

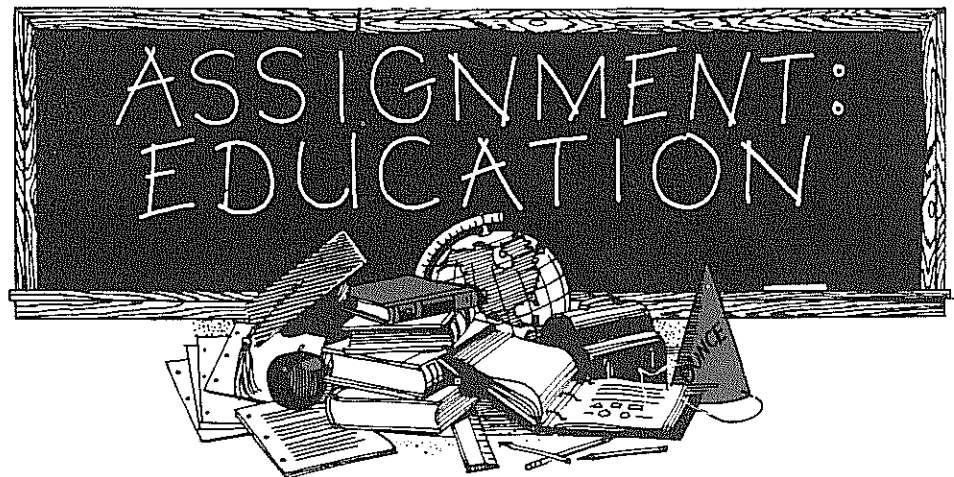
An Overview

Louisiana is implementing a comprehensive statewide student testing program, ranging from readiness screening in kindergarten to a high school graduation test.

Standardized tests are the best way to determine what students are learning and if education reforms are working. This report explains the various kinds of student tests and their purpose. It also reports student test scores among Louisiana's 66 local school systems and the states. An in-depth analysis is not possible because of lack of socioeconomic data on the students and their test scores over a number of years.

A testing program must be implemented properly to be a "quality control" measure for schools. Ideally, the state and local school districts should define the curriculum (what students should learn at each grade level), choose textbooks to match the curriculum, and select a testing program which correlates with both the curriculum and the textbooks. If this is done and teaching is monitored, a student testing program can be a reliable measure of how well students are learning and teachers are teaching.

This report recommends ways to strengthen the state's testing and reporting program so that problems can be identified at all levels.



Student Testing: Problems & Promises

States began to mandate student testing programs in the 1970s because of public dissatisfaction with schools. A variety of standardized tests have evolved to permit tracking of student progress and comparisons with performance of students in other schools, school districts and states.

Each type of test has its purpose. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) in its report, *Goals for Education, Challenge 2000* (1988), stated:

No single existing indicator, test, or standard provides an adequate measure of student achievement. Information from nationally normed tests, the proposed state-by-state version of the National Assessment of Education Progress, the American College Test, the Scholastic Aptitude Test, and Advanced Placement tests can be used to describe how well students are doing compared to national results. State basic skills tests, end-of-course tests, and high school graduation tests can help raise student achievement by pinpointing problem areas.

LEAP

The Louisiana Education Assessment Program (LEAP), the state's student testing program, was enacted in 1986 and is being implemented fully this spring. LEAP combines two types of student tests—criterion-referenced tests (CRTs) and norm-referenced tests (NRTs). These tests are in addition to traditional school-based, teacher-devised tests.

CRTs

CRTs evaluate a student's mastery of specified skills. The individual student's performance is compared against a specific list of skills he is expected to master, and his test score is a percentage of correct answers.

CRT results cannot be compared among states because each state defines its own curriculum and sets its own level of desired student performance. Louisiana's high school graduation test, first implemented in April 1989, is an example of a CRT.

NRTs

NRTs compare a student's performance against the performance of a national sample of students who took the test, and scores are reported in this manner. Student performance then can be compared across school districts and state lines. Unlike CRTs, the emphasis is not upon the individual's performance against a skill list. However, data about a student's performance by skill area can be obtained and used to plan instruction for student improvement.

NRTs are based upon a review of textbooks used nationwide as well as state-developed curriculum guides. The national norms, or averages, are obtained by administering the test to a sample of students who reflect the nationwide makeup of students. The national norms usually are revised every seven to eight years.

