IN ACADIANA PARISHES

School Test Scores Making Rounds Again

The time has come again for school districts throughout Louisiana to publicize the scores from the state’s "assessment tests" given each spring to the public school students. Almost invariably, spokesmen for the schools will cite statistics showing that the 7th and 10th graders (who took the tests) are "doing better" than a) the state average or b) those in nearby parishes.

As the old saying goes, even the devil can quote the Scriptures to his own advantage.

The point is that statistics of themselves don't mean a thing, especially when used to compare with the average in Louisiana. The reason is that Louisiana's average is nothing to brag about, not when we're considered to be at the bottom of the educational ladder, despite the multi-millions we pour into the public school system.

In Lafayette Parish, for example, children are "doing better" except in math. The scores in that subject dropped but, school officials quickly add, that's because the tests this year were harder than last year's. That is as it should be. If our children are to receive a proper education in the basics, then it's only proper that those basics be difficult in preparation for what graduates and college students will encounter later on. Comparisons with last year's scores and why they're lower are mere rationalizations.

However, the fact that the "back to basics" approach, for which we have been editorializing for years, is gaining momentum is indeed encouraging. More money won't do it (Louisiana is a prime example of that wasteful, useless approach); neither will gadgetry teaching nor wispy-headed experimentation.

Comparisons are odious, and more so when trying to justify gaps in the educational process. Let's not worry about if our students are doing "as good as" or "better than" somebody else. That reminds us too much of the Pharisee in the temple who wanted everybody to know how great he was. Let's concentrate on what our own kids are doing, and teach them as much as they can absorb of the basic elements of education.