coupee 54 32 35 32 32 32

St. Helena 50 50 50 50 50 50

St. James 47 39 48 38 38 38

St. Landry 47 39 47 39 39 39

Tangipahoa 47 41 47 44 44 44

Vermilion 47 40 49 46 46 46

West Baton Rouge 45 46 48 48 48 48

West Feliciana 50 50 50 50 50 50

1999 scores only: state 42 not administrator Iowa tests was in all students tested.

West Baton Rouge third-graders scored 48.1 in the Iowa test. In fifth-graders scored 47.6, sixth-graders scored 45.0 and seventh-graders scored 45.0.

We take steps to make progress," Triche said. It's a change in thinking for many of our teachers. You can learn to teach it.

Mathematics is a good example of that change, Triche said. It's also an example of the work the state is doing.

West Baton Rouge plans to look at each students' scores to look at their strengths and weaknesses and develop their lesson around.

"Every teacher has to assume that responsibility," Triche said.

By BUSHER MARTELO

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Tests

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several systems have already met the 10-year goal for the Iowa test.

Picard said the state Education Department will look at school accountability scores over the next few years to review how many systems exceed the goal.

"We can raise it, or lower it," Picard said. "We'll see how we're doing."

Iowa test results are reported in percentages, with a range of 0 to 100. The national average is 50.

The state's best average this school year was 45 for third- and sixth-graders, or five points below the national average of 50.

The state average for fifth and seventh grades was 44.

Sixth-grade scores, the only for which there is a comparison, increased from 44 last year to 45 this year.

The 10-year goal is for all schools to score at least 50. The 20-year goal is for all schools to score 75.

To meet the 10-year goal for the Iowa test, the state's average scores must climb 1 percent each year. To reach the 20-year goal, Iowa test scores must improve by about 1.5 points each year.

"When you're dealing with a large number of kids, one point will be difficult," Picard said.

Livingston Parish was among the seven systems that have already met the 10-year goal.

Livingston Superintendent J. Rogers said the system has continued its growth trend.

Livingston's fifth- and seventh-graders scored an average of 60 on the Iowa test, third-graders scored 59 and sixth-graders averaged 58, all well above the state average of 50.

Those scores will set the system's baseline for accountability.

"Now we have to meet our growth trend," Picard said.

If Livingston's sixth-graders are to reach the state's 20-year goal on time, its test scores will have to continue to improve by about 68 of a percentage point each year.

Picard attributed the higher-than-average scores on a combined effort of parents, teachers, supervisors and administrators.

"We had a school improvement plan long before the state," Picard said.

"We've got to change this back to the classroom level; they work pretty hard," Rogers said. "We don't teach to the test."

East Baton Rouge Parish students had a slight drop in the state average on the Iowa test.

West Baton Rouge Parish Superior Gary Mathews said he's pleased with the scores.

But added, "Indeed, I think the state has a lot of work to do."

West Baton Rouge third-graders scored 30, sixth-graders scored 32 and seventh-graders scored 32.

East Baton Rouge's sixth-grade scores were up from 27 in the previous year. Mathews said that in line with his district's increase in scores on the American College Test and the National Association of Educational Progress reading test.

Bierlein said increases in the sixth-grade Iowa test, ACT and reading test scores show the state is making progress.

"I'm not going to say we're pleased, because we have a lot of work to do," Bierlein said. "But we have halted the slide... There's a curve we are on track.

West Baton Rouge Parish Superintendent Beverly Triche said the test scores will be used to evaluate how students are taught.

Teacher workshops have focused on the state's new content standards on teaching critical-thinking skills.