Criticisms of NRTs

Testing programs have come under fire in recent years. In June 1986, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) pointed out that "*student achievement as measured by norm-referenced tests was at or above the national average for nearly every state.*" Statistically, more than 50% of the nation's students could not be above the middle, i. e., the 50th percentile.

This same criticism was made in a 1987 Friends for Education, Inc. report which said that the norms established on NRTs, such as the California Achievement Test (CAT), "*allow 90 percent of the school districts in the United States to be above average.*" The report cited some reasons for these results. The national norms may be inaccurate when special education students are included. Testing companies infrequently revise the national norms; out-of-date norms may not reflect improvement in student knowledge. Some school dis-

tricts use the same test for many consecutive years, allowing teachers to become familiar with the test and prepare their students for the questions. Test familiarity also may result from failure to rotate test items. A federally-funded study released in March 1989 confirmed the allegations made in the Friends of Education report.

NAEP

Because school districts and states use different NRTs, it is not possible to measure accurately student performance among all states. However, state-by-state data on student test performance should become a reality in the near future.

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) is a federal program initiated in 1969 to establish a nationwide testing program. Louisiana has participated in NAEP programs.

A federal law now has mandated that NAEP expand its program in 1990 to include interstate comparisons of math skills of eighth graders and in 1992, math and reading skills of fourth graders. Only public schools are to be included in the 1990 interstate comparisons. Louisiana is one of 38 states that has agreed to par-

ticipate in the 1990 NAEP trial assessment which is to be modeled after guidelines provided in 1988 by the national association of state superintendents of education.

Louisiana's Testing Program

Table 1 shows the components of Louisiana's state testing program. Continuation of the CRT program, according to Act 146 of 1986, hinges on the recommendation of the Louisiana Testing Commission and the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), while state law mandates the NRT program.

Some refer to CRTs as "high stakes" exams because passing scores are a major consideration for a student to be promoted to the next grade and are required for high school graduation. Students who received passing grades might fail the tests.

Kindergarten

The kindergarten readiness screening instrument is used to assist teachers and others in planning for the instruction of students. Local districts can select their test from a list approved by BESE. Districts also set their performance standards but cannot use these to exclude students from the regular programs.

The kindergarten readiness testing program was enacted in 1985 and amended in 1986 so that first grade students are not involved in the readiness screening--only children who enter kindergarten. Children are not required to attend kindergarten, but about 95% do. State law provides that as a prerequisite to enrolling in the first grade of a public school, a child must have attended at least a half-day kindergarten (full-day kindergarten will be required beginning in 1990-91) for a year, or satisfactorily pass an academic readiness screening. Each local system establishes the academic readiness for the first grade.

TABLE 1
Louisiana Educational
Assessment Program
(LEAP)

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Test</u>
K	Developmental Readiness Screening ^a
3, 5, 7	Grade-Level State-Developed Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT) ^b
4, 6, 9	Grade-Level Norm-Referenced Test (NRT) ^c
10	High School Graduation Test—Language Arts, Math and Writing (CRT) ^b
11	High School Graduation Test—Science and Social Studies (CRT) ^d

^a Implemented in fall 1987.

^b Implemented in April 1989; nonpublic, April 1991.

^c Implemented in April 1988.

^d To be implemented in April 1990; nonpublic, April 1992.

CRT Program

Louisiana has developed, for the second time, a CRT program based upon a curriculum defined by the SDE and statewide advisory committees.

Louisiana's first attempt was ill-fated because it was a "minimum competency" basic skills testing program. It was geared to the minimum skills a child was expected to master in grades 2, 3, 4 and 5. Passing scores were set so low that the results were meaningless. The program was discontinued.

Louisiana's new CRT program is based on upgraded curriculum standards. In January 1989, BESE set the cutoff scores for remediation purposes for grades 3, 5 and 7, as well as for the high school graduation test. (See Table 2.) The SDE recommended these scores based on the number of anticipated failures predicted by a pilot study conducted in the spring of 1988, and also on how much money is anticipated to be available to remediate students who fail.

The important issue now and for the future is whether to set the cutoff scores high enough to reflect what students should know at each grade level, or low enough to avoid high failure rates and the consequent investment needed to raise the educational attainment of large numbers of students.

NRT Program

Even before LEAP was enacted, many Louisiana school systems tested their students through NRTs they selected.

