School Board OKs first-grade testing

A School Board committee on Tuesday approved a screening program for all first-graders entering the system for the first time.

The test is supposed to determine whether students have mastered kindergarten skills, according to Delores Lewis, supervisor of research and program analysis.

The test would measure social/personal development, physical development, language development and math skills, Lewis said.

Students who have not attended kindergarten, as well as those who have attended kindergarten outside the school system, must take the test, Lewis said.

"It was our feeling that all kindergarten children needed to be tested," Lewis said. "We're talking about a small number of kids who do not have kindergarten experience."

The local school system mandates that all students entering the first grade must either pass a public school kindergarten or be able to pass a kindergarten equivalency examination.

The state Legislature last year set similar requirements to take effect in the 1986-87 school year. The Legislative also required that each public school system develop an academic readiness level test.

Children who complete kindergarten in the public school system are not given a test at the end of the school year. However, through a series of in-class examinations and observations, the teachers can determine whether a student is ready for the first grade, Lewis said.

The examination will be given during the first two weeks of the school year.

The examination includes such things as identifying colors, knowledge of the alphabet and ability to write one's name, Lewis said.

Parental input also will be considered in the test, Lewis said.

If the student does not exhibit first-grade ability, a school committee could recommend that the child be placed back in kindergarten, Lewis said.

Board member Frank Millican said he was concerned that if the child scores less than expected in one area, he may be held back.

"I can see problems," Millican said. "We'll have some big children in kindergarten."

Associate Superintendent Donald Hoover said that there is plenty of time for modifying the program before the 1986-87 school year if necessary.