Study finds poor readers in La. schools

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WASHINGTON — Fifty-eight percent of fourth-graders in Louisiana public schools read below the “basic” level expected of their age group and cannot understand even simple stories, according to a report released Wednesday by the U.S. Department of Education.

The report ranked Louisiana among the lowest for fourth-graders reading at that level, only Mississippi, Washington, D.C., and the territory of Guam ranked lower.

Nationwide, 43 percent of public-school fourth-graders read at a “below basic” level, the report states.

The state rankings are based on reading tests given in 1992 to “representative samples” of students in almost every state.

The students primarily were required to give written answers about materials read. In Louisiana, 2,843 fourth-graders were tested.

Nationwide, 140,000 students were tested, grades 4, 8 and 12. Results for individual states were charted only for the fourth grade.

The assessment was administered by a private contractor, Education Testing Service.

“Parents need to create some rule of proportion about the amount of television their child or children are watching,” Riley said. “I hope parents will remember that the same little remote control that can turn on your TV can also turn it off.”

At the Educational Testing Service, Ina Mullins, lead author of the report said children need to be encouraged to read.

“We must help them find the literacy gateway, not just the video and computer windows, to appreciate the world,” Mullins said. “Parents need to make special efforts to help children appreciate the power and entertainment value of the age-old seren of a book.”

Another ETS executive, Archie Lapointe, said the report does document encouraging findings about “changes in teachers behavior.”

At all three grade levels surveyed, greater numbers of teachers are trying new teaching techniques, Lapointe said. “This demonstrates again that we can change the schools,” he said.

Students were tested in 41 states, plus Guam and the District of Columbia, States that were not required to give the tests, and Alaska, Illinois, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont and Washington did not give the tests.