The California Achievement Test (CAT) was chosen for Louisiana's statewide NRT program. Personnel from the field judged the CAT to be the best match with state curriculum standards. The CAT was given statewide for the first time to approximately 150,000 students in grades 4, 6 and 9 in April 1988.

TABLE 2
Cutoff Scores Adopted and Anticipated
Failure Rates for the CRT Program

Grade	Subject	Number of Test Items	Percent of Correct Items Needed to Pass	Percent of Students Estimated to Fail
3	Language Arts	78	57.7%	22.0%
	Mathematics	78	69.2	18.4
5	Language Arts	78	59.0	21.4
	Mathematics	79	58.2	23.8
7	Language Arts	78	66.7	22.9
	Mathematics	82	45.1	26.7
10	Language Arts	57	64.9	19.7
	Mathematics	58	53.4	28.9
	Writing	72*	65.3	15.3
11	Science	59	47.5	31.1
	Social Studies	60	46.7	30.3

* Seventy-two represents the maximum possible score. Unlike the other tests, writing is hand-scored.

SOURCE: Louisiana Department of Education.

Table 3 gives the reported percentages of students in each local system who scored above the national median, which is halfway between the highest and lowest score. Statistically, half of Louisiana's students should be below and half above the median if their performance matches the national pattern.

There were few school districts with more than 50% of their students scoring above the national median: in grade 4, only five school districts, in grade 6, only 17 districts and in grade 9, only four districts.

The CAT data is particularly interesting when studied in quartiles, which means all students who took the CAT are divided into four equal groups. If the national pattern is followed, 25% should fall into each quartile. Table 4 shows the state's scores in these quartiles.

Louisiana's greatest potential for improving its student test scores lies in the third quartile. Louisiana has approximately the same proportion of students as the national median in quartile one, although large numbers

of students in grade 4 fall in this bottom group. The fourth quartile (highest score) is where the biggest gap between Louisiana and the national median occurs.

Even a brief examination of the reading comprehension and reading vocabulary scores statewide and for each of the grade levels indicates a significant deficiency in reading vocabulary. Many more students appear in the lower quartiles in this subtest than in the reading comprehension subtest. School districts starting comprehensive vocabulary enrichment programs should improve their students' overall reading scores on the CAT. Vocabulary enrichment programs are low-cost and can be done as homework assignments. Improved vocabularies should translate to better ACT college-entry scores.

Graduation Test

Louisiana, following some 23 other states, began a high school graduation test, starting with this year's 10th grade class in public

TABLE 3
Percentage of Students Scoring Above
the National Median on the CAT^a
Battery Total

