IN LOUISIANA SCHOOLS

Test Scores Show Basics Are Needed

The tests given public school students last Spring and released last week brought the observation from a Baton Rouge educator that the reason scores were lower than expected was that there was “turmoil” surrounding impending desegregation in that community and, the exams were given at an “inappropriate time.”

That reaction would seem to give credence to what a St. Martin Parish School Board member said after he and other Board members read the scores on their schools. He contended that educators, not only in his parish, but state- and nation-wide are “always looking for excuses. They’re good excuses but that just doesn’t cut the mustard anymore.”

It’s not categorically true that those in charge of public school education are busier with rationalizing than they are with seeking remedies for the poor health of the educational system. Certainly there are the incompetents who hide behind alibis, just as there are in any field. But we believe that the majority of educators are sincere in their efforts to upgrade the education of children in our Louisiana schools.

The best that Superintendent of Education Kelly Nix could say about the tests is that “public school systems are doing as good as or better than expected in getting across basic skills.”

However, it is our contention that “better than expected” isn’t quite good enough, even after so many years of floundering in pedagogic seas and tampering with the basics. Basics — that’s the key word, one which we have been stressing editorially for years, long before the cry “Back to Basics!” began to be heard.

It seems that the cry has finally reached the ears of educators. Pressure from the public has forced them to discard many of the hare-brained schemes inflicted upon our children. They are now looking with a much less jaundiced eye on those poor stepchildren of the classroom: reading, writing and mathematics.

Every year test scores substantiate evidence that without a solid basic foundation in the early grades, students will continue to do poorly, socio-economic factors notwithstanding. Tests are not the sole criterion of the progress of an educational system, but the recent results have given the message loud and clear to those who would listen: let’s get back to teaching our children first things first and do it before it’s too late. If that sounds simplistic, so be it. The basics worked once and they will again, if only they are given the chance.