Rank	Grade 4		Grade 6		Grade 9	
1	Caldwell	67.0%	Caldwell	68.9%	West Carroll	55.2%
2	St. Tammany	55.8	Ouachita	61.8	St. Tammany	53.3
3	Bossier	52.0	West Carroll	60.5	Vernon	52.2
4	West Carroll	51.6	Lafayette	59.6	Lincoln	51.7
5	Lafayette	50.7	Bossier	59.3	Ouachita	49.8
6	Ouachita	48.7	Lincoln	58.7	Webster	47.9
7	Lincoln	48.6	St. Tammany	57.8	Winn	47.7
8	Grant	47.3	Vernon	56.1	Bossier	47.5 ^b
9	Union	46.1	Livingston	55.4	Caldwell	46.7 ^b
10	Webster	45.8	Natchitoches	54.8	Livingston	46.4
11	Calcasieu	45.5	Jefferson	54.0	West Feliciana	46.1
12	LaSalle	44.8	St. Charles	52.6	Natchitoches	45.6
13	Beauregard	44.6 ^b	Sabine	52.5	LaSalle	45.4
14	Livingston	44.6 ^b	Terrebonne	51.4	Calcasieu	44.6
15	Vernon	43.6	Union	51.1	Lafayette	44.0
16	Ascension	42.2 ^b	Grant	50.8	Catahoula	43.9
17	Cameron	42.2 ^b	LaSalle	50.5	Lafourche	43.7
18	St. Charles	41.7	Calcasieu	48.8	Ascension	43.2
19	Bienville	41.3	Catahoula	48.6	Bienville	42.7
20	Natchitoches	40.2	Webster	48.4	East Baton Rouge	42.5
21	Allen	40.0	Iberia	47.8	Rapides	42.3
22	Jefferson	39.0	Vermilion	47.3	Union	41.9
23	East Baton Rouge	37.6	Beauregard	46.2	St. Charles	41.4
24	Jackson	37.5	Cameron	45.6	Sabine	40.7
25	Washington	37.1	Claiborne	45.5	Terrebonne	40.2
26	St. Bernard	37.0	Jefferson Davis	45.1	Jackson	39.9
27	Sabine	36.7	Jackson	45.0	Jefferson Davis	39.2
28	Catahoula	36.2 ^b	Rapides	44.1	Franklin	39.1
29	Iberia	36.2 ^b	East Baton Rouge	43.4	City of Monroe	38.8
30	Rapides	36.2 ^b	St. Landry	42.7	Vermilion	38.1
31	Jefferson Davis	35.6	Lafourche	42.4	Iberia	37.9
32	Caddo	35.1	Ascension	42.3	Grant	37.6
33	Richland	35.0	Morehouse	41.8 ^b	Allen	37.3
34	Vermilion	34.8	St. James	41.8 ^b	Beauregard	37.2
35	Lafourche	33.7	St. Mary	41.2	Assumption	36.9
36	Terrebonne	33.4 ^b	Caddo	39.8	Caddo	36.3
37	Winn	33.4 ^b	Concordia	38.6	St. Landry	36.2
38	City of Bogalusa	33.2	Bienville	38.5 ^b	Acadia	35.4
39	West Feliciana	33.1	Winn	38.5 ^b	St. Bernard	34.9
40	Concordia	30.7	Assumption	38.0	City of Bogalusa	34.7
41	Avoyelles	30.0	Tangipahoa	37.7	St. Mary	34.4
42	St. Mary	29.3	West Baton Rouge	37.6	St. Martin	33.1
43	Tangipahoa	29.2	Acadia	37.5	Richland	32.1
44	St. James	28.7	West Feliciana	36.9	DeSoto	31.8
45	Assumption	27.9	Richland	36.6	Avoyelles	31.5
46	Acadia	27.5	St. Bernard	36.3	Cameron	31.1 ^b
47	DeSoto	27.3	City of Bogalusa	35.9	Glaiborne	31.1 ^b
48	City of Monroe	26.9	Allen	34.7 ^b	Evangeline	31.0
49	Iberville	26.5	Franklin	34.7 ^b	Concordia	29.9
50	Claiborne	25.6	St. John	34.5	Washington	28.5
51	St. John	25.4	St. Martin	34.4	Tangipahoa	28.2
52	Plaquemine	25.3	Avoyelles	33.9	West Baton Rouge	28.0
53	Tensas	24.8	Washington	33.3	Morehouse	27.4
54	St. Landry	24.5	Evangeline	33.1	Plaquemine	26.2
55	West Baton Rouge	23.9	DeSoto	32.0	East Carroll	26.0
56	Franklin	23.7	City of Monroe	30.5 ^b	St. James	25.3
57	St. Martin	23.0	Plaquemine	30.5 ^b	Madison	24.4
58	Morehouse	22.4	Pointe Coupee	29.7	Pointe Coupee	23.3
59	St. Helena	21.4	Iberville	27.2	Orleans	23.1
60	Evangeline	19.9	East Feliciana	26.3	East Feliciana	20.6
61	Red River	19.6	Orleans	24.5	Tensas	20.4
62	Madison	18.6	Madison	24.2	Red River	20.1
63	Pointe Coupee	18.4	Red River	23.0	St. Helena	20.0
64	East Feliciana	17.8	St. Helena	18.3	St. John	19.6
65	Orleans	17.6	Tensas	15.4	Iberville	18.0
66	East Carroll	16.5	East Carroll	12.5		
STATE		35.3%		43.7%		38.5%

^a California Achievement Test.

^b Indicates a tie.

SOURCE: Louisiana Department of Education, *Parish Evaluation Summary Report*, Spring 1988.

schools. Tenth grade students were tested in language arts, mathematics and writing during April 1989. Multiple opportunities to pass (two each year until graduation) will be given. In April 1990, this year's 10th graders will be 11th graders and will take the last two parts of the graduation test, which consist of science and social studies. Again, multiple opportunities for passage will be provided.

The graduation test was implemented for several reasons. First, there is growing concern among employers that the high school diploma is meaningless because many young people cannot perform at a sufficient level to be employable.

Also, BESE members and some state-level policymakers have been concerned that the recently implemented high school graduation requirements, among the toughest in the country, might result in "watering down" courses without a standardized test to measure what actually was being taught and learned.

Finally, Louisiana has an open admission policy for its public colleges and universities, except for LSU which instituted admission standards for the fall 1988 freshmen. This policy allows any student with an approved high school diploma to enter a state university regardless of high school grades or ACT score.

These concerns caused BESE to opt for an on-grade-level graduation test as opposed to a minimum competency (functional literacy) type test adopted by several other states.

The pilot test, given in the spring of 1988, allowed the SDE to predict how many students would fail. The passing score of 64.9% in language arts forecasts a failure rate of 19.7% of 10th grade students, while the 10th grade math score of 53.4% predicts that 28.9% will fail. On the 11th grade portion of the exam, the SDE is recommending a cutoff score of 46.7% for social studies and of 47.5% for science. Even with these low

ACT

TABLE 4
Louisiana's CAT Results by Quartile, Battery Total,* Spring 1988

Louisiana				
	National	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade 9
Quartile 4 (76-99%)	25%	13.3%	18.6%	15.4%
Quartile 3 (51-75%)	25	22.0	24.9	23.1
Quartile 2 (26-50%)	25	34.8	33.4	35.0
Quartile 1 (1-25%)	25	29.9	22.9	26.5

* Composite score of reading, language and math tests.

SOURCE: Louisiana Department of Education, *State Evaluation Summary*.

cutoff scores, a failure rate of 30.3% is forecast for social studies and 31.1% for science.

Remediation

Local school districts must develop remediation plans for the CRT programs in grades 3, 5, 7, 10 and 11, according to guidelines approved by BESE. The guidelines, developed by the SDE, give local school systems discretion in designing a plan for remediation, but would hold local systems accountable for results.

One view is that local school systems should fund a portion of the remedial programs since the state financed a large part of the cost for the initial instruction of students. It generally is assumed that when parents pay part of the remediation cost, either through local taxes or special fees, they will be more interested in their child's study habits and seek help when needed.

GED Testing

In the 1987-88 school year, more than 20.9% of all those receiving public high school diplomas did so through the General Educational Development (GED) diploma. Louisiana has the largest number of students under age 19 receiving GED diplomas, according to the SDE.

Louisiana GEDs are more difficult to obtain than in most other states. First, the student must score at the 13.0 grade equivalent on the entire battery of a CAT to be eligible to take the GED test. If he scores at an acceptable level on the GED test, he is awarded the GED diploma. The GED test is normed using high school seniors from across the nation. While many view the GED as inferior to the regular high school diploma, Louisiana's GED graduates may be among the state's most literate students.

Louisiana is one of 28 states using the American College Test (ACT) for college placement. Louisiana does not use the ACT for eligibility for college entrance. While the ACT is considered primarily an aptitude test, it does measure how much students learned in elementary and secondary school as preparation for college work.

Students taking the "core curriculum" recommended for college entrance—four years of English, three or more years of mathematics, three or more years of social studies, and two or more years of natural science scored consistently better than those who did not. In 1987, "core curriculum" students scored two points higher on the ACT than did those in a regular curriculum. Similar results occurred in 1985 and 1986.

Throughout the 1980s, Louisiana's ACT scores for all students taking the test consistently ranked 27th lowest among the 28 states where the ACT predominates. Attempts to explain

TABLE 5
Average ACT Scores, for Enrolled Freshmen
at Louisiana Public Institutions of Higher Education,
Fall 1980-1988

Institution	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
LSU-Alexandria	15.9	16.4	15.0	15.0	15.3	14.8	15.0	15.6	15.7
LSU-Baton Rouge	19.5	19.6	19.4	19.2	19.2	19.3	19.7	19.6	21.4
LSU-Eunice	16.8	16.3	16.5	15.5	16.5	16.1	16.5	16.3	14.8
LSU-Shreveport	18.8	18.8	18.9	18.7	17.7	17.5	17.5	16.7	17.5
UNO	16.5	16.4	15.9	16.0	16.6	16.2	16.4	16.4	16.8
Southern-Baton Rouge	11.6	11.2	11.5	10.7	10.8	11.5	11.0	11.3	12.4
Southern-New Orleans	8.4	8.6	9.3	9.3	9.6	9.5	9.2	9.7	10.8
Southern-Shreveport	9.4	9.4	9.1	9.8	9.6	8.7	8.9	9.4	9.3
Delgado	10.9	11.4	10.2	10.9	11.3	NA	10.8	12.6	12.6
Grambling	10.6	11.1	11.0	9.5	10.0	10.5	10.8	11.0	11.6
Louisiana Tech	18.7	18.6	19.0	18.7	18.3	18.4	18.3	18.3	18.7
McNeese	15.6	15.5	15.6	15.1	14.6	14.8	15.6	15.4	15.7
Nicholls	15.2	15.4	15.1	15.2	15.2	15.2	15.9	15.7	15.9
Northeast	16.1	16.2	15.7	15.8	15.4	16.1	16.5	16.9	17.2
Northwestern	15.6	15.2	14.4	14.8	15.1	14.6	15.8	16.1	17.3
Southeastern	15.3	15.4	15.6	17.0	15.5	15.2	16.0	15.6	15.6
USL	15.9	15.8	16.0	16.2	16.3	15.9	16.3	16.3	16.7
State	16.4	16.3	15.9	16.0	15.8	16.0	16.3	16.1	16.7
National	18.5	18.7	18.8	18.7	18.9	19.1	19.2	19.0	19.3

NOTE: Maximum ACT score is 36.
SOURCE: Louisiana Board of Regents.

TABLE 6
Percent of First-Time Freshmen
Enrolled in Remedial
Courses, Fall 1987

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Delgado	38.8%
Grambling	83.7
Louisiana Tech	31.1
McNeese	36.0
Nicholls	60.0
Northeast	54.7
Northwest	29.1
Southeastern	46.2
USL	51.8
LSU	46.9
LSU-Alexandria	73.1
LSU-Eunice	31.0
LSU-Shreveport	54.6
University of New Orleans	61.2
Southern-Baton Rouge	72.1
Southern-New Orleans	78.5
Southern-Shreveport	73.7
Average	50.8%

SOURCE: Louisiana Board of Regents.

Louisiana's low ACT scores often cite the large percentage of the state's high school graduates taking the exam. However, in 1987, 10 of the 28 ACT states had higher percentages taking the exam than did Louisiana.

Table 5 reports the 1980-88 average ACT scores for Louisiana's high school seniors who enrolled at Louisiana's public institutions of higher education. Louisiana's 1988 ACT scores statewide showed a significant improvement--twice the national increase.

SAT

The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is a college-entry test similar to the ACT. In 1987, Louisiana ranked 20th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia on SAT student scores.

Louisiana's relatively high rank is because few Louisiana high school students take this test. Those who do usually plan to attend colleges out of state with high entrance requirements, or private institutions in Louisiana.

College Remediation

The purpose of a college remedial education program is to prepare college students for college-level work. According to a spring 1989 report of the state superintendent of education, remedial education was required for 53% of Louisiana's 1987 first-time freshmen who enrolled in the state's public institutions of higher education; 54% of the public high school graduates were required to take remedial courses compared to 47% of nonpublic high school graduates.

Table 6 shows the percentage of first-time freshmen enrolled in one or more remedial education courses, by public college campus in 1987. Northwestern University had the lowest percentage of freshmen in remedial programs, while Grambling had the highest percentage. Campuses differ in requirements for remedial courses.

AP

Some high school students receive college credit for courses they take as part of their high school curriculum. The Advanced Placement (AP) program allows high school students to enroll in AP courses and receive college credit if they make a satisfactory score on the National College Board Exam. Students judged outstanding may take this exam without enrolling in an AP course. Individual campuses decide their required score for college credit.

Table 7 shows the state-by-state data for advanced placement candidates as a percent of high school graduates.

Louisiana has had a small but growing AP program. In 1982, Louisiana high school students earned approximately 2,395 college semester credit hours, while in 1987 that num-

ber grew to 10,088, with approximately \$3.5 million saved in college costs to the students.

International Perspective

A January 31, 1989 report by the Educational Testing Service said that American teenagers scored dead last in mathematics and well below the average in science in an international survey whose results "pose a serious challenge to our position in the world community."

The survey assessed 24,000 students who were 13 years old and lived in Ireland, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States and four Canadian provinces. Seventy-eight percent of the Korean 13-year-olds could use intermediate math skills to solve two-step problems compared to 40% in the U.S. Ironically, two thirds of the U.S. students considered themselves good at mathematics compared to 23% of Korean students.

TABLE 7
1987 Advanced
Placement Candidates

<u>State*</u>	<u>As Percent of High School Graduates</u>
North Dakota	1.3%
Arkansas	2.4
West Virginia	2.4
Oklahoma	3.2
LOUISIANA	3.3
Mississippi	3.4
Texas	5.2
Kentucky	5.8
Alabama	8.0
North Carolina	8.4
Georgia	8.7
Tennessee	9.1
Maryland	13.6
Virginia	14.4
South Carolina	17.3
Florida	18.1
Utah	26.6%

* All 50 states and Washington, D.C. participate in the Advanced Placement Program.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation, *State Statistics*, February 1988.

These comparisons help determine how high U.S. expectations should be in educating students. Scores for Louisiana's 4th, 6th and 9th grade students are dismal by U.S. standards. Placing the scores in an international context makes a more compelling reason to improve the public schools.

Progress Profiles

Louisiana's 1988 Children First Act calls for a system to record the progress of educational achievement in local districts and schools.

This important project received an 8 (g) appropriation of \$750,000 in 1988-89, and \$1 million is requested for 1989-90.

Information about student achievement on CRT, NRT and ACT scores will be part of the system.

Recommendations

Test results statewide are not good, but merely to lament the poor scores and fail to act is pointless.

The following recommendations will not solve Louisiana's education problems. Instead, they should help identify the problems so that appropriate remedies can be implemented.

● *Louisiana should continue to participate in NAEP, which is a nationwide testing program.*

State Department of Education

● *Student test scores should be reported by characteristics such as race, gender, level of family income and educational attainment of the mother, which is a good predictor of a child's performance. The SDE and local systems should use this data to identify problems and make needed changes.*

● *The SDE should expedite completion of a study to compare student achievement on the newly-developed CRTs and the NRT program to determine if the CRT cutoff scores set by BESE measure student performance at grade level.*

● *The SDE should examine practices of local schools and districts where students performed well on tests despite socioeconomic and demographic characteristics projecting poorer*

performance. Information on these successful programs should be made available to other schools and districts where similar students performed less well.

● *Each student should be identified by a social security number to track individual student performance year to year, pinpoint students who participate in the state testing program and track students who transfer.*

● *The SDE should develop and distribute by December 31 an annual statewide report which assesses student achievement as reflected in the state spring testing program. The report should include student socioeconomic characteristics such as ethnic group and gender.*

Local School Systems

● *Steps should be taken to avoid test familiarity and assure valid student test scores by implementing a test security system, rotating test items annually, and periodically adopting new forms of the tests.*

BESE

● *BESE and the Legislature should make a long-term commitment to the state's comprehensive testing program so that student test scores over a number of years will provide the data needed to track and analyze student progress.*

● *BESE should monitor development of the Progress Profiles required in the 1988 Children First Act to avoid past experiences where the state spent large amounts and had undue delays in developing database systems.*

● *BESE should develop a plan to raise cutoff scores on the state-developed CRTs to reflect what students should know at specific grade levels.*

● *Local systems should coordinate their testing programs with the state program so that a comprehensive assessment of student progress occurs each year. Ideally, an informal reading and mathematics inventory should be given each student before grade 2. From grade 3 upward, local districts should give students an NRT at grades not covered by the state testing program. Students scoring in the bottom quartile should be targeted for remediation.*

● *Curriculum requirements, textbooks and other instructional*

materials should be examined to be sure they match closely what is being assessed on state tests.

● *School systems should obtain and provide teachers with data on their students' test scores early in each school year. Teachers should receive in-service training on how to interpret the test data.*

● *There should be greater emphasis on the Advanced Placement program by initiating or expanding the program in high schools. This program allows higher-achieving students to gain*

college credit while still in high school, thus encouraging such students to graduate from high school and enroll in college.

Conclusion

Louisiana students are not less capable of learning than students of other states, but their test scores indicate serious problems. Louisiana must continue and improve its testing program to identify problems and do what is needed to give its students a better opportunity to learn